In this issue

The Pollitzer Sisters: Fighters for Women's Rights ~ Betsy Newman ~

Lomansky Kligman, Kligman’s St. Matthews, ca. 1930; Ida Gordin (Gorodinskaya) Yelman, Bottom (l to r), Hannah Family Papers at the South Carolina Historical Society

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Letter from the President

I am honored to take over the presidency of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina from Mr. Jeffrey Rosenblum and know I have big shoes to fill. Jeffrey graciously stepped into the role on short notice, yet he had large and enduring ideas about the future of the Society based on his earlier tenure in office. Thanks to him, we have continued on the road of success and will build on his foresight. What cannot be overlooked is the fabulous staff support that the executive board, and the president, specifically, enjoys. The dedication and hard work of Executive Director Mark Swick, Administrator Enid Idolsohn, Program Director Rachel G. Barnett, Founding Curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection, Dale Rosengarten, and Assistant Archivist Alyssa Neely make the board and the Society look good. Thank you all!

It is my love of history coupled with the loss of my extended family in the Holocaust that have attracted me to this vibrant society. I marvel at the stories our members tell, from immigration to peddling to becoming established business owners, documented through the Society’s Jewish Merchant Project, launched in 2016. Through JHSSC’s exhibit A Store at Every Crossroads, we can bring the experience of South Carolina Jews to any museum, and through the Society’s Jewish Merchant Project, launched in 2016, we can tell the story of the history of South Carolina’s Jewish merchants.

JHSSC’s November 9–10, 2019, meeting in Spartanburg, SC, was a big success, a reunion of sorts for many of the attendees, seen here standing outside their former synagogue, Temple B’nai Israel, 191 S. Dean Street. Many thanks to Joe Wachter for his tireless work to make the weekend a special one! Photo: Mark Swick.

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Future to look forward to. It was a wonderful, warm weekend. Thank you to all who were there!

The year 2020 should have a lot of meaning and historical significance to us all. January 27, 2020, was International Holocaust Day, the 75th anniversary of that momentous occasion when Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated by Soviet forces. A large commemoration was held in Columbia, South Carolina, with many dignitaries and historical figures in attendance. The event was live-streamed by SCETV and you can watch the program in its entirety at scetv.org/auschwitz.

Our spring meeting, Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State,” will be held in Columbia, South Carolina, on May 2–3, 2020. Please join us in celebrating and recognizing the state’s Jewish women, who often worked behind the scenes—metaphorically “behind the counter”—but pulled their weight in terms of economic productivity, family cohesion, and religious life. We will be highlighting an array of “strong women,” unsung heroines, “necks that turned the man’s head,” recognizing historic individuals, including suffragists, medical pioneers, Holocaust survivors, and women who broke the glass ceiling, gaining access to the bimah and to leadership positions in their congregations. August 18, 2020, will mark 100 years since the passage of the women’s suffrage amendment, giving women the right to vote. It should be an electrifying year!

Lilly Stern Filler, MD
JHSSC President

See page 22 for a special save-the-date message, plus other news from JHSSC Program Director Rachael Barnett.
The Pollitzer Sisters: Fighters for Women’s Rights

by Betsy Newman

Carrie, Mabel, and Anita Pollitzer came from a prosperous Jewish family in Charleston, South Carolina. Their parents, Gustave and Clara Pollitzer, were active members of the city’s Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, the birthplace of Reform Judaism in America. Gustave was deeply involved in community affairs, serving on numerous boards and commissions. The three Pollitzer daughters reflected their father’s civic engagement, taking active roles in reform movements at the local and national levels.

Carrie Pollitzer (b. 1881), the oldest of the three, established the city’s first free kindergarten program and worked for admittance of women to the College of Charleston, which was granted in September 1918. Mabel (b. 1885) taught for more than 40 years at Memminger High School, where she began the school’s first sex education programs. She also helped found Charleston’s first public library. The sisters’ interest in improving education was in line with the contemporary Progressive Movement, when reform-minded mayors like John P. Grace advocated for investment in public schools.

The Pollitzer sisters all became involved with the struggle for women’s rights. In 1915, Susan Pringle Frost founded the Charleston Equal Suffrage League with the Pollitzer sisters as charter members and Carrie serving as secretary and membership chair. Anita Pollitzer (b. 1894) was the most directly engaged with national efforts to gain the vote for women. Like her sisters and their brother, Richard, she studied at Columbia University, and it was in New York City that she began working with the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, created by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns in 1913. All three Pollitzer sisters were founding members of the CU. Anita joined the national campaign in New York in 1915. In June 1916, the CU formed the National Woman’s Party, and, in January 1917, the NWP began to stage silent protests in front of the White House, calling themselves “Silent Sentinels.” The government’s initial tolerance for their picketing gave way after the United States entered World War I. Beginning in June 1917, suffrage protestors were arrested, imprisoned, and often force-fed when they went on hunger strikes. Anita Pollitzer was among those arrested in 1917. The suffragists’ persistence and reports of their horrific treatment in prison, which was well documented in the press, began to change public opinion. In January 2018, President Woodrow Wilson switched his position and endorsed the vote for women, and, on May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the 19th Amendment, known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. Two weeks later the Senate followed, and the NWP began campaigning for state ratification. Anita Pollitzer was deployed to Nashville, Tennessee, where a dramatic battle for ratification was playing out.

By March 1920, 35 of the necessary 36 states had ratified the amendment, and only Tennessee remained in a position to vote on ratification that year. Advocates for both sides spent the night before the vote in a Nashville hotel, lobbying legislators. Anita had dinner with a young member of the legislature named Harry T. Burn, and the next day he surprised his colleagues by casting the decisive vote in favor of the amendment. Although his support for women’s suffrage is often credited to a letter from his mother urging him to “be a good boy” and vote “aye,” it seems likely that Anita Pollitzer also helped to convince him.

In 1928, Anita married Elie Edson and settled in New York City. Edson was folk singer Pete Seeger’s uncle, and Seeger proudly declared his aunt “a firecracker.” Anita continued to work closely with Alice Paul, succeeding her as national chair of the NWP in 1945 to 49. All three Pollitzer sisters labored for social reform for many more years, including advocating for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment—a fight that is still ongoing.

A century after women got the vote, in January 2020, Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the ERA. However, according to the New York Times, “Virginia’s decision does not seal the amendment’s addition to the United States Constitution. A deadline for three-quarters, or 38, of the 50 states to approve the E.R.A. expired in 1982, so the future of the measure is uncertain, and experts said the issue would likely be tied up in the courts and in the political sphere for years.” (NYT, 1/16/20) At this writing, South Carolina is one of the 12 remaining states that have not passed the ERA.
Rosa Hirschmann Gantt: Pioneering Doctor and Suffragette

by Diane Vecchio

Love Rosa Hirschmann Gantt (1874–1935) was the first woman physician in Spartanburg, South Carolina. A pioneer in providing health services to rural areas, she served as acting surgeon for the U.S. Public Health Service.

Born in Camden, South Carolina, on December 29, 1874, Rosa (her preferred name) Hirschmann’s family moved from Cades, South Carolina, to Charleston, where her father, Solomon, a native of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, opened a wholesale grocery store and she attended local schools. At the age of 14, when her mother, Lena Nachman Hirschmann, died, Rosa helped care for her father and younger siblings. Her numerous responsibilities, however, did not deter her from excelling in her studies; after graduating from high school, Rosa enrolled in the college today known as the Medical University of South Carolina. In 1901, she was one of the first two women to obtain a medical degree from the institution.

After postgraduate training at the Aural and Ophthalmic Institute and the New York Ear and Eye Hospital in New York, Dr. Hirschmann was appointed resident physician at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

A year later she left Winthrop to marry Spartanburg attorney Colonel Robert Gantt and relocated to his hometown.

Without delay, she established a practice as an ear, nose, and throat specialist, making her the first female physician in the city. In the 33 years she practiced medicine, she left an indelible mark on the health and well-being of Spartanburg County.

Along with her private practice, Dr. Gantt pioneered work in public health by dispatching mobile health clinics to rural areas of the state with a dearth of physicians. These “health mobiles” were among her greatest innovations. Staffed with physicians, nurses, and nutrition workers who offered immunizations, examinations, prenatal, and dental care, their motto was “Bringing Health to the Country.”

A highly respected doctor, Gantt served as an officer for the all-male Spartanburg County Medical Society from 1909 to 1918 and was one of the first female members of the Southern Medical Association. She also served as president of the American Medical Women’s Association.

During World War I, Gantt organized local women to sell Liberty Loans, serve in the Red Cross, and engage in hospital work caring for soldiers. She was the only woman to be appointed to a draft board in the United States and held a commission from the Department of Commerce as a medical examiner of air force pilots.

