

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Eric L. Goldstein, *Book Review Editor*

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NECROLOGY

Samuel Proctor (1919-2005)

by

Chris Monaco

**D**r. Samuel Proctor, a founding member and former president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, passed away in July after a long illness. Sam—as many lovingly called him—was a passionate advocate of southern Jewish history and his numerous contributions to the field have enriched and inspired us all.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, Sam Proctor was the eldest son of parents with humble eastern European Jewish origins. During his teenage years Sam worked full time while attending night school in order to receive his high school diploma. He arrived as an undergraduate at the University of Florida in 1937, one of only 3,200 students. The move to Gainesville suited him well for he eventually earned three degrees, including a Ph.D. in 1958, and served on the faculty for fifty years. UF's outstanding Oral History Program, Judaica Library, and Center for Jewish Studies all owe their existence to Proctor's initiatives. He was the author or editor of six books, served as general editor of a groundbreaking twenty-five volume series for the Florida Bicentennial Commission, and became a pioneer in the oral history field, personally conducting over 3,300 interviews. During his thirty-one year tenure as editor of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Sam greatly enhanced the journal's scholarly reputation. He served as history curator at the Florida Museum of Natural History and was the official historian of the University of Florida. Among his many accomplishments he considered teaching paramount. Numbering

in the thousands, many of Sam's former students, like Florida's U.S. Senator Bob Graham, kept in close touch through the years.

Beginning in 1949 Proctor began a long association with the American Jewish Historical Society and became a member of its academic advisory board. He concluded, however, that the organization "has been focused over the years, and continues to be focused, on the area from the New England states through New York and Baltimore," so he joined others in forming a regional society that dealt with the unique contributions of the southern Jewish experience. In 1976 the Southern Jewish Historical Society, dormant since the 1950s, was revived and Sam became closely involved with its formal reestablishment. According to longtime SJHS member and fellow founder Bernard Wax, Sam was "generous with his time, knowledge and expertise, and endowed with a marvelous sense of humor, he helped us 'incubate' and develop. He was involved in so many facets offering guidance and advice that all the early progress of the SJHS was intimately involved with, if not attributed, to him."

Proctor co-edited with Louis Schmier and with the assistance of Malcolm Stern, *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, GA, 1984) an invaluable scholarly resource. In 1987 and 1988 Sam served as SJHS president. On a personal level Sam always looked forward to attending the annual society conferences with wife Bessie. "The papers that are given are usually very excellent papers by reputable scholars," he proudly asserted a few years ago. Equally important to him, however, was the feeling of camaraderie and fellowship.

Clearly Sam Proctor succeeded on many levels: humanist and scholar, esteemed teacher, friend, and colleague. His legacy is one that balanced the rigors of intellectual life with a selfless and considerate heart. Dr. Mark I. Greenberg, Sam's last graduate student, has called his late mentor, "the most gentle, caring, sweet, and giving person I have known." Good friend Bernie Wax characterized Sam as "a true *mensch* in every sense of that word." He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.