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Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Sandra Berman, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

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NECROLOGY

Solomon Breibart (1914–2009)

by

Janice Rothschild Blumberg*

Sol Breibart served as a guiding light for me from the moment I joined the Southern Jewish Historical Society. More importantly, he was a guiding light for the society. In his quiet, strong, but unassuming way, he inspired many of us to take active roles in bringing the organization from obscure infancy to the respected position it holds today.

My memory of Sol goes back to 1981 when the SJHS held its conference in Mobile, Alabama. He chaired the membership committee, representing South Carolina in a group of twelve men and women from nine southern states. Under his leadership that year the society doubled its roster to 330 members, not just from the South, but from eighteen states across America.

In those days relatively few dues-payers engaged in the work of the society and even fewer were trained historians. We were mostly aging aficionados interested in writing about our ancestors. Sol broadened our vistas as well as our membership, attracting younger, more serious amateur historians and an ever-increasing nucleus of recognized scholars. He was not alone, but his softly spoken suggestions and untiring actions were largely responsible for making it happen.

Throughout the eighties Sol edited the society's quarterly newsletter, routinely filling its four to six pages with interesting sketches on points of southern Jewish history in addition to news

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bulletins and reminders. He did this while serving as SJHS president for two years (1983 and 1984), compiling a bibliography of articles on southern Jewry found in the journals of the American Jewish Historical Society and the American Jewish Archives, compiling records and writing articles on Charleston Jewish history, and nurturing future presidents of SJHS. Thanks largely to his encouragement and support, my own term as president, which followed immediately upon his, proceeded successfully without noticeable trauma to the organization or to me.

Sol, a native and lifelong resident of Charleston, was surely one of its most worshipful sons and a major historian of its Jewish component. After graduating from the College of Charleston and UNC Chapel Hill, he taught high school for thirty-eight years, which included the difficult period of transition to integrated classrooms. He took early retirement in 1976 and then focused on his historic congregation, Kahal Kodesh (KK) Beth Elohim, beginning with research and writing on a much earlier member, the distinguished poet Penina Moïse.

Following this initial work, Sol expressed his ongoing passion for Charleston Jewish history in a variety of activities. He produced many articles for publication, now edited by fellow historian and archivist Harlan Greene, who compiled them into *Explorations in Charleston's Jewish History*.¹ Sol volunteered as a tour guide for his famous synagogue, going to such lengths in his quest for detailed information, according to Greene, as to crouch on his hands and knees looking under pews to determine which ones had been repaired after balcony-supporting columns were removed.² Precise and unrelenting in his search for truth, he kept Jewish burial records, not only for KK Beth Elohim's area of the Coming Street cemetery, but also for all of Charleston's Jewish burial places.³

In addition to his 1976 roles in reviving the SJHS and hosting its several annual conferences held in Charleston, Sol was instrumental in founding the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina in 1994. Furthermore he was largely responsible for the gift of congregation KK Beth Elohim's records to the College of Charleston's Special Collections in the Addlestone Library. He

*Solomon Breibart, Coming Street Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina, 2000.
(Photo by Bill Aron, courtesy of the Jewish Heritage Collection,
College of Charleston Library.)*

then masterminded the agreement to deposit SJHS archives at the College of Charleston and recently contributed his own vast research files there as well. Historian Dale Rosengarten, curator of its Jewish Heritage Collection to whom he entrusted the treasure, describes him as one whose cause “was the chronicle of Charleston Jewish history, a subject he knew more about than an-

yone on the planet. And a field he advanced in the most concrete ways.”⁴

Solomon Breibart died on October 30, 2009, one day short of his ninety-fifth birthday. His legion of admirers and friends miss him greatly. On behalf of the Southern Jewish Historical Society we extend our deepest sympathy to his family, especially to his beloved wife, Sara, and their children, Carol and Mark. His memory lives as a blessing to us all and to all who may follow us in the pursuit of southern Jewish history.

NOTES

¹ Solomon Breibart, *Explorations in Charleston's Jewish History* (Charleston, SC: 2005).

² Harlan Greene, “Doing It Right: Sol Breibart (November 8, 1914–October 31, 2009),” *Charleston (SC) Post and Courier*, November 1, 2009.

³ For a full discussion of Breibart’s life and work see Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten, “In Distinguished Company: A Profile of Solomon Breibart,” *Southern Jewish History* 7 (2004): 1-26.

⁴ Dale Rosengarten, eulogy for Solomon Breibart, congregation Kahal Kodesh Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC, November 2, 2009.