Dr. Gantt was the first president of the Women’s Auxiliary of Temple B’Nai Israel, incorporated in 1916. In addition, she negotiated with Oakwood Cemetery to create Spartanburg’s first Jewish burial section. In 1922, the Sisterhood of Temple B’nai Israel joined the State Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and changed its name to Temple B’nai Israel Sisterhood. In 1919, Gantt elected president of the South Carolina Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

From her leadership of Temple Sisterhoods, locally and on a state level, to her work as a suffragist, Dr. Rosa Gantt illustrates how Jewish women of her era blended traditional Jewish values with prevailing social and religious ideas. As a member of the South Carolina Equal Suffrage League when it was organized in 1914, Gantt was on the cutting edge of suffragist activity. She was one of the few educated women who became both professionally and politically active—balancing her medical career and her duties as legislative chair of the South Carolina Equal Suffrage League.

Gantt was also instrumental in establishing Spartanburg General Hospital, the first public hospital in the city. After decades of devoted service to Spartanburg, Dr. Gantt died in 1935, following surgery for uterine cancer.

Reflecting the high esteem in which she was held by residents of the city, an obituary published in the Spartanburg Herald-Journal on November 17, 1935, praised her many accomplishments: “[S]he was one of the outstanding women of this section, not only a shining example of a physician standing for the highest and best in ethics, but a leading worker in social service.”

Gantt’s death was a loss to the medical community and to the synagogue where she devoted much of her time. Similar to the North Carolina Jewish activist, Gertrude Weil, who was politically active and, at the same time, committed to her synagogue and Jewish causes, Gantt was a “New South” progressive who served her community while challenging gender barriers as a doctor and suffragist.

“Miz Clara”

by Larraine Lourie Moses

Miz Clara, as she was ever so fondly addressed by her many loyal customers, was my grandma, Clara Kligerman Baker. She owned and operated Baker’s Grocery on Park Street in Columbus, South Carolina, for more than 40 years. She was petite, freckled-faced, red-headed, blue-eyed, no-nonsense, hard-working, witty, smart, dedicated, stuborn, selfless, and altogether wonderful.

The small neighborhood store opened in the late 1920s, surrounded by blocks of worn-down, weathered frame houses in which mostly low income families dwelled. Grandma Baker extended credit to her customers and was quite often left with an unpaid balance.

She would turn a blind eye when, on numerous occasions, customers would “sneak” food items from the grocery. She understood their desperation. In her decades behind the counter, no one ever tried to harm her. The neighborhood would not have tolerated such. No crying child went unattended. Grandma Baker would reach into the deep pockets of her meat-stained apron and give the youngsters candy and bubble gum. The crying ceased. Tears turned to smiles. The child was happy and she was happy.

Baker’s Grocery was open for business seven days a week. From sunrise till sundown, Grandma was there, serving her clientele. In the early years, when business was slow, she kept the door open on the weekends until midnight. Oftentimes, local men would enter the store late Saturday night, drunk as could be. She made them sip hot coffee and eat crackers. This was her way of sobering them up. Then she would take out her broomstick and shoo them out the door, demanding they go straight home to their families and sleep it off. Grandma Baker took care of the neighborhood; she watched...
Patty Levi Barnett: Steel Magnolia
by Tricia Barnett Greenberg

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At a time when few women were encouraged to attend college far from home or major in the sciences, Mama spread her wings and went to Virginia’s Sweet Briar College. She flourished there academically and made lifelong friends from all around the country. She always said being Jewish helped her social life as the Jewish boys at University of Virginia and Washington and Lee sought her out, while her non-Jewish friends were always on the lookout for Jewish guys to fix her up with.

Mama majored in chemistry, an unusual field for a woman at the time, and her advisor encouraged her to apply to the master of chemistry program at Wellesley College near Boston, Massachusetts. Mama loved to tell the story that when she expressed doubt that her grades were good enough to get in the program, her professor responded that an A student in chemistry is commonplace but a B chemistry major with a good disposition is a rarity and that was Mama! She was accepted and, after graduating from Sweet Briar in 1949, she headed to Boston.

Working on her master of chemistry at Wellesley and teaching physics and chemistry as a teacher’s assistant for one dollar a day plus room and board were among her proudest accomplishments and favorite memories. She enjoyed dating men from Harvard and MIT and relished discussing chemistry with them. Her combination of smarts, guts, common sense, and what she called “good listening skills” made her an attractive companion. Some of her male friends said she was sensible and different from the other female students and encouraged her to go into research.

Summer of 1950, Mama was back in Sumter and met Henry Davis Barnett (Bubba), who had returned to the Midlands town to run the family farm after the death of his parents. They quickly fell in love and Mama traded her test tubes and graduate school for a wedding ring and a traditional role as housewife and mother, providing a happy home for Daddy, me, and my brothers, Henry and Wendell. Sharp and hard to keep down because of her love of a challenge, Mama was always involved with the farming business. Daddy grew peaches on a large scale and shipped them across the country and around the world. Mama noticed that many of the peaches, too ripe to ship out of town, were wasted. She decided to visit all the local grocery stores and South Carolina chains to see if they would carry the superior tree-ripened fruit. Not many, if any, could resist her charm and convincing salesmanship, so she became a pioneer in the concept of local sales, or, as we say now, “farm to table!” It was a huge success and a great sales addition for the business.

In the late 1970s, Mama served on the board of the Pigeon Plant, which her father and Harold Moïse had started in 1923. When the manager of several years was terminated, the Levi and Moïse brothers, Henry and Wendell.

With Grandpa Baker so busy with his inventions, his wife Clara knew she had to do intervention. With so many hungry mouths to feed, Baker’s Grocery was opened to meet their many needs. This tiny store had a variety of meats, the most memorable of all being the pink pig’s feet. Also there, you could find cookies, candies, and nuts, which most probably created the now famous “Baker Butt.”

—excerpt from a poem I wrote for my mother’s 80th birthday

Patty Levi Barnett came into this world along with her twin brother, Wendell M. Levi, Jr., on Friday, September 13, 1927, a day most consider bad luck. Not so for Mama, who possessed a confidence and fearlessness that served her very well throughout her life. Born to Wendell M. Levi, an attorney, and Bertha London Levi, a Wellesley College graduate from an old South Carolina family, Mama was very grounded in Sumter, the South, and Judaism. Yet she also believed in venturing out of one’s comfort zone for exposure and education.

Beautiful, smart, and always popular, she was a conscientious student and excelled in leadership and sports. A class officer, senior superlative, and athlete, Mama and her twin, Wendell, graduated from Sumter High School in 1944. With only 11 grades in Sumter, she bravely ventured to Ferry Hall School (now Lake Forest Academy) in Lake Forest, Illinois, for 12th-grade work. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school, snow, and dorm life broadened her horizons and fostered a sense of independence.

Rabbi Samuel Shillman presided over confirmation exercises, Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC, May 24, 1942. Patty Levi is third from right. Her twin brother, Wendell, is on the far left.

Other confirmands, according to the program, were Faye Lomansky, Joan Schlossberg, Everett Nosi, and Bernice Richman.

With Clara Baker.

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Louise Levi Marcus:
Behind the Counter in Eutawville, SC
by Ernie Marcus and Robert Berger

Marcus Department Store was founded by my immigrant grandfather, Morris Marcus, in 1901; his death 16 years later left his wife, Janie, to support their two sons. My dad, Harry Marcus, was involved intermittently in the business until after his service in World War II. So, from 1917 to her death in 1962, my mom worked in the store, off and on, from the 1950s to the ’70s. My siblings and I spent many Saturdays running retail businesses in South Carolina since the 1850s, with stores all over the state, including Rosenberg’s Mercantile Company in Abbeville and Greenwood, Moses Levi’s Emporium in Manning, and shops operated by King Street merchants Moses Winstock and Julius Visansa in Charleston.

Mom’s passions, however, were elsewhere, and she invested her time in community organizations and intellectual pursuits. She was a long-time leader of the Eutaw Garden Club, which she belonged to for more than 35 years. Upon her death, the Club planted a magnolia, as her life revealed.

My mother was exceptionally beautiful, elegant, and refined to the eye, but the depth of her character, her integrity, and her loyalty were even more amazing. She loved a challenge and used reason and logic to tackle any situation. She was gutsy and feisty and eager to step up and speak up whenever it was needed. She took her responsibilities seriously and broke the norms. A lovely southern lady, she was indeed a “steel magnolia,” as her life revealed.

