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The Politzer Sisters: Fighters for Women's Rights — Betsy Newman — The sisters Politzer were social activists both locally and nationally. In their hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, Carrie and Mabel lobbied for free kindergartens, women's rights, sex education, and a public library. Anita became a leader of the National Woman's Party in the struggle to ratify the 19th Amendment. 4

Dr. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt: Pioneering Doctor and Suffragette — Diane Vecchio — Dr. Gantt ushered in the 20th century by breaching the first of many gender barriers she encountered in her lifetime. While busy running a medical practice in Spartanburg, South Carolina, she demonstrated singular drive and vision through her initiatives in health care and her leadership on medical boards, in the suffrage movement, and in her synagogue. 7

Mrs. Charles Levinson in 1927, the struggle to make a living was daunting, but she and her husband finally found success when they opened The Leader, a clothing store in Barnwell, South Carolina. Libby put her heart and soul into the business and into her new hometown. 17

Regina Greene (née Kaver): A Woman of Valor — Harlan Greene — Holocaust survivor Regina Greene lived life on her own terms, unfettered, intense, and fueled by a fire burning just beneath the surface. Brutally honest and laser-focused on the world's injustices, she understood there was no time for anything but the truth. 19

Lior v’dor: A Daughter's Perspective — Beth Bernstein — Carol Osterweil Bernstein, mother of six children, was a pioneer who—for her daughters and the women of Columbia, South Carolina—cleared a path right onto the bimah in her synagogue, Beth Shalom. She didn’t stop there. She became the first female president of the congregation. 20

Power to the Women, No Delay — Mark Swick — JHSSC’s executive director applauds this issue’s tribute to Jewish women who have changed lives and paved the way for the next generation. 23

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 Idolshohn, Program Director Rachel G. Barnett, Founding Curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection, Dale Rosengarten, and Assistant Archivist and Layout Designer 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, college, or community organization.

Those of you who attended the November 9–10, 2019, meeting in Spartanburg, South Carolina, were thrilled to visit with old friends and make new ones. A special thanks goes to Joe Wachter who gathered his basketball team, AZA chapter, high school buddies, and synagogue friends to join in the weekend of remembrance and recognition of a time past and a 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 8, 2020, will mark 100 years since the passage of the woman’s suffrage amendment, giving women the right to vote. It should be an electrifying year!

Lilly Stern Filler, MD
JHSSC President
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 folksinger 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 from 1945 to 1949. 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, she attended local schools. At age 17, 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 hold 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 was 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: “She 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 Lorraine 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 Columbia, South Carolina, for more than 40 years. She was petite, freckled-faced, red-headed, blue-eyed, no-nonsense, hard-working, witty, smart, dedicated, stubborn, selfless, and altogether wonderful.

The small neighborhood store opened in the late 1920s, surrounded by blocks of worn-out, 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 show 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

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, her twin brother, Wendell, is on the far left.

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.”

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. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school, 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. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school, 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. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school, 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. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school,
Mama immediately tackled marketing. She reached out to Southern Living and other magazines to familiarize epicureans with the delicacy of squabs. She prepared a squab dinner and her recipe was printed in the magazine and its book of Recipes. She endeavored 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.

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.

Louise Levi Marcus: Behind the Counter in Eutawville, SC

by Ernie Marcus and Robert Berger

Eutawville, the little town I grew up in, represents a microcosm of how Jewish women ended up behind retail counters in the South. The women in my family, from cousins to my grandmother and, finally, my mother, Louise Levi Marcus, each found herself working in a store to support the family. It must have been hard for my mother, a well-educated, sophisticated woman raised in a decidedlly proper, Victorian family in the Upstate South. The women in my family, from cousins to my grandmother and, finally, my mother, Louise Levi Marcus, each found herself working in a store to support the family. It must have been hard for my mother, a well-educated, sophisticated woman raised in a decidedlly proper, Victorian family in the Upstate South. My mother was a well-liked and respected leader in her community. She believed in giving back to the community. She was a pillar of the community and a curious, creative mom.

Reflecting on Mom’s collections, the poems and plays she wrote as a school girl, the paintings she created in college and for some time afterwards, her library, her education at Agnes Scott and the University of South Carolina, where she earned her English degree, and her discerning eye when reviewing her children’s school papers, it’s obvious she had many talents. These were on display as she wrote wide-ranging comments to Ashley Cooper, the columnist for Charleston’s News and Courier, sometimes involving local fauna, flora, and tidbits, the majority about language and its dialectical peculiarities as practiced in South Carolina by both white and black residents. My mother was a pillar of the community and a curious, creative mom for me and my three siblings. Still, I have to wonder if she ever found herself in separate general and grocery stores along Porcher Street in Eutawville.

