

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

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Editor's Note on History and Memory

When Eli N. Evans was asked to reflect on the history of the society he requested a list of the presidents and conference meeting places. Our starting point was a list on the society's webpage that was hitherto largely accepted. Past presidents Janice R. Blumberg, Rachel Heimovics Braun, Catherine Kahn, and Hollace Ava Weiner clarified and brought the list up-to-date with Blumberg even going to her collection of society newsletters dating back three decades. As the memoirs came in, further questions arose and discussions ensued with the memoirists and past president Sol Breibart. Finally, our history detective Eric L. Goldstein came forward with archival research that altered key data concerning the society's history. One of the lessons re-learned from this experience is that oral history is excellent in unearthing an individual's perspective of what occurred in the past from their vantage point in the present but that it is essential to verify facts. Yet the written record – the seemingly authoritative list on the society webpage – should also be used with scrutiny.

In his search, Goldstein was assisted by Dale Rosengarten and Eve Casset at the College of Charleston Jewish Heritage Collection (which houses the society's records) and by Kevin Proffitt, archivist at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. He wishes to thank those individuals as does the editor. Thanks are also extended to the past presidents who assisted in the search and those who shared their reflections.

The following includes a brief history of the origins of the society largely compiled by Goldstein; the corrected list of presidents, dates, and conference sites; the first three pages of the first issue of the predecessor of this journal listing the earlier society's officers and editorial board, the table of contents, and a prescient forward by Jacob Rader Marcus, the late acknowledged

dean of American Jewish history; and finally additional pictures from the society's past.

To keep the record straight, here are sources Goldstein used for the history and the list:

Letter from Saul Viener, December 28, 1956, inviting interested people to attend an organizing meeting for the Southern Jewish Historical Society to be held on January 13, 1957, box 1, file 1, SJHS Papers, MS Coll 1056, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston.

Letter from David Goldberg to "Dear Members and Prospective Members," April 6, 1978, (following up after the Raleigh conference) that included an attached list of SJHS officers elected in 1978: Jack Coleman, president; Louis Schmier, vice president; Larry Capilouto, treasurer; David Goldberg, secretary; Saul Rubin, president of the board of trustees; Sam Proctor, Sol Breibart, Harriet Zimmerman, and Saul Viener, trustees; box I, file 1, SJHS Papers.

"Additional Facts About the Southern Jewish Historical Society," (flyer; c. 1984) (which says the Raleigh conference was in 1978 and lists the presidents to date), SJHS Papers.

Louis Schmier, "Historical Society Studies Southern Jewish Past," *Southern Israelite*, April 14, 1978, 29.

Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections on Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA, 1982), Introduction.

SJHS Savannah Conference Program, November 17-19, 1978, box 21, file 1, SJHS Papers.

Malcolm H. Stern Papers (which has a full set of SJHS newsletters going back to 1978 as well as the program for the original conference in Raleigh, March 11-12, 1978), Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Mark K. Bauman

Revisiting History

While working on his article that follows on page 39, Eric L. Goldstein discovered discrepancies in the early history of the Southern Jewish Historical Society that appeared on the society's webpage. He summarized these discrepancies in two emails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, on August 10 and 13, 2007. Here is a summary of the closest we can come to a correct history largely quoting from those emails.

The original SJHS was organized at a meeting on January 13, 1957, at the home of Saul and Jackie Viener in Richmond. That society remained active on and off for about a decade.

In October 1976 a conference on the history of southern Jewry, sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society and supported by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and the local Jewish community, convened in Richmond, Virginia, and stimulated great interest in southern Jewish history.

The following spring (1977), Saul Viener, Louis Schmier, Abram Kanof, and David Goldberg met in the Raleigh airport and organized the society with Kanof serving as host/acting president, but the documents they signed named Viener as the first "real" president of the organization.

The first SJHS conference following the Richmond conference took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1978. Viener presided at this founding conference of the newly reorganized SJHS. A circular (dated April 6, 1978) following up this conference states, "the momentum gained in Raleigh is now being continued by a membership drive." An article by Louis Schmier in the [Atlanta] *Southern Israelite*, April 14, 1978, reported, "[The] society is a reality after a year of planning . . . the launching effort was a conference on southern Jewish history held at Raleigh, NC and attended by 150."

At the 1978 conference in Raleigh, Jack Coleman was elected president and Rabbi Saul Rubin became president of the board of trustees. Coleman remained president through 1980 and was succeeded by Rubin. Saul Viener, meanwhile, moved into leadership positions of AJHS, becoming chairman of the board of trustees in 1978 and president the following year.

The next SJHS conference was held in November 1978 in Savannah. Since then, SJHS conferences have been held annually with one exception. Thanks to Hurricane Hugo, the 1989 conference set for Charleston, SC, November 3 through 5, was postponed until the following March.

Conferences and Presidents

The following table shows the year, the location, and the presiding president for each SJHS conference. All conferences were held in the fall unless otherwise indicated.