Mama was a well-liked and respected leader in her volunteer work in the Sumter community. She was the first Jewish member of the Sumter Junior Welfare League and even served as an officer. She was selected to be the first president of the Wilson Hall School Association of Parents and Teachers, served as a trustee of the Sumter Museum, and endowed a portion of the Levi Barnett Gallery at the Sumter County Gallery of Art. Judaism was important to her and she passed on her love of the tradition to her children and her students at Temple Sinai’s religious school, where she taught for many years. She was a trustee of the temple, as well as president and treasurer of the Sinai Sisterhood. In fact, she remained treasurer almost until her death on June 1, 2016. She always believed in giving back to the community.

Louise Levi Marcus, each found herself to my grandmother and, finally, my mother, Janie, to support their two sons. My dad, Harry Marcus, was involved intermittently in the business until after his service in World War II. So, from 1917 to her death in 1962, my mom worked in the store, off and on, from the 1950s to the ’70s. My siblings and I spent many Saturdays running retail businesses in South Carolina since the 1850s, with stores all over the state, including Rosenberg’s Mercantile Company in Abbeville and Greenwood, Moses Levi’s Emporium in Manning, and shops operated by King Street merchants Moses Winstock and Julius Visansa in Charleston.

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Louise Levi Marcus: Behind the Counter in Eutawville, SC
by Ernie Marcus and Robert Berger

Marcus Department Store was founded by my immigrant grandfather, Morris Marcus, in 1901; his death 16 years later left his wife, Janie, to support their two sons. My dad, Harry Marcus, was involved intermittently in the business until after his service in World War II. So, from 1917 to her death in 1962, my grandmother was running the store. Her niece, Marie Karesh, who never married, operated her own store a few doors down until her death in 1975. Two of Janie’s sisters, Katie and Mary, taught for many years. She taught her students at Temple Sinai’s religious school, where she taught for many years. She was a trustee of the temple, as well as president and treasurer of the Sinai Sisterhood. In fact, she remained treasurer almost until her death on June 1, 2016. She always believed in giving back to the community.

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dreaming of another life, beyond the counter of the store in small-town South Carolina.

Robert

Mom hated the store. It was dirty and dark, and she found the work boring. She was a wonderful cook, wife, and mother, which was a full-time job. She loved the outdoors and hard physical labor. My stepdad, Harry Marcus, inherited from his mother a 50-acre sharecropping farm, run by the family of Isaac Washington, just outside Eutawville. Mom worked a two-acre vegetable plot there, as well as a home garden, planting Park catalogue seeds and picking the crops. She canned and froze all sorts of vegetables, such as corn, lima beans, and string beans, so we could eat them year round. She was an inspiration to the Garden Club members as she could name any plant—and knew the Latin words for most—and describe its features.

Mom's best friend, intellectually, was the African-American superintendent of schools. He would come by the store and try to stump her. I would not be successful. She knew virtually every word's spelling and definition.

The people of Eutawville loved our mom for her generosity and kindness. She helped our African-American neighbors and encouraged everyone to open their minds and understand one another. She never tolerated racist talk and was seen by all as a beacon of purity and love.

The bridge club was a talk-a-thon for women—not a serious game. The only thing that was competitive was the quality of the snacks served. The store was not very busy, usually, and we eked out a living. Mom and Harry spent very little money while Arthur and I were young. They didn’t have much and never complained. It was a poor area and we had a roof over our heads, enough to eat, and ambition for the future. Mom was proud of her children until the day she died.

Joyce Antler, Keynote Speaker

Joyce Antler is the author or editor of a dozen volumes, including works on American women’s history and Jewish history. She wrote the prize-winning book, You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother, and the Journey Home: How Jewish Women Shaped Modern America.

Her most recent book is Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women’s Liberation Movement, published in May 2018, which tells the previously unknown stories of nearly 50 women’s liberation and Jewish feminist pioneers—women who helped shape the politics and culture of the late 20th century. Joyce taught at Brandeis University for 37 years and recently retired as the Samuel J. Lane Professor of American Jewish History and Culture in the American Studies Program. She is also Professor Emerita of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and was a founder of Women’s Studies at the university, chairing the program for 10 years. She was an affiliate of the Departments of African and African-American Studies; History; Education; and Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation.

Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State

May 2–3, 2019 ~ Columbia, South Carolina

JHSSC’s spring meeting is produced in partnership with Historic Columbia and Jewish Studies at the University of South Carolina.

Saturday, May 2

11:30 a.m. Registration and lunch
12:15 p.m. Welcome – Lilly Stern Filler, JHSSC president
12:30 – 1:30 You Never Call! You Never Write! – Brandeis Professor Joyce Antler provides an illuminating and often amusing history of one of the best-known figures in American popular culture—the Jewish Mother. Whether drawn as self-sacrificing or manipulative, in countless films, novels, radio and television programs, stand-up comedy, and psychological and historical studies, she appears as a colossal figure, intensely involved in the lives of her children.

2:00 – 3:30 Women Behind the Counter and Beyond
Moderator: Robin Waits, Executive Director, Historic Columbia
Panelists: Beth Bernstein, Margie Levinson Goldstein, Ann Meddin Hellman, Ernie Marcus, Lorraine Louie Moses, Diane Vecchio
3:45 – 5:30 Columbia City of Women bus tour – Join Kat Allen of Historic Columbia on a drive through downtown Columbia to sites where remarkable women left their mark. Tour will end at Graduate Columbia hotel.

5:30 – 6:00 Reception, Graduate Columbia, 1619 Pendleton Street
Dinner on your own

Sunday, May 3

9:00 a.m. Open board meeting—everyone is invited!
10:45–12:00 Sisterhood: South Carolina Suffragists – It took South Carolina 50 years to ratify the 19th Amendment, but the state was home to some of the most famous—and infamous—fighters for women’s right to vote. South Carolina suffragists were fearless, provocative, and persistent. Panelists: Beryl Dakers, Director of Cultural Programming/Outreach, SCETV; Amy Thompson McCandless, Professor of History, Emerita, College of Charleston; Betsy Newman, Producer, SCETV; Katharine Purcell, Instructor of English and Director of International Education, Trident Technical College

Hotel reservations
Graduate Columbia
1619 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29201
803.779.7777
Special rate: $149 per night + tax
To get the special rate, make your reservation by Wednesday, April 1, 2020.

Meeting registration
Online at: jhssc.org/events/upcoming with Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express
Or by check: payable to JHSSC c/o Yashik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street Charleston, SC 29424
Meeting fee: $60 per person
Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohn@cofc.edu
Phone: 843.953.3918 ~ fax: 843.953.7624
My Mother and the New State of Israel
by Ellen Solomon

I have almost no papers of my mother’s and was astonished recently when I discovered the speech she gave in 1948 as the finale to her two years as president of the Charleston chapter of Hadassah. The speech—typed and 17 pages long—was not only a relic, excavated from boxes of my old papers, but a new glimpse into her life.

As I have read and reread these pages, I’ve wondered how the woman who wrote and spoke these words could really have been my mother. This woman who wrote, “Our work cannot be measured in terms of a year or years. It is part and parcel of the great and noble fight to achieve full nationhood for our people.” This woman who then traced the progress of the United Nations in its recommendation of the partition of Palestine, the “violence and bloodshed that followed.” “The decision of the Yishuv to bring into being a provisional government of a new Jewish state,” and the attempt by the Charleston chapter to raise $5,000 in an emergency drive. This woman who described the formation of groups of ten Charleston women—“minyanim”—each of whom pledged to “redeem” a Jewish child in Palestine “by paying a tenth of that child’s upkeep, estimated as $630 a year,” to Youth Aliyah. This woman who urged other members to further their education about Palestine and the world. This woman who, throughout, called out the names of 30 other women, thanked them for their work, and asked each one to rise.

My mother’s life, which ended in 2007, was deeply influenced by her mother, who wanted to correspond with a good-looking Jewish child in Palestine “by paying a tenth of that child’s upkeep, estimated as $630 a year,” to Youth Aliyah.

Mama was a recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, Charleston Area Mental Health Association, and, in 1986, she was honored by the Society of 1824, Health Sciences Foundation of the Medical University of South Carolina. In 1998, she was recognized by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), Charleston Section, as A Woman Who Makes a Difference. The award, sponsored annually by the Charleston chapter of Hadassah and the women’s division of the Charleston Jewish Federation, is presented to one woman from each of the local Jewish women’s organizations, including the sisterhoods, for her volunteer work on that group’s behalf.

Mama was a past president of the Charleston Area Mental Health Association and K. K. Beth Elohim Sisterhood. She was a board member of the City of Charleston Office of Economic Opportunity and the South Carolina Mental Health Association, and a chair of the UNICEF Year of the Child, Charleston. She helped start...
Because her brother, Dr. Abner H. Levkoff, was head of pediatrics, Mama would visit the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) often. On one of these visits, she noticed that children were taken to procedures on hospital beds. This upset her, so she bought little red wagons and arranged for a playroom so that the kids’ experience in the hospital less scary and more fun.