Moses 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, worked alongside their husbands (Abe Karesh and Moses Cohen, respectively) in separate general and grocery stores along Porcher Street in Eutawville.

My mother married into the Marcus family in 1949 after her divorce from Manuel Berger, with whom she had sons Arthur and Robert. My sister, Ellen, and I came along in the next decade. Among the four of us, Marcus Department Store had an auxiliary workforce, off and on, from the 1950s to the ’70s. My siblings and I spent many Saturdays and some weekdays waiting on customers, straightening out lay-away packages, and putting away new inventory. Mom did not work in the store during the early years, but after Janie’s death my parents immediately began to modernize the store inventory and presentation.

When I got a bit older and more able to fend for myself, Mom spent most Saturdays in the store, kibitzing with the clerks and the customers. She would go on buying trips with Dad to wholesalers in Charleston and Savannah with a focus on women’s fashions. Dad often deferred to her sense of style. Mom’s extended family had been 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 Visanska 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 Spanish oak and placed a plaque in her honor in the shadow of the water tower my father is credited with building during his 23-year term as mayor.

While Mom had no official duties as First Lady, she attended municipal conferences in the state and a mayoral conference at Expo ’67 in Montreal. She also took charge of getting clothes from the store whenever there were burnout victims (the old wooden shotgun houses around town were real tinderboxes). She and Dad were also known to befriend visitors (usually lost) who happened upon the store, in cases inviting them back home for a good southern meal. She also dedicated herself to the South Carolina Archeological Society, the Caroliniana Society, the South Carolina Historical Society, the Orangeburg Arts League, and was a member for at least three decades of her bridge club with mostly the same group of ladies.

Mom spent hours and hours walking along the shores of Lake Marion, usually with kids in tow, searching for Indian artifacts that washed ashore from the ancient villages that once dotted the Santee River. Over the years she accumulated an impressive array of arrowheads and pottery, as well as antique bottles. Reflecting on Mom’s collections, the poems and plays she wrote as a school girl, the paintings she created in college and for some time afterwards, her library, her education at Agnes Scott and the University of South Carolina, where she earned her English degree, and her discerning eye when reviewing her children’s school papers, it’s obvious she had many talents. These were on display as she wrote wide-ranging comments to Ashley Cooper, the columnist for Charleston’s News and Courier, sometimes involving local fauna, flora, and tidbits, the majority about language and its dialectical peculiarities as practiced in South Carolina by both white and black residents.

My mother was a pillar of the community and a curious, creative mom for me and my three siblings. Still, I have to wonder if she ever found herself in separate general and grocery stores along Porcher Street in Eutawville.

From top: Louise Levi Marcus and Harry Marcus in the yard of their Eutawville, SC, home, 1951; view of the Eutawville water tower, built during Harry Marcus’s term as mayor, and the Spanish oak tree planted by the Eutaw Garden Club in honor of Louise Levi Marcus; News and Courier columnist Ashley Cooper responds to the poem submitted by Louise Levi Marcus. All images courtesy of Ernie Marcus.
Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State

May 2–3, 2020 ~ 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 Waites, Executive Director, Historic Columbia
Panelists: Beth Bernstein, Margie Levinson Goldstein, Ann Meddin Hellman, Ernie Marcus, Lorraine Laurie 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

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.

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 Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street
Charleston, SC 29424
Meeting fee: $60 per person
Questions: Enid Isoldohn, isoldohn@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 time—a year or years. It is part and parcel of the great and noble fight to achieve full nationality 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 bloodshed that followed,” “the decision 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—“mynayumim”—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 1979 when she was 65, has always seemed tragic to me and feels even more so now that I have read her Hadassah speech. A few people had told me that her Hadassah presidency was uniquely successful, but I really had no idea.

Mildred Cohen was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. She spent two years at Agnes Scott College and was then admitted to the University of North Carolina but left second semester of junior year. I’ve always wondered why. She remembered college with excitement: acting in dramas, debating a team from Oxford University, being accepted into the Mortar Board honor society, learning about socialism, and admiring Robert Hutchins’ educational reforms at the University of Chicago. Perhaps there wasn’t enough money to continue college; perhaps more intellectual growth would have threatened her marriageability.