DATE	LOCATION	PRESIDENT
April 1978	Raleigh, NC	Saul Viener
1978	Savannah, GA	Jack Coleman
1979	Charleston, SC	Jack Coleman
1980	Jacksonville, FL	Jack Coleman
1981	Mobile, AL	Saul Rubin
1982	New Orleans, LA	Saul Rubin
1983	Savannah, GA	Solomon Breitbart
1984	Richmond, VA	Solomon Breitbart
1985	Memphis, TN	Janice Blumberg
1986	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	Janice Blumberg
1987	Durham, NC	Samuel Proctor
1988	Birmingham, AL	Samuel Proctor
March, 1990	Charleston, SC	Rachel Heimovics
1990	Jackson, MS	Rachel Heimovics
1991	Alexandria, VA	Carol Hart
1992	Montgomery, AL	Sheldon Hanft
1993	Atlanta, GA	Sheldon Hanft
1994	Raleigh, NC	Beryl Weiner
1995	New Orleans, LA	Beryl Weiner
1996	Miami Beach, FL	Berkley Kalin
1997	Hot Springs, AR	Berkley Kalin
1998	Nashville, TN	Bruce Beeber
1999	Richmond, VA	Bruce Beeber
2000	Cincinnati, OH	Catherine Kahn
2001	Norfolk, VA	Catherine Kahn
2002	Shreveport, LA	Hollace Weiner
2003	Memphis, TN	Hollace Weiner
2004	Charleston, SC	Minette Cooper
2005	Baltimore, MD	Sumner Levine
2006	Little Rock, AR	Sumner Levine
2007	Bethesda, MD	Scott Langston

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FOREWORD

THERE IS NEED for a journal for the Southern Jewish Historical Society. In the larger setting of American history, to the days of the great Civil War, the South was particularly important in our national period. Wealth and culture were present in a relatively large measure. It is essential that the life and story and achievements of those who lived south of the Pennsylvania border be more adequately studied and described. It may well be that in examining the history of the Southern Jew, new light may be shed on the trends and characteristics that prevailed in that important region of our country.

The Southern Jew was an urban dweller, a man of commerce and business, who played an important part in the economy of his community. A study of him as a shopkeeper and merchant is necessary, inasmuch as the political dominance of the plantation owner and his preoccupation with his own welfare has tended to obscure the importance of commerce and industry in that area in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century.

The Jew was deeply immersed in the relatively high culture of the South Atlantic littoral; therefore, it is not surprising that the reform of Orthodox Judaism was first undertaken in Charleston, South Carolina. In a sense, the rise of the Reformed Society of Israelites in 1824 is a significant chapter in Jewish history, for a generation was to pass before the European radical Jewish Reformers were to reach the stage of religious liberalization that distinguished the South Carolina Jewish pioneers.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, there has been a new South. Its rise has been marked by an industrial revolution. New cities are springing up — and new Jewish communities with them. Some day, in this South of tomorrow, there will blossom forth a new vigorous culture that will affect the Jew as American citizen and as Jewish religionist.

It is imperative that the story of the old be retold, correctly, and in proper perspective, that the magic of the new be captured while it is young and vital and everpresent.

The Southern Jewish Historical Society has dedicated itself to a great task. It is confronted with a challenge and an opportunity that must be met not only with enthusiasm, but also with earnest labor, scientific precision, a faultless methodology, and a passionate desire for objectivity.

To these ends I would have you dedicate your efforts, and this journal.

JACOB R. MARCUS

American Jewish Archives
Cincinnati, Ohio

SJHS History in Pictorial Memory*

*Six former presidents, Alexandria, 1991.
Left to right: Sol Breibart, Sam Proctor, Jack Coleman,
Saul Viener, Rachel Heimovics Braun, Janice Rothschild Blumberg.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

* The pictures that follow were taken at SJHS conferences, except for the one of Berkley Kalin. Most are from the collection of the managing editor. Some were photographed by Bruce H. Weiner, DDS, at the 2003 Memphis conference, by Beryl Weiner in 1990 at the Charleston and Jackson conferences, and by other, anonymous photographers at various conferences. Dates and places are given where available.

Carol (right) and Ricka Hart, Jackson, Mississippi, 1990.

Berkley Kalin, Memphis, 1996 (photo by Leigh Rogoff).

Catherine Kahn, Memphis, 2003.

*Catherine Kahn (left), Bruce Beeber,
and Hollace Weiner, Memphis, 2003.*

Hollace Weiner (left) and Minette Cooper, Memphis, 2003.

Sumner Levine with Helen Wax, Memphis, 2003.

Scott Langston, Memphis, 2003.

Len Rogoff, Memphis, 2003.

Louis Schmier (right) with Bobbie Malone.

Mark Bauman, Memphis, 2003.

Stephen Whitfield, Memphis, 2003.

*Saul Viener (left) and Bruce Beeber, Richmond, 1999.
(Courtesy of Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)*