Mama believed children had to learn how to be kind. She developed a program for students in the lower grades in the City of Charleston to draw a picture of what they thought kindness was. To reward the winners, whose pictures showed that they knew what kindness was, she gave each an ice cream cone. About the same time, the News and Courier came out that they knew what kindness was, she gave each an ice cream cone. About the same time, the News and Courier came out that they knew what kindness was, she gave each an ice cream cone.

Mama believed in equal rights. When Burton Padoll was the rabbi at K.K. Beth Elohim in the 1960s, he wanted to have an interracial civil rights meeting. Mama let him hold the meeting at our house on Murray Boulevard. She was not concerned about what others thought. She knew she was doing the right thing.

Listening to the radio one night, Mama heard that the Dallas Section of NCJW had designed a project, Safeguard for Seniors, to help people at risk from medication complications. She presented this idea to the NCJW in Charleston, then approached the Medical University College of Pharmacy for help. The program became the Doris Levkoff Meddin Medication Safety Education Program at MUSC, created to educate healthcare professionals and the general public about drug safety and to help reduce the number of adverse drug effects experienced by patients statewide. Because of this program, Mama was inducted as an honorary member of Phi Lambda Sigma Leadership Society of the South Carolina College of Pharmacy, MUSC.

With all of this, Mama still found time to operate her own real estate company. In selling real estate, she was always guided by her Jewish beliefs. While showing one client houses, the client stated she didn’t want to live near Jews. Mama drove the person back to where she picked her up and told her that she would have to find another agent.

Mama’s eating habits were looked down upon by the many doctors she knew, whether they were family, professors at MUSC, or just friends, but thanks to her unlimited consumption of chocolate she lived to be 96. Knowing there was so much to be done to repair the world, she was determined to do as much as she could. She was a perpetual optimist. She had no boundaries and would call upon anyone at any level who she felt could make her dreams come true and help others have a better life.

A Legend in Her Own Time: The Life of Libby Levinson

by Margi Levinson Goldstein

The story of my mother, Libby Friedman Levinson, is of a woman who faced life’s challenges with courage and resilience. In 1918, at the age of eight, she traveled from Poland to Charleston, South Carolina, accompanied by her mother, two sisters, and a brother. Financial circumstances were dire. Libby quit school at age 14 and found a job cleaning a ladies’ dress shop. Little did she know, ladies’ dress shops would be her destiny.

Life was difficult but there was still a little time for fun. At a party, a young blond man asked her to dance. She refused, thinking he was not Jewish. After she realized her error, their romance blossomed. Libby and Charles Levinson were married on February 27, 1927, in Holly Hill, South Carolina.

The newlyweds opened their first store in Branchville, South Carolina. Her sisters lived nearby. Annie Lourie operated a store in St. George and Minnie Kalinsky lived in Holly Hill. 1927 was not a good year to start a new business and the Branchville store failed. Next they tried North, South Carolina; then Marion, North Carolina; and then Toccoa, Georgia. In the midst of all the failures, Arnold Milton Levinson and Margi Cecilia Levinson were born. In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Libby had had enough. She was determined to build a better life. No more
Libby and Charlie established a warm relationship with the black community. They extended credit to African-American customers when other stores did not. The Leader was one of the first stores in lower South Carolina to encourage black people to try on clothes in the fitting rooms.

Libby rarely compromised her Judaism. In a small town, Saturday represented 50 percent of the week’s business and the store had to stay open. But Libby would not ride on Shabbos. Rain or shine, she walked from home to the store and back. On the way, you could hear passersby call out, “Hello, Miss Libby!”

The Christian community had great respect for Libby’s commitment to her faith. The Levinsons were invited to join the country club and the bridge club. Libby graciously refused. However, you would always find jars of matzo ball soup and noodle kugels at the church bazaars. Grandmother had taught our housekeeper, Lovie, to be a fabulous Jewish cook.

After 40 years in business, Libby and Charlie were aging. Charlie had suffered serious wounds in World War I. While he went to veterans’ hospitals for weeks at a time, Libby met the challenge and managed the store on her own.

Libby had always dreamed of living in a Jewish community. Arnold was in Columbia. Margi was in Charlotte. Six grandchildren were added to the family. Libby would not leave South Carolina. So, in 1967, Libby and Charlie sold the Leader and moved to Columbia. Libby made adjustments, but in truth, her heart remained in Barnwell.

During retirement, Libby played cards and went to synagogue, but her happiest days were spent selling dresses part-time at Arnold’s store, Brittons. There she could do what she did best. And Charlie had his own throne from which he could kibitz with the customers and smoke his cigarettes.

Libby died in 1983. Libby was deeply saddened, but she knew she had been loved unconditionally for 56 years. Libby was 73, a handsome, engaging woman with a keen mind, politically savvy and an ardent Democrat. She died on May 10, 2000, at the age of 90.

I always knew there was something different about my mother that set her apart—not just from other mothers, but from other people, too.

First, there was her accent—her Eastern European and yet slightly nasal French manner of pronouncing things. Like Edith Piaf, the little Sparrow, my mother was a tiny woman, who stood five foot one (taller in the high heels she always wore). She was full of self-confidence and fierce in her delivery of any message, whether it was love, or something else. When she was angry, you knew it, and then the wrath passed like a violent storm, and you were wrapped again in the warmth of her unconditional love and acceptance.

She loved us in a way that maybe, again, was not like other parents. She was not southern, not sentimental, not particularly physical in her affection; her love blazed in her spark-blue eyes when she spoke to us, expressing her own intense affection and intelligence and challenging us to return it. If I came home bragging of a 99 on a test, the inevitable question was, “Who got a hundred?”

At the furniture store on King Street she and my father owned, she befriended the African-American customers and workers, demanding they strive to get ahead. In shul, she looked down on me like a beneficent goddess, hatted and in sleeves, even on the hottest Yom Kippurs. (European, she would never leave the house without being extremely well dressed.) Yet she’d storm out and cause a scene if she detected hypocrisy on the bimah, in the benches below, or in the balcony. She was much too frank, many said, always on a slow burn like one of those cigarettes (first Pall Malls and then the long black mentholated Mores) she smoked ceaselessly.

She denied herself most pleasures (except reading, which she deferred till late in the day) and never tried to guilt-trip us, though I think she was consumed with guilt herself.

It was survivor’s guilt. For someone who spoke so directly about what was on her mind, she was always tight-lipped about her past. Born in Warsaw to a middle class Jewish family, she was left wing, attracted to my father, a poor working class youth from a shtetl. They married in June 1939 and were still in Warsaw as the German bombs fell and tanks rolled in. My father went east to his village, where my mother eventually joined him. A blonde with blue eyes, she could “pass.” I’ll never know exactly what happened, but there were mentions of guns smuggled in hay wagons, working in the underground, and her firstborn who died. She told me she had to bury him in a Jewish graveyard in stealth one night by herself. “Where was that?” I asked when I was about 13. She could not remember, she told me.
L’dor v’dor: A Daughter’s Perspective

by Representative Beth Bernstein, South Carolina House of Representatives

L’dor v’dor, “from generation to generation,” accurately describes how my late mother, Carol Osterweil Bernstein, served as a role model for my siblings and me and a trendsetter for women at Beth Shalom Synagogue in Columbia, South Carolina. Her innovative nature paved the way for us to follow her into leadership roles in the Jewish community and the community at large.

My mother was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1933. She graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from New York University and received a master of arts in English from Columbia and received a master of arts from New York University in Newark, New Jersey, in 1957. She settled in Columbia, South Carolina.

Her mother remained passionate about women’s rights in the religious community, while also dedicating her time to numerous board positions, as Christian-Jewish Congress and Catholic-Jewish Dialogues, while allowing her to share the values of Judaism with people of other faiths. She served as president of the Columbia chapter of Hadassah and even participated in a bat mitzvah ceremony at a national Hadassah convention.

Ultimately, my mother’s paramount contributions were to her synagogue, where she remained an active member for most of her adult life. She served on numerous board positions, including president of the congregation, including some of her family and friends, who walked out in protest. Nevertheless, her courage led to fundamental change at Beth Shalom, where women now read from the Torah and are counted as part of the quorum for a minyan. Serving as the first female president of Beth Shalom required bravery, determination, and a willingness to challenge the rules of convention to advance women’s rights in the religious setting.

Throughout her life, my mother remained passionate in her commitment to her family and the community. Her devotion never wavered, even after the devastating loss of my brother Sam, who was killed in an automobile accident in 1981.

Her family, except for her sister, blonde hair and blue eyes, too, died in camps. My mother fussed at my father when he began to speak of the past. All his stories were about himself, until the day of my mother’s funeral. It was then that my father, not a very emotional man, collapsed in my arms, sobbing that he could not count the number of times she saved his life.