At an AZA convention in Atlanta, she met my father, Walter H. Solomon, who wanted to correspond with a good-looking girl in order to improve his English. After they married, she devoted herself to being what a ‘Mrs. Mister.’ He, the son of immigrants and the only one of nine children to go to college, became a successful Broad Street lawyer, the first Jew in South Carolina to be granted a license for a federal savings and loan, and the architect of the Saul Alexander Foundation. The year after Momma’s Hadassah presidency, he suffered the first of many debilitating political views, including her distaste for college fraternities and sororities, influenced her children, but only her children. Her Hadassah presidency was the one time after college when she used her leisure mind, her capacity for leadership, and her desire to change the world. Tragic, but also heroic in its own way.

Mama was active in 21 different organizations. She remained heavily involved in the community until her death, initiating programs that would better the lives of others. Among the boards she was on were the South Carolina College of Pharmacy’s Board of Advisors, the College of Charleston’s School of the Arts, the Dee Norton Lowcountry Children’s Center, Darkness to Light, and the Florence Crittenton Home.

In 1976, 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. B. Etholim 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...
Members of Doris Levkoff Meddin’s family gather in September 1994 to celebrate the naming of the neonatal intensive care unit at the Medical University of South Carolina in honor of her brother, Dr. Abner Levkoff, who established the high-risk nursery. Back row (1 to r): Abner H. Levkoff, Alice Fink Levkoff, Jule Tocca, and then Tocca, 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 at MUSC, or just friends, but thanks to her unlimited consumption of chocolate she lived to be 96. Knowing there was much to be done to repair the world, she was determined to do much as she could. She was a perpetual optimist. She had no boundaries and would call upon anyone at any time 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 Russia to New York. She was the product of a woman who faced life’s challenges with courage and resilience.

Listening to the radio one night, Mama heard that the Dallas Section of NCJW had designed a project, SafeSight for Seniors, to find people at risk from medication complications. She presented this idea to the NCJW in Charleston, and 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, or just friends, but thanks to her unlimited consumption of chocolate she lived to be 96. Knowing there was much to be done to repair the world, she was determined to do much as she could. She was a perpetual optimist. She had no boundaries and would call upon anyone at any time who she felt could make her dreams come true and help others have a better life.

The United States entered World War II in December...
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!”

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 store and moved to Columbia. Libby made adjustments, but in truth, her heart remained in Barnwell.

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 store 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 business 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 have much to thank my mother for. She taught me to work hard, think for myself, fight for what I believe, never stop learning, and to truly love being Jewish.

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.

I grew up 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, hated 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 always deferred till late in the day) and never tried to guilt-trip us, though I think she was consumed with guilt herself. 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.

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Libby was not the typical mother or wife. She never cooked a meal or mopped a floor. She did not read bedtime stories or sing lullabies. To compensate, Libby’s mother, Baila, lived with us. Baila would travel to Holly Hill and St. George, but Barnwell was her home. She was strictly Orthodox. We had no synagogues or Hebrew school, but we had our grandmother. Ours was a kosher, Jewish home.

My mother died at age 69. And the thing I remember most from her funeral was how strangely 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 discreetly. 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.

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, a production assistant for the popular children’s television program Captain Kangaroo, and then as a high school English teacher. She settled in Columbia in 1961, after marrying my father, the late Isadore Bernstein, and quickly became involved in the community, while also becoming a mother to six children in the short span of eight years. I was her fifth child and shared the place as her youngest with my identical twin sister, Anne. Although my mother was constantly busy raising all of us, she remained committed to her civic responsibilities and dedicated to her faith in Judaism.

Joining Columbia’s League of Women Voters in the 1960s and becoming its president in 1967 marked the beginning of her lifelong volunteerism in the community and at Beth Shalom. She participated in a variety of interfaith groups, such 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 in numerous board positions, including vice president, and eventually became Beth Shalom’s first female president.

In the 70s and early 80s, during my formative years at Beth Shalom, women were not allowed to stand on the bimah (pulpit) to pray while the ark was open while the Torah was being read. When she was vice president, my mother fought against this practice and prayed on the bimah to make the point that women should play an integral part in ritual life at the synagogue.

This was quite a controversial stance at the time. Many men in the congregation, including some of her friends and family, 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 a drunk driver accident in 1981. My mother was truly a woman of valor. She led by example and exuded the principles of love, integrity, dignity, humility, justice, open-mindedness, and acceptance, values that were instilled in my siblings and me. Her legacy is now passed down to our children, L’dor v’dor.
We need people to help with oral history interviews, Jewish merchant research, and cemetery updates. For more information, contact Marcie Cohen Ferris (ferrismarcie@gmail.com).

How might digital humanities and digital archives help us achieve our archival goals? Might they assist in the cataloging and preservation of our new collections—to discover new southern Jewish voices and stories? How might we use archival material—or create digital versions thereof—to influence—and might continue to influence—the study of southern Jewish history and culture. How might we use archival materials—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 (rabinbvr@verizon.com), Dale Rosengarten (rosengartend@cofc.edu); Marcie Cohen Ferris (ferrismarcie@gmail.com).

My South Carolina Jewish History

An Essay/Media Contest for Ages 12–16
Deadline for submissions: April 3, 2020

The first youth activity sponsored by JHSSC, this contest is open to all young people, ages 12–16, with a story to tell about their Jewish heritage. Submissions can be written essays or multi-media productions. Contest winners will be announced the first weekend of May at the JHSSC spring meeting in Columbia, SC. Each prize will total $1,000. For more information, contest rules, and submissions form, visit: jhssc.org/contest

Kugels & Collards

Does the smell of brisket remind you of a special place and time? Do you have a family recipe to share? Kugels & Collards documents Jewish foodways in Columbia, SC, through shared recipes and family memories. K&C, sponsored by Historic Columbia, will expand its range in 2020—recording oral histories and gathering documentary materials in small towns and cities across the state. Visit kugelsandcollards.org and follow us on Twitter and Instagram.

A Store at Every Crossroads:
Documenting the Stories of South Carolina’s Jewish Merchants

A Store at Every Crossroads is now available for rent through the South Carolina State Museum Traveling Exhibit Program. The multi-panel display grows out of JHSSC’s Jewish Merchant Project, an ongoing effort to collect information through a statewide survey, illustrated narratives, and a website featuring an interactive map. See merchants.jhssc.org/. To book the exhibit contact: steven.kramer@scmuseum.org

Interested in volunteering?
We need people to help with oral history interviews, Jewish merchant research, and cemetery updates. For more information, contact Rachel Barnett (rgbarnettsc@gmail.com).

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Spring 2020 Volume XXV Number 1

Power to the Women, No Delay

by Mark Swick, Executive Director, JHSSC

I am a loud and proud disciple of The Bitter Southerner, an online media platform that publishes feature-length stories and photographic essays about an often overlooked aspect of southern culture: the progressive South. It was in those digital pages that I was recently introduced to a now-favorite idiom, printed on a t-shirt in the BSJ General Store: “Power to the Women, No Delay.”

Like so many of yours, mine is a family of strong women. I was raised by a single mother and profoundly influenced by both my grandmothers, whose word was law, their opinions on unwavering as their kindness. And, though Judaism was not necessarily a defining quality for either of them, the respect they demanded and their unfappable determination are traits that I have come to identify with South Carolina’s Jewish women—those whom I know and work with, and the southern matriarchs whose stories I have internalized, some of which have appeared in past issues of our magazine.

I am in awe of the women profiled in this issue and those who memorialize them. Awe by the survivors of Europe’s atrocities, such as Regina Kaver Greene; filled with respect for merchants like Louise Levi Marcus, Patty Levi Barnett, Libby Friedman Levinson, and “Miz Clara,” who so ably ran businesses, often alone, in South Carolina towns large and small. I am enthralled by those who broke barriers and smashed glass ceilings—the Pollitzer sisters, Dr. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, Carol Osterweil Bernstein—and those who advocated on behalf of people in need, like Doris Levkoff Meddin, and championed a Jewish homeland, like Mildred Cohen Solomon.

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina has had a remarkable 25-year run thanks, in large part, to women like Ann Meddin Hellman, our inaugural webmistress and curator of South Carolina’s Jewish cemetery surveys; like our Administrator Enid Idelsohn, our President Lilly Filler, and Program Director Rachel Barnett. And, of course, our colleagues at Addlestone Library, Alyssa Neely and Dale Rosengarten, who so ably edited this magazine, among their many other responsibilities. My deepest thanks to these women, to name just a few.

Finally, we are where we are thanks to friends, members, donors, and JHSSC Pillars, many of whom have supported our various initiatives over the past quarter century. Your membership dues, especially those who choose to join us as Pillars, are what make the Society function day in and day out. I invite you to sign up today, and to proudly proclaim with me: Power to the Women, No Delay.
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. … 4

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 woven into Carolina's Fundamental Constitutions to the Proprietors' pragmatic desire to recruit white settlers with experience in commerce to the new colony. By the early 17th century, the authors contend, "Charleston had become the unofficial Jewish capital of America." 7–18

Rejuvenating the Study of Sephardic Jewry and Its Role in South Carolina Jewish History – Merrill Shapiro – Rabbi Shapiro implores American Jewish historians and the general public to pay more scholarly attention to Sephardic Jewry, whose history and culture have been neglected, he argues, in favor of the more numerous Ashkenazim. 11