When she survived breast cancer, she became a breast cancer volunteer immediately, helping other women adapt. She monitored politics incessantly, pursued social justice as zealously as she cleaned, and aged much too quickly. She would it, as passionately as she smoked, and that should not stop us from seeking it, as passionately as she smoked, and loved, and cleaned. looks at the world—a woman of valor (the words on her tombstone) such as she should have attracted the hundreds that should not stop us from seeking it, as passionately as she smoked, and loved, and cleaned.

My mother died at age 69. And the thing I remember most from her funeral was how sparsely it was attended. It dawned on me then that there really is very little justice in the world—a woman of valor (the words on her tombstone) such as she should have attracted the hundreds she had helped quietly and discretely. Looking back, I have to think that even in death, she was teaching me. She had known, firsthand, the lack of justice in the world, but she taught that should not stop us from seeking it, as passionately as she smoked, and loved, and cleaned.

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SAVE THE DATE!

Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History
45th Annual Conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society
Co-sponsored by JHSSC and the Pearlstone/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture
October 23–25, 2020 | Charleston, South Carolina

SJHS is planning its next annual meeting to be held at the College of Charleston on October 23–25, 2020, with JHSSC and CSJC serving as local hosts. In honor of the 25th anniversary of Addlestone Library’s Jewish Heritage Collection, the conference will examine how archives have influenced—and might continue to influence—the study of southern Jewish history and culture. How might we use archival material—or create new collections—to discover new southern Jewish voices and stories? How might digital humanities and digital archives help us achieve our archival mission? For more information, contact program co-chairs: Shari Rabin (srabin@oberlin.edu), Marcie Cohen Ferris (ferrismarci@gmail.com).
Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Name: __________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

City: _____________________________ State: ________ Zip: ___________________

Phone: _____________________________ Fax: _______________________________

E-mail Address: __________________________________________

ANNUAL DUES FOR 2020 (JANUARY–DECEMBER)

___ Individual/Family Membership $54

___ Friend $200

___ Institutional $250

___ Sponsor $350

___ Patron $750

___ Pillar ($1,000 per year for 5 years) $5,000

___ Foundational Pillar ($2,000 per year for 5 years) $10,000

Join or renew online at jhssc.org. Enroll your friends and relatives for an additional $54 each. Send us their information and we will inform them of your gift.

Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to the address above.

Register now for the May 2–3 meeting in Columbia. See page 13 for more information.
In this issue

Leon Banov, M.D., and the Spanish Flu – Alan Banov – As a young doctor, Leon Banov worked on the front lines of the influenza pandemic of 1918 and went on to become a renowned health officer for the city and county of Charleston. His story, as his grandson recounts, feels eerily relevant in this age of COVID: quarantines, masks, super-spreader events—it’s happened here before. . . .

Charleston’s Early Jews and the City’s Notable History of Religious Tolerance — Richard M. Gergel and Robert N. Rosen – Authors Gergel and Rosen attribute the remarkable religious tolerance we see in South Carolina to two primary factors. First, the proprietors of the colony needed as many settlers as possible to fill the colony as quickly as possible. Second, the proprietors wanted religious diversity as a way to attract a diverse community of settlers who would have a vested interest in the success of the colony.

The Yiddish expression “Mann tracht, un Gott lacht”—Men plan, and G-d laughs—aptly depicts the times we find ourselves in. As I was thinking about what I would write, I looked back at the JHSSC spring 2020 magazine and bounding out of the pages were all the plans we had for 2020—plans that were not to be.

In the first quarter of the year, we began to hear about a virus in China that was receiving some unusual press, but that did not stop me from planning and attending the 18,000-person AIPAC gathering in Washington, D.C., the first weekend in March and thinking we were moving ahead with our planning events. And then the BOOM—when the coronavirus was here. This novel virus arrived with a vengeance and life as we knew it came to a screeching stop. The unseen plague had hit us.

Then, following the murder of George Floyd, we witnessed an explosion of protests against racial injustice and police violence. There were calls for “defunding” the police and repeated cries for strategies to address economic inequities, food deserts, our failing healthcare system, and rising racism and antisemitism.

Change and Challenge – Rachel G. Barnett – JHSSC’s new executive director describes the hurdles she has faced since the coronavirus pandemic upended all of our lives. With her able colleagues, she has reimagined the Society so it can continue to operate virtually—through email newsletters, online conversations, meetings, and events—until we are able to gather again in person.

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Friday, October 2, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Charleston’s Early Jews and the City’s Notable History of Religious Tolerance

Join Faith Geffen, Charleston’s Curator of Collections, as she explores the history of Jewish Charleston from the early 1700s.

For Zoom registration information, visit jhssc.org/events/upcoming

Letter from the President

T he Yiddish expression “Mann tracht, un Gott lacht”—Men plan, and G-d laughs—aptly depicts the times we find ourselves in. As I was thinking about what I would write, I looked back at the JHSSC spring 2020 magazine and bounding out of the pages were all the plans we had for 2020—plans that were not to be.

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Then came the failure of a unified response to the pandemic and the politicization of wearing masks. The perfect storm had hit our world, and most of us wanted to crawl in or under the bed and hide until these terrible assaults disappeared. The health virus of the winter mixed with the hatred virus of the spring and emerged in the political virus of our summer.

What can we do during this unprecedented time? We will always remember 2020 as one of the most challenging years we’ve experienced, but how we handle it will be paramount.

The Jewish Historical Society remains active and committed to our mission, even with the departure of our wonderful friend and executive director Mark Swick. The Society’s leadership has the full-throated support of the College of Charleston’s Jewish Studies Director Yaron Ayalon, and the concerted power of three women—Enid Idolson, our administrator; Rachel Barnett, our newly appointed executive director; and yours truly, your devoted president.

We immediately went to work to realign responsibilities and study how we could continue quality programming in a safe environment. I am pleased to announce, “By George, we think we’ve got it!” We have reached out to Atlanta’s B’nai Brith Museum and the Southern Jewish Historical Society to collaborate on virtual programs. We will be advertising a multitude of presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and seminars through Zoom and other online platforms. These will be announced in our monthly newsletters and on our Facebook page and website. A special thank you goes to board member Terri Kaufman, who spearheaded our youth essay contest and has agreed to manage our social media outlets.

Federal Judge Richard Gergel and attorney Robert Rosen—both past presidents of the Society and authors, respectively, of Unexamined Courage and The Jewish Confederates—have initiated a monthly “Sunday Conversations” series. Our first Sunday program, which aired on July 26—“Reaping the Benefits of Jewish Toleration: Jewish Public Service in SC from the Colonial to the Modern Era”—featured guests Senator Joel Lourie, Representative Beth Bernstein, and Mayor Billy Keyserling and attracted more than 80 participants.

On August 3, we collaborated on an SCTV program, “Sisterhood: SC Suffragists—Moving Forward.” I was one of five guests. A week later JHSSC hosted a second “Sunday Conversation” titled City Jews, Country Jews: South Carolina Synagogues from 1749 to the Present with special guests Dr. Gary Zola and Dr. Sam Gruber. Please watch for information and Zoom instructions for future programs in our monthly email newsletters.

With editorial leadership from Dale Rosengarten and the skills of layout designer Alyssa Neely, our fabulous annual magazine will continue to appear both in print and online. This fall edition looks back 350 years to the founding of Charles Towne and forward to 2021. Having postponed our 2020 joint meeting with the Southern Jewish Historical Society until October 2021, we will continue quality educational programming online only for the coming year.

Please tune in to our seminars and speakers and send us your ideas about sessions you’d like us to sponsor. Save the date for our virtual fall meeting on Sunday, October 18, 2020, at 11 a.m. Your support and participation are more critical now than ever!

As we say in Yiddish: “Gai Gezunt”—Go in Good Health.

Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.
JHSSC President
Leon Banov, M.D., and the Spanish Flu

by Alan Banov

As the coronavirus pandemic has taken hold of our country, its death toll continuing to climb, people have drawn comparisons to the Spanish flu that hit the United States in 1918. In Charleston, Leon Banov, a young doctor who had emigrated from Russia two decades earlier, assisted in stopping the deadly virus in his new city.

He was a pioneer in American public health, becoming the health officer for the city and county of Charleston in 1926, a position he held for nearly 50 years. He also was my grandfather.

Dr. Banov left a profound legacy, both professionally and personally, and was responsible for implementing several public health measures that are commonplace today.

Leon Banov was born in 1888 in a little town called Kopcheve (in Yiddish) and Kopciowo (in Polish). Kopcheve, then in the Russian province of Suwalki Gubernia, had a population of about 1,400, of whom approximately 40 percent were Jews. My grandfather was the youngest of five children of Alexander and Sonia Danilovich Banovitch. Alexander came to Charleston in 1889 and later sent for the rest of the family in stages.