Mapping Jewish Charleston: 2020 – Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten – This introductory essay for the newest "page" of the online exhibit describes the reshaping of the Jewish landscape since World War II — the rush to the suburbs, the jump across both the Ashley and Cooper rivers, the advent of Conservative Judaism, the multiplication of Orthodox options–a momentous 73 years. 14

"My South Carolina Jewish History" Winners Announced – JHSSC's inaugural essay and media contest for Jewish teens produced an array of exceptionally creative award-winning projects, now available on the Society's website. 18

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. 19

Letter from the President
The Yiddish expression "Man nicht, un Gott lacht"—"Man plans 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 SXSW events. And then—BOOM—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.

Then came the failure of a unified response to the pandemic and the politicization of wearing masks. The perfect storm 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 Idolsohn, our administrator; Rachel Barnett, our newly appointed executive director; and yours truly, your devoted president. We immediately went to work to reassign 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 Breman Museum and to the Southern Jewish Historical Society to collaborate on virtual programs. We will be advertising a multitude of presentations, conversations, 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 Unexampled 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 a Tolerant Society: Jewish Public Service in SC from the Colonial to the Modern Era"—featured guests Senator Joel Lourie, Representative Beth Bernstein, and Mayor Billy Kesylering 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 Gemut"—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.

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

The Spanish Flu as Described by Dr. Banov

The Spanish flu was a lethal and highly contagious disease. In the United States, about 28 percent of the population of 105 million became infected, and 500,000 to 850,000 people died. In South Carolina, there were an estimated 150,000 to 400,000 cases, with 4,000 to 10,000 deaths attributed to the flu. By November 1918, nearly 6,000 Charleston residents had become infected and more than 200 people had died from it.

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 people.

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.

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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 cache of confiscated liquor was released by the Courts and turned over to the Health Department to be distributed for flu patients on the doctor’s prescription.” The News and Courier reported on October 17 that Dr. Banov “hurried to Charleston soon thereafter; thousands more became sick with it and dozens more died. "super spreaders.” Not surprisingly, the influenza returned to Charleston soon thereafter; thousands more became sick with it and dozens more died.

Dr. Leon Banov, Sr., died on November 4, 1971, in a car accident on Savannah Highway near his home in Byrnes Downs. From his own activities in helping to contain the 1918 influenza, as well as his long experience in public health, Leon’s progeny included my father, Dr. Leon Banov, Jr. (1914–2007), a Charleston proctologist; Morton Banov (1919–1992), a Knoxville merchant; and Roslyn Banov Wyman (1923–1958), a civic leader in Pontiac, Michigan.

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

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 French 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.

Inset from a map by Edward Crisp, one of three included in A compleat description of the province of Carolinas in 3 parts, published in London, ca. 1711. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

TIMELINE

1661
Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKEB) is formed under the leadership of Moses Cohen (Jahaziel), Isaac Da Costa (hazzan), Joseph Tobias (president), Philip Hart (mohel), and Michael Lazarus (secretary), following the Sephardic misogu of London’s Congregation Bevis Marks. Cover image depicts, left to right, Da Costa, Lazarus, Tobias, and Cohen.

1679
Simon Valentine joins three other “aliens of the Jewish nation” and 60 French Protestants, known as Huguenots, in a petition to the colonial governor for naturalisation. See image, page 9.
Among the promising sources of potential settlers were religious dissenters, who found themselves in unwinnable battles against 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 that any seven or more persons agreeing in any religion, shall constitute a church or profession. This represented a major departure from the European practice of oficial state religions, which tolerated no dissent or alternate viewpoint. Leaving no ambiguity regarding the target audience, Article 97 expressly stated, “This representation of a church or profession is intended to take care of the poor and widows and such other indigent persons as the said church or profession may think proper to assist.”

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

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 unremittent 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 Huguenots and four Jews jointly petitioned the governor of the Carolina colony for naturalization. Governor Philip从而 endorsed the petition and recommended adoption in an address to the colonial legislature, which adopted in an address to the colonial legislature, which responded by granting citizenship rights to all aliens and their wives and children, regardless of their nation of origin. The legislation noted that a number of dissenters had come to the colony for religious freedom. Shortly thereafter, colonial records confirm that two Charleston Jews, Simon Valentine and Abraham Avila, were issued citizenship papers—40 years before such rights were given to Jews residing in England.

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, totalling 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.

The Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded in 1774, ministered to the sick and burying the dead, is still in existence today. The replica seal, painted by Faith Murray in 1967, includes the society’s motto, “Charity delivers from death.”

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 Heralds, London, 1745.

KKBE petitions for incorporation and, in 1794, complete 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.

Hebrew Orphan Society is established to support widows and children of indigent parents. The organization continues to function as a philanthropic agency affiliated with Charleston Jewish Social Services.

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

Charleston’s Jews created other organizations to support its communal life. In 1754, Isaac Da Costa established a Jewish cemetery. This was followed in 1784 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 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 the United States. In 1825, reformer Isaac Harby delivered an anniversary discourse, later bound into the manuscript prayer book he wrote for his sister Caroline Delachufeld Harby, which includes a prayer for the Sabbath she composed.
Rejuvenating the Study of Sephardic Jewry and Its Role in South Carolina Jewish History

by Rabbi Merrill Shapiro

In there 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 history of Ashkenazim and Ashkenazic institutions at the expense of the study of Sephardic Jews and their institutions, which dominated in 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 Ashkenazim 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 original communities 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 Engravings depicting a marriage ceremony of Portuguese Jews, above, and of German Jews, below, in Amsterdam. By Claude Du Bosc after Bernard Picart. William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Unable to sustain separate congregations in the aftermath of the Civil War, Shearith 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 Jewish history to life.

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.

The study of history involves the interactions of great ideas, concepts, and movements. While Ashkenazic Jewry "grew up" in relatively benevolent Medieval Europe, Sephardic Jewry lived in the relatively 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 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 relatively benevolent Medieval Europe, Sephardic Jewry lived in the relatively 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.

Could 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?
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 the Sullivan’s Island beach houses of various members, notably that of Florence and Moses J. (“Mosey”) Mendelsohn. Emanu-El 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 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, Emanu-El 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 construction of a new, free-standing, state-of-the-art school building. The temple was completed a major restoration of its 1840s-era sanctuary in 2015, and is now working on the restoration of its nearly-completed major restoration of its 1840s-era sanctuary in 2015, and is now working on the restoration of its nearly-full pre–Revolutionary War cemetery on Coming Street.

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.

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 Adelstein 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, 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 skyrockets, 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 KKBE, 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 home in South Windermere.
Change and Challenge
by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

T o 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 comes at you fast. We wish Mark “mazel tov” in his new job as executive director of KJBE 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. Endi Ideri, 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!

Pillars

Anonymous
Susan and Charles Altman, Charleston, SC
Ellen Arnowitz, Atlanta, GA
Rachel and Henry Barnett, Columbia, SC
Doris L. Baumgarten, Aiken, SC
Harold Brody, Atlanta, GA
Alan and Rosaene “Binky” Cohen, Charleston, SC
Alex and Dyan Colsen, Darlingt, SC
Joan Cutler, Columbia, SC
Lowell and Barbara Epstein, Charleston, SC
Lilly and Bruce Filler, Columbia, SC
Richard and Belinda Gergel, Charleston, SC
Steven J. Gold, Greenville, SC
Judith Green, Charleston, SC
Stuart and Rebecca Greenberg, Florence, SC
Max and Ann Meldin Hellman, Charleston, SC
Alan and Charlotte Kahn, Columbia, SC
Jerry and Sue Kline, Columbia, SC
Michael S. Kogan, Charleston, SC
Susan R. Lourie, Columbia, SC
Bert and Robin Mercer, Carnesville, GA
Susan Pearlstein Norton, Charleston, SC
Andrew and Mary Polakoff, Spartanburg, SC
Edward and Sandra Polakoff, Columbia, SC
Alan and Anne Reynier, Columbia, SC
Deborah Ritter, Columbia, SC
Benedict and Barbara Rosen, Myrtle Beach, SC
Robert and Susan Rosen, Charleston, SC
Jeffrey and Mickey Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
Sandra Lee Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
Joseph and Edie Rubin, Charleston, SC
Fred and Ellen Seidenberg, Columbia, SC
Larry Simon, Isle of Palms, SC
Mark and Gayle Sloan, Myrtle Beach, SC
Gail (Altman) and Ronald Spahn, Baltimore, MD
Richard Stern, Boston, MA
Haswell and Dale Toporek, Augusta, GA
Anita Zucker, Charleston, SC

Foundation Pillars
Nathan and Marlene Addlestone Foundation
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Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation

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Betty Brody
Harold and Carol Rosen Fox
Harvey and Mimi Gleberman
Ruth Brody Greenberg
Ronald and Anne Oster Krakor
Isadore Lourie
Raymond Rosenblum
Raymond and Florence Stern
Raphael and Lois Welpert
Jerry Zucker

“ My South Carolina Jewish History” Winners Announced

JHSSC’s essay and media contest for Jewish teens was a rousing success. Designed by board member Terri Wolff 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 Rosenbergbaum, Charleston, SC (written essay)

The 2021 contest will open in January. Go to jhssc.org/contest or follow us on Facebook for updates.
Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Name: ____________________________________________________________________
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Phone: _____________________________ Fax:  _________________________________
E-mail address: ___________________________________________________________

2021 annual Dues (Jan.–Dec.)