When Leon arrived in Charleston, he spoke only Yiddish. However, he learned English and other subjects at Bennett School and, instead of attending high school, was home-schooled in reading, history, and math. After working in a drugstore, he decided he would become a pharmacist. He did, graduating with a degree in pharmacy from the Medical College of South Carolina in April 1907, at age 19. (A college degree was not required at that time.)

For a few years, Leon operated a pharmacy on King Street. His slogan was "The Largest Drug Store in the South for its Size." But his medical education did not end there. He matriculated at the Medical College in 1908 and received his M.D. in June 1917. While earning his medical degree, he taught in the pharmacy school.

He entered public service in 1912 as assistant city bacteriologist. Five years later he became the city’s chief food inspector—the position he held when the Spanish flu hit Charleston.

The Spanish Flu as Described by Dr. Banov

As the public hysterically clamored [sic] for action, Dr. Green issued orders forbidding crowds on the street. Meetings and gatherings that called for more than 4 or 5 people were banned.

This automatically closed down schools and churches. One church objected to this interference with its religion and refused to curtail its worship service. The board of health, not being itself sure as to the benefits of the closing of churches, did not make an issue of it; and soon all the churches began to function again.

Another order of the board of health was that all stores in the city must be closed by sundown; and the entire staff of the health department was detailed to the enforcing of this ruling.

The Spanish Flu as Described by Dr. Banov

As with the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, health officials had no cure and could only attempt to contain the disease. Dr. John Mercier Green, the city’s health officer, issued orders similar to those issued this year: people had to quarantine at home for at least five days, wear masks, not congregate in groups, and not hold public funerals at homes or churches.

Banov assisted Dr. Green in the battle against the influenza. As chief food inspector, he scrutinized the sanitation of restaurants and other places that served food and drink to the public. As I rode up and down the street, I saw a number of these merchants just standing listlessly in front of their closed doors waiting for their usual going-home time.

I felt sorry for them, and I wished at the time that I could have taken them to their homes and reintroduced them to their families for whom they had been working so hard and steadily.

Charlestonians. In October 1918, finding that soda fountains were generally not sterilizing utensils properly, he wrote to Dr. Green recommending that “all soda fountains be closed and kept closed until the danger of the spread of the influenza has ceased.” His letter was reprinted in its entirety in the News and Courier. Leon’s advice apparently seemed too harsh to the federal, state, and city health officials, but they authorized him to send letters warning food establishments that they would be closed if they did not observe certain prescribed sanitary conditions—such as using spoons only once! In addition, he visited stores and soda shops to make sure they were not congested and overcrowded. As the News and Courier reported on October 15, “The entire force of the health department, the sanitary inspection department, the police department and Dr. Leon Banov, food inspector, were busy distributing humanity [dispersing crowds] so that the influenza germ would not be so likely to stalk unbidden into their systems and do permanent damage in consequence.”

Leon was also involved in an effort by the health department to curtail the pandemic by distributing whiskey to flu patients, even though it was during Prohibition. In his book Leon explained: “In another futile gesture in attempting to cope with this outbreak of pestilential proportion, a large printing establishment and ordered 1,500 whiskey labels for flu patients on the doctor’s prescription. “The News and Courier recommended against the use of the labels because, it said, the police department and Dr. Leon Banov, food inspector, were busy distributing humanity [dispersing crowds] so that the influenza germ would not be so likely to stalk unbidden into their systems and do permanent damage in consequence.”

Public health physicians from around the world visited his office every day of the flu pandemic, and Charlestonians turned to him for directions. By the year 1800, Jews had settled up and down the eastern seaboard of the United States, with significant Jewish populations in the northeastern cities of Philadelphia and New York. But the largest, most sophisticated, and probably most affluent Jewish community in the young republic resided in Charleston, South Carolina, whose first congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, was organized circa 1749. Charleston’s emergence as a city of refuge and opportunity for Jewish settlers was the product of conscious and largely successful efforts to welcome immigrants from diverse religious backgrounds.

One cannot appreciate the Jewish attraction to Charleston without understanding the extraordinary burdens and disabilities Jews suffered in most European countries during the 17th and 18th centuries. A broad array of officially sanctioned discrimination and harassment against Jews was part of the fabric of European life.

In 1661, King Charles II of England granted to eight English noblemen a massive tract of land lying between the Virginia colony and the Spanish settlement in Florida. This land grant, titled the Charter of Carolina, was bestowed in appreciation for the role these men, now known as the Lords Proprietor, had played in Charles II’s ascendency to the throne in 1660. From the beginning, the Proprietors viewed the colony as a business proposition, and there was little of the religious fervor and mission associated with the establishment of other colonies, such as Massachusetts Bay.
Among the promising sources of potential settlers were religious dissenters, who found themselves in unending battles with established churches in their home countries. These dissenters, including Quakers, Unitarians, Free Will Baptists, French Protestants, and Jews, were thought to be pious and family-centered people, ideal settlers for a growing and prosperous colony. Further, Jewish traders and merchants from the West Indies, particularly Barbados, were especially sought after to assist in building the commercial life of the new colony.

Driven by the pragmatic desire to recruit new settlers to the colony of Carolina and influenced by the idealism of the Enlightenment, John Locke, then secretary to Lord Proprietor Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, assisted in drafting the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, first published in 1669. The Constitutions provided for the Sabbath, to be observed by all. The Sabbath was to be observed in worship, study, and household duties. The Servants were to rest and the peasehill plow was to plow. The Sabbath was to be honored as the day of rest.

The replica seal, painted by Faith Harby, which includes a prayer written for his sister Harby, which includes a prayer written for his sister.

Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, July 21, 1669. Image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.

The freedom of worship was not universal, however, specifically excluding “Papists.” Despite this lingering discrimination against members of the Catholic faith, the Fundamental Constitutions was a remarkable document in a world of seemingly unrestricting religious strife. Carolina offered Jewish settlers an oasis of inclusiveness and tolerance almost unknown at the time. The provision of religious tolerance was in marked contrast to the colony’s embrace of the particularly cruel and brutal system of human slavery practiced in early colonial settlements in the West Indies.

By the 1690s, Christian dissenters, particularly French Protestants and Quakers, and Jews were actively engaged in the life of the colony. One of the first documented Jewish individuals in South Carolina was a translator for then-Governor John Archdale, presumably a Sephardic Jew (of Spanish or Portuguese origin), who assisted the governor in 1695 in communicating with Indians from the Spanish colony of Florida.

In 1697, 60 Hugenots and four Jews jointly petitioned the governor of the Carolina colony for naturalization. Governor Joseph Blake endorsed the petition and recommended adoption in an address to the colonial legislature, which adoption in an address to the colonial legislature, which adopted the proposal in 1697.

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In the first half of the 18th century, Charleston was transformed from a small town to a bustling port with great economic opportunities. Jews were actively involved in the city’s commercial life and thrived in the religiously tolerant environment. The Jewish population, totaling perhaps 12 households in 1749, created sufficient numbers for the minyan of ten adult males necessary to conduct Jewish religious services. In or around 1749 (the precise date being somewhat in dispute), the Jewish community of Charleston formed a congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (“The Holy Congregation of the House of God”). In its early years, the congregation met in a small wooden house near Queen Street in downtown Charleston and followed the orthodox protocol and Sephardic liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.

Charleston’s Jews created other organizations to support its communal life. In 1754, Isaac Da Costa established a Jewish cemetery. This was followed in 1764 by the founding of the Hebrew Benevolent Society, the first Jewish charitable organization of its kind in America. As historian James Hagy expresses it: “the Jews intended to take care of their own people.” The society would later play a significant role in response to public disasters, including recurrent yellow-fever epidemics.

In 1801, Charleston Jews formed the Hebrew Orphan Society to assist Jewish orphans and needy children and families—serving more as a social work agency than an actual orphanage. The Hebrew Orphan Society’s aid was reportedly extended to the near-destitute Charleston shopkeeper’s son Judah Benjamin, who would later attend Yale University, serve as a U.S. senator from Louisiana, and become attorney general, then secretary of war, and then secretary of state of the Confederacy.

South Carolina boasts the first Jew in the New World elected to public office. Francis Salvador, London-born, of Sephardic heritage, arrived in Charleston for the purpose of creating an indigo plantation on his family’s vast land holdings in 1774.

Francis Salvador is elected, at age 27, to the First Provincial Congress of South Carolina as one of ten deputies from Ninety Six, the first professing Jew in America to serve in a legislative assembly. Left: the Salvador family coat of arms on the grant of arms issued by the College of Heraldic, London, 1745.

KKBE petitions for incorporation and, in 1794, completion construction of the congregation’s first synagogue. For the next 30 years, the city is home to the largest, wealthiest, and most cultured Jewish community in the United States.