You may purchase or renew your JHSSC membership online. Go to jhssc.org, click on Support and then choose your membership category.

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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.

jhssc.org
Letter from the President

In deciding on the theme of the Spring 2021 magazine, we found ourselves in new territory. In normal years, we focus the upcoming issue on whatever topic we choose for the next biannual meeting. But because of the coronavirus pandemic, we had no Spring 2021 gathering to plan. Co-editor and layout designer Alyssa Neely came up with a novel idea: to devote the issue to the pandemic, which over the past year has utterly changed the world. We agreed that generations to come would like to hear how this unprecedented public health emergency is affecting our synagogues, hospitals, schools, and life cycle events, including funerals. We hope the end of this plague is in sight. At some point it will be historical, and we will have chronicled it.

As Jews, I think it is in our DNA to be hyper-aware of our surroundings, to measure the temperature of discussions related to Jewish life, achievements, and challenges. What has captured my attention has been the heightened need for security in our synagogues and temples, in our cemeteries and around memorials. This is our new reality.

A pandemic is a stressor on everyone, interfering with daily life and in some cases our livelihood. As stress increases, some members of our society feel compelled to act out, to subscribe to conspiracies and cults and commit acts of violence. Around the globe and in our own back yard, we see a rise in antisemitic incidents, which, according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), have increased by 42 percent in the last 18 months.

In closing, I look forward to a time when we can come together, learn together, and celebrate the END of COVID-19 together. L’Chaim! To Life!

Sincerely,
Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.
JHSSC President

JHSSC Sponsors
New Historic Marker
Spindel Development Partners and Armada Hoffer Properties, builders of student apartments called Hoffer Place at 555 King Street in downtown Charleston, worked with and supported the local teams documenting the history of the theatre as well as the African Americans that once stood on the property. Spandrel Development Partners and Armada Hoffler Properties, led by architect Isadore Lourie, o.b.m., and designer Rachel Gordin Barnett, worked with the city and state to recognize the significance of the theatre. KKBE’s rabbi describes the struggle and finds a few silver linings. Her congregation, like so many others, is doing what Judaism has done throughout history—adapt.

Another sobering aspect of the pandemic is what it has done to the mental health of our most vulnerable citizens—children, the elderly, the poor. Even for those of us who are able to shelter at home, quarantine means isolation and little social interaction; it means children going to school on their iPads; it means those of us who can learn new computer skills and navigate the worldwide web find ourselves spending a lot of time online!

Our monthly “Sunday Conversations” have played an invigorating role by providing insightful discussions on selected aspects of South Carolina’s Jewish history. Their popularity has grown, attracting increasing numbers of participants from all over the nation via Zoom. By design we have partnered with like-minded organizations who share our programming with their constituents. The easy-going exchanges between Judge Richard Gergel and attorney Robert Rosen and their guests have filled part of the void left by the absence of in-person meetings and communal events. A huge hassle for these two past presidents who have made this difficult year easier for us all.

Thanks also to another past president, Jeffrey Rosenbaum, for his dogged work on developing an endowment fund for the Society. And thanks to Executive Director Rachel G. Barnett, whose logistical and creative talents, persistence, and wisdom have guided us forward through uncharted territory.

In closing, I look forward to a time when we can come together, learn together, and celebrate the END of COVID-19 together. L’Chaim! To Life!

Sincerely,
Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.
JHSSC President
The Best Laid Plans Laid to Rest
by Nancy Polinsky Johnson

Tucked among the many manila folders from my parents’ filing cabinet is one labeled “Funerals,” and inside are a few magazine photos of a beautiful celebrity funeral service and some scrawled notes in my mother’s lovely handwriting. Her first notation, “rose bouquet on casket; shades of peach and pink.”

Mummy loved peach and pink flowers. The beautiful tables she used to set for Passover seders were usually highlighted by a centerpiece in those tones, and most of the family photos of Daddy leading the community at large—particularly family and the community at large—particularly friends who had been like family to them, sharing life’s joys and sorrows over countless bridge parties, and life cycle events. Now that Mummy and Daddy had returned to the city and are in their final resting place, I find myself among many of those friends, which is a great comfort to me and my sister.