KKBE’s charter (governing council) of Jewish Orphans is established to support widowers and their wives, orphans and children of indigent parents. The organization continues to function as a philanthropic agency affiliated with Charleston Jewish Social Services.

Fifteen men petition KKBE’s adjoint (governing council) in an effort to Americanize the traditional worship service. Rebuffed, they create the Reform Society of Israelites, the first sustained movement to reform Judaism in the United States. In 1825, reformed Isaac Harby delivered an anniversary discourse, later bound into the manuscript prayer book he wrote for his sister Caroline Delachfield Harby, which includes a prayer for the Sabbath she composed.

Naturalization of Simon Valentine, Merchant: an alien of the Jewish nation, May 26, 1697. South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
Rejuvenating the Study of Sephardic Jewry and Its Role in South Carolina Jewish History

by Rabbi Merrill Shapiro

There is a difference between the study of Ashkenazic Jewish history in South Carolina and the study of the Jews of South Carolina? Of course there is! But, for a number of good reasons, there seems to be a bias towards the study of the Jews of South Carolina through the Revolutionary War and into the early decades of the 19th century. The term “Ashkenazi” refers to Jewish settlers who established communities along the Rhine River in Western Germany and in Northern France dating to the Middle Ages. By the time of the founding of South Carolina in 1670, tens of thousands of Jews had migrated to welcoming lands in East Europe, especially Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. The vernacular tongue of Ashkenazic Jews is Yiddish, a language derived from High German and Hebrew with elements of both Aramaic and Slavic from early Medieval Europe. The plural of Ashkenazi is Ashkenazim.

“Sephardi” refers to Jews whose origins can be found in Spain, Portugal, and throughout the areas held under Moslem conquests in North Africa and the Middle East. Many Sephardim, the plural of Sephardi, fled the Inquisition, including mass expulsions from Spain and Portugal in 1492.


1 James W. Hoge, This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 68.

The Upstate in Ninety Six District, near what is now Greenwood, South Carolina. Salvador soon became a passionate advocate for American independence and was elected to the South Carolina Provincial Congress in 1774. He was killed two years later, ambushed by Tories and their Cherokee allies, making him the first Jew known to die for American independence.

By the early 1790s, Charleston Jews were ready to build their own synagogue, befitting what was fast emerging as one of the New World’s premier Jewish communities. Designed as a near model of the legendary Bevis Marks Synagogue of London, the striking building was located on Hasell Street, right off bustling King Street. The cornerstone of the building was laid in 1792, and the synagogue was consecrated in 1794 with prominent civil, religious, and political figures in attendance. The interior of the sanctuary contained a centrally located reading desk, traditional with Sephardic worship, and balconies for women to separate the sexes in accord with orthodox religious practices. The synagogue served the community until 1838, when the sanctuary burned to the ground in a fire that consumed more than 1,100 buildings, including three other houses of worship, in addition to KKBE.

David Lopez rebuilds KKBE's sanctuary. The congregation votes by a bare majority to install an organ to provide musical accompaniment to worship, resulting in the cessation of the traditionalists, who form a separate congregation called Shearit Israel (Remnant of Israel).

By the early 1860s, the men who raised the Confederate flag over the fort, Moshe appears as governor of South Carolina between 1872 and '74—becoming the state’s most notorious scalawag. Courtesy of John Sands.

KKBE Resolution

Unable to sustain separate congregations in the aftermath of the Civil War, Shearit Israel and KKBE negotiate a merger.
Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496, making their way to the Low Countries of Europe, the British Isles, and to Turkey and Greece in the east. The traditional language of Sephardic Jews is Judaeo-Spanish, sometimes called “Ladino Oriental” (Eastern Ladino), a Romance language resultant from Old Spanish, incorporating elements from Hebrew and from all the old Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula.

Most of those engaged in the study of South Carolina’s Jewish history are of Ashkenazic descent and naturally tend to emphasize the Ashkenazic migrations over the earlier Sephardic arrivals. This reflects the demographic fact that 95 percent of American Jews today are Ashkenazim. Much contemporary scholarship focuses on families and events within living memory. Many engaged in the work of bringing South Carolina’s history to life consider the work of studying South Carolina’s Ashkenazic migrations over the earlier Sephardic arrivals. This reflects the demographic fact that 95 percent of American Jews today are Ashkenazim. Much contemporary scholarship focuses on families and events within living memory. Many engaged in the study of Ashkenazic history are of Ashkenazic descent and naturally tend to emphasize the Ashkenazic migrations over the earlier Sephardic arrivals.

Sephardic Jewry’s era of greatest popularity, vigor, and prosperity is much further removed in time. The customs of the Sephardim are less known to us, and their world view, vision, and outlook are different and more difficult to understand than those of our own ancestors. The study of history is, of course, more than a regurgitation of names, dates, facts, and places. The study of history involves the interactions of great ideas, concepts, and movements. While Ashkenazic Jewry “grew up” in perenially hostile Medieval Europe, Sephardic Jewry lived in the relatively benevolent and enlightened world of Islam, exposed to the influence of Arabic and Greek philosophy and science.

Some say there is still a sense among Sephardic Jews in the United States that they are culturally superior to their Ashkenazic co-religionists. During the early years of South Carolina settlement, anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic propaganda was endemic in British North America. The aggressive, proselytizing Spanish colonizers were demonized as religious and cultural enemies. Spanish discoveries in the New World were minimized in significance, and religious purity on the Iberian Peninsula, barring Islam and Protestantism, as well as Judaism, was ridiculed on both sides of the Atlantic.

Did the lingering influence of “la Leyenda Negra,” the Black Legend, have suppressed the study of Sephardic Jews in South Carolina? Dating back to the 16th century, the Black Legend propagated anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic views, reflecting the desire of northern Europeans, especially the English, to demonize their Spanish rivals. Anti-Catholicism was a major tenet of the Ku Klux Klan and persists today among white supremacists, who put forward the notion that the United States is a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant country.

Are we devoting enough time and attention and hard thinking to understanding what first brought Sephardic Jews to South Carolina? Was there a separate Sephardic community during the colonial era and in the early national period? How did the Sephardim get along with the Ashkenazim who, from the very beginning, chose to settle here too? Were Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities and neighborhoods distinct or did they assimilate one into the other? Where are the voices of the Sephardim today? Can we still hear them, if we listen closely, or are they gone forever?

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Mapping Jewish Charleston: 2020
by Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten

As the 21st century unfolds, Charleston's Jewish community continues to grow and change along with the city. A premier destination for tourists, retirees, and high tech and manufacturing companies, the region has been developing by leaps and bounds, with subdivisions and industrial parks sprawling along every highway.

While some old Charleston Jewish families still occupy their pews in the synagogues, local congregations now include large numbers of transplants from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and beyond, as well as a smattering of people from Israel, South Africa, and the former Soviet Union. The Jewish population (estimated in 2016 at 9,500 in the tri-county area) has crossed the rivers on both sides of the peninsula, first establishing a foothold west of the Ashley River in the early 1960s, and more recently popping up east of the Cooper River with the opening of Chabad of Charleston’s Center for Jewish Life in 2016.

The suburban exodus commenced in the decades after World War II, driven by the automobile, postwar prosperity, the GI Bill, and the desire for a yard and a garage. Jewish families living downtown began moving into the northwest section of Charleston. Some bought summer houses on Sullivan’s Island—so many that the beach community earned the nickname Solomon’s Island. Charleston’s first Conservative congregation was in fact “hatched” at meetings in Sullivan’s Island beach houses of various members, notably that of Florence and Moses J. (“Mosey”) Mendelsohn. Emanuel-EI held its first Friday night services in a church at Fort Moultrie on the west end of the island in the summer of 1947. By the end of the year, the congregation had acquired its own house of worship, a former U.S. Army chapel rebuilt on a lot on Gordon Street in Charleston’s northwest neighborhood.

Another centrifugal force was Brown v. Board of Education, the 1954 Supreme Court decision ordering the desegregation of the nation’s public schools. The case, originating in Clarendon County, South Carolina, accelerated the flight from the peninsula of white Charlestonians who wanted to avoid sending their children to racially mixed schools.

In 1959, the Jewish Community Center (JCC), which had been situated downtown since the 1920s, acquired 25 acres off Millbrook Drive, renamed Raoul Wallenberg Boulevard in 1982. West Ashley, an area undergoing rapid suburban development, had become a new center of Jewish life. Eight years earlier, attorney Bill Ackerman had begun transforming a truck farm on the road to Folly Beach into a residential development, had become a new center of Jewish life. Eight years earlier, attorney Bill Ackerman had begun transforming a truck farm on the road to Folly Beach into a residential subdivision and shopping center called South Windermere, which became a neighborhood of choice for many Jewish families. According to a famous quip attributed to William B. "Bill" Regan, Mayor Joseph P. Riley’s chief legal adviser and Charleston’s corporation counsel from 1975 until 2003: “When Bill Ackerman raised his rod, the waters of the Ashley parted and the Jews walked to South Windermere.”