Arlene Furman and Gerald Polinsky’s wedding day, Boston, MA, December 26, 1955.

When she founded the Columbia Jewish Film Festival in 2000, she launched an event that has become a highly regarded annual happening that draws film enthusiasts from the Jewish community and beyond. Meanwhile, Daddy moved into administration at Voorhees, then began advising other historically Black colleges and universities as a consultant, and eventually capped his career spending more than 35 years working with the top administrators at Morris College in Sumter. But he never thought of it as work. For him, helping to improve the academic, financial, and organizational standing of the small Black schools he served was akin to a calling, and he answered that calling until the day before the moving company crew arrived to pack up his house for the move to Florida.

He was 83 on his last day on the job. With Daddy’s background as a history teacher, the commitment to Judaism that he shared with Mummy, and the deep love they both felt for their adopted state, it was only natural that the two of them became founding members—and later, Mummy a board member—of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina when JHSSC was formed in 1994. They attended every meeting and, along with dear friends Susan and Isadore Lourie, Mick Louise, Gerry Sue Arnold, Fred Fields, Joel Levy, Klyde Robinson, and others, worked hard to build the organization.

My parents made many wonderful friends during their years in Columbia, friends who had been like family to them, sharing life’s joys and sorrows over countless bridge parties, and life cycle events. Now that Mummy and Daddy had returned to the city and are in their final resting place, I find myself among many of those friends, which is a great comfort to me and my sister.


Their funeral service was conducted by Rabbi Sanford Marcus, who served as the spiritual leader of Tree of Life for 20 years and is now Rabbi Emeritus. He and his wife, Ruth, had been very special to Mummy and Daddy, and Joanna and I were grateful that he was willing to venture beyond the pandemic-safe confines of his home to perform this mitzvah.

In 2020, the funeral was live-streamed on Dunbar Funeral Home’s Facebook page and available for online viewing afterwards (it is still posted today). More than a thousand people watched it—many of them strangers—which I can only attribute to the fact that Mummy and Daddy’s deaths had received quite a bit of press coverage, as they were among the first couples in the United States to die together of COVID-19. Their story touched people, particularly because one of the devoted nurses who cared for them recounted their last moments: they had been holding hands in their side-by-side hospital beds and, as Daddy’s body was being wheeled out of the room, Mummy faintly cried out. While her words were mostly unintelligible, the nurse could make out, “Together, Jerry.”

Now they lie together, as they lived for 64 years, and Joanna and I have chosen to be grateful that neither had to go on without the other.

After their deaths, Mum and Daddy’s apartment was fumigated and sealed, so my sister and I couldn’t go inside for a month. When we were finally allowed in to pack up everything, we came across the funeral file with Mummy’s notes and lamented with great sadness that nothing had happened as she had wanted. You can be sure there will be a rose bouquet in shades of peach and pink at the unveiling of our parents’ headstone this spring.


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The Best Laid Plans Laid to Rest

by Nancy Polinsky Johnson

When she founded the Columbia Jewish Film Festival in 2000, she launched an event that has become a highly regarded annual happening that draws film enthusiasts from the Jewish community and beyond. Meanwhile, Daddy moved into administration at Voorhees, then began advising other historically Black colleges and universities as a consultant, and eventually capped his career spending more than 35 years working with the top administrators at Morris College in Sumter. But he never thought of it as work. For him, helping to improve the academic, financial, and organizational standing of the small Black schools he served was akin to a calling, and he answered that calling until the day before the moving company crew arrived to pack up his house for the move to Florida.

He was 83 on his last day on the job. With Daddy’s background as a history teacher, the commitment to Judaism that he shared with Mummy, and the deep love they both felt for their adopted state, it was only natural that the two of them became founding members—and later, Mummy a board member—of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina when JHSSC was formed in 1994. They attended every meeting and, along with dear friends Susan and Isadore Lourie, Mick Louise, Gerry Sue Arnold, Fred Fields, Joel Levy, Klyde Robinson, and others, worked hard to build the organization.

My parents made many wonderful friends during their years in Columbia, friends who had been like family to them, sharing life’s joys and sorrows over countless bridge parties, and life cycle events. Now that Mummy and Daddy had returned to the city and are in their final resting place, I find myself among many of those friends, which is a great comfort to me and my sister.


Their funeral service was conducted by Rabbi Sanford Marcus, who served as the spiritual leader of Tree of Life for 20 years and is now Rabbi Emeritus. He and his wife, Ruth, had been very special to Mummy and Daddy, and Joanna and I were grateful that he was willing to venture beyond the pandemic-safe confines of his home to perform this mitzvah.

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Reinventing Judaism
by