Later, one of the main streets, Confederate Circle, would become known as The Bagel. In 1965, Brith Sholom Beth Israel (BSBI) opened a minyan house in South Windermere for congregants who wanted to walk to shul and not have to cross the bridge on a long trek to the downtown synagogue. In 1964, the JCC sold its downtown building to an all-white segregation academy and, two years later, dedicated a new building on its West Ashley campus. In subsequent years, the JCC campus became home to the Charleston Jewish Federation, Sherman House for seniors, and Addlestone Hebrew Academy (AHA), successor to the Charleston Hebrew Institute.

In 1979, Emanuel-EI built a new sanctuary on Windsor Drive, west of the Ashley, following its congregants who had relocated more or less en masse from the northwest section of Charleston where the synagogue first stood.
Since the turn of the century, another sea change has altered the lay of the Jewish landscape. Following the national trend within Orthodoxy, a number of Jewish families (mostly living in West Ashley) wanted to become more "shomer shabbat"—to fully observe the traditional laws of the Sabbath, including the stricture against driving to synagogue. They needed a minyan (a quorum of ten men required for prayer services) within walking distance of their homes and began meeting first in private houses and then in the auditorium of the JCC. Negotiations to affiliate with BSBI were unsuccessful, and, in 2012, the West Ashley Minyan (WAM) formally reorganized as Congregation Dor Tikvah.

In 2013, Dor Tikvah hired its first rabbi, and, in 2015, it was one of two tenants remaining on the former JCC campus, the other being the kosher catering company Dining In. The congregation renovated the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue, while local donors funded the community center, transforming it into a handsome synagogue. The federation had completed the construction of a new, free-standing, state-of-the-art school next door for Addlestone Hebrew Academy. The federation had rebranded itself Charleston JCC "Without Walls" (WOW), and created flexible space for preschool classes, adult education, cooking, eating, and gatherings of all sorts.

On the peninsula, the historic Reform congregation Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim has stretched its facilities to the limits of its urban lot on Hasell Street. The temple completed a major restoration of its 1840s-era sanctuary in 2020 and is now working on the restoration of its nearly-full pre-Revolutionary War cemetery on Coming Street. BSBI continues to worship in its Moorish synagogue on Rutledge Avenue and to support the minyan house in South Windermere.

Meanwhile, at the College of Charleston, the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, founded in 1984, offers an array of Jewish social and intellectual activities and has attracted ever-increasing numbers of Jewish students. As of 2019, these students were estimated to account for a robust eight percent of the undergraduate population. At the College’s Nathan and Marlene Addlestone Library, named for Jewish philanthropists and opened in 2005, the Jewish Heritage Collection has become a leading repository of archival material on southern Jewish life.

In 2016, a kosher/vegetarian/vegan dining hall, Marty’s Place, was built as the anchor in the expansion of the Jewish Studies building. The eatery was named for the program’s visionary director, Dr. Martin Perlmutter, who was also founding director of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, a statewide membership organization established in 1994, housed physically and administratively within the Jewish Studies Program. As of 2019, only two of the historic Jewish dry goods stores remained in business on King Street—Berlin’s at the corner of Broad, and Dumas at Society. The heyday of the Jewish retail merchant is past. As the value of real estate on upper King street, there has been a string of closings of Jewish-owned businesses, including longstanding furniture emporia Morris Sokol and Dixie Furniture; George’s Pawn Shop; Bluestein’s, leased to the Charleston School of Law; and Read Brothers, out of business and to be developed. While Jews are no longer concentrated in mercantile pursuits, some have found prominent positions in the city’s dynamic food and beverage industry. Hyman’s, a popular delicatessen and seafood restaurant, for instance, operates on the site of the family’s old dry goods store.

Today occupations pursued by Charleston’s Jews are as varied as the population itself. The community’s Blue Book, a directory of ‘Jewish Residents of Greater Charleston’ compiled every other year by KEBE, keeps up not just with names and addresses, but with changing demographics, institutional histories, and professional shifts. Passionate partners in all the major movements in the area, never static, always in flux, BSBI continues to worship in its Moorish synagogue on Rutledge Avenue and to support the minyan house in South Windermere.

On April 16, 2018, the stretch of King Street between Mary and Reid streets was dedicated as Sokol Family Block by Mayor John Tecklenburg and members of city council, in honor of the family that had been in business at 510 King Street from 1919 to 2015. L to r: Freida Sokol, Mayor John Tecklenburg, Joe Sokol, and the Sokols’ grandchildren Elliot Nahoko (holding the street sign) and Theo Nahoko. Photo by Dave Rosengarten.
“My South Carolina Jewish History” Winners Announced

JHSSC’s essay and media contest for Jewish teens was a roaring success. Designed by board member Terri Wolf Kaufman and launched in December 2019, the contest asked young people between the ages of 12 and 16 to express their connection to Judaism and to South Carolina within any creative format—and win cash prizes.

Projects were judged on their energy and creativity and the emotional connections they made to family, Judaism, and the state’s Jewish history. The ingenuity of the submissions exceeded our expectations, running the gamut from an original song to a graphic novel.

We are delighted to present the 2020 “My South Carolina Jewish History” finalists and honorable mentions. To view their prize-winning projects, go to jhssc.org/contest

1st Place: Sophia Kamen Dewhirst, Johns Island, SC (graphic novel—see images this page)
2nd Place: CJ Kincaid Doss, Williamston, SC (YouTube video)
3rd Place: Sydney Lee, Mt. Pleasant, SC (written essay)
Honorable Mention: Olivia Kamen Dewhirst, Johns Island, SC (photo collage)
Honorable Mention: Shoshana Rosenbaum, Charleston, SC (written essay)

The 2021 contest will open in January. Go to jhssc.org/contest or follow us on Facebook for updates.

Change and Challenge
by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

to say this spring and summer has been challenging is an understatement. From cancelling meetings due to the pandemic, to learning how to “Zoom,” to finding new ways to pursue the Society’s mission in the digital world, to adapting to Mark Swick’s departure from the College of Charleston—as they say, life does come at you fast. We wish Mark “mazel tov” in his new job as executive director of KKBE and we are thrilled he and Ellen will remain in Charleston and stay involved with the Society. Mark has been a terrific partner as he and I entered the “post-Marty” era as executive and program directors, respectively.

I first became involved with JHSSC in 2009 when then-President Ed Polakoff asked if I would assist with planning a meeting. I did not realize this meant I was also a board member! In 2011, I joined forces with President Ann Hellman as we hosted the Southern Jewish Historical Society in Columbia; when Ann’s term ended, I succeeded her as president and then continued to work for the Society as program director.

For me, stepping into Mark’s shoes as JHSSC’s executive director is truly an honor. I am confident in the knowledge that there is a strong team in place. Enid Idelsohn, the Society’s longtime administrator, handles daily operations, logistics, and bookkeeping. Jewish Studies Director Yaron Ayalon has pledged his support and partnership. President Lilly Filler and a dedicated executive committee are keeping a firm hand on the tiller. Meanwhile, Dale Rosengarten and Alyssa Neely, our partners at Addlestone Library’s Jewish Heritage Collection, continue their outstanding efforts producing this biannual magazine, recording and processing oral histories, and supporting researchers from far and wide, even while working from home.

Past-presidents Robert Rosen and Richard Gergel have offered their talents for our monthly Sunday Conversations via Zoom. Board member Terri Kaufman has volunteered her expertise in marketing and social media. Terri also initiated our first youth essay and media contest on the theme of “My South Carolina Jewish History”—with inspirational results! Next year’s contest will open in early winter 2021.

Times of crisis such as the present make us focus on what is important. We ask ourselves, what activities are most meaningful, how can I make the world a better place? The Society’s mission “to study, preserve, and promote the history and culture of South Carolina’s Jewish community” speaks to me; as Robert Heinlein writes, “A generation which ignores history has no past and no future.” The JHSSC exists not only for us now, but for future generations. I therefore encourage you to get involved. Offer your talents, sign up for our e-newsletter, renew your membership, and consider becoming a Pillar.

If you have an idea to contribute or would like to volunteer your time, please email me at rgbarnett@gmail.com or call 803-917-1418. You are valued and needed now more than ever!

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Haszil and Dale Toporek, Augusta, GA
Anita Zucker, Charleston, SC

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<td>Pillar ($1,000 per year for 5 years)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enroll your friends and relatives for an additional $54 each. Send us their information and we will inform them of your gift.

Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to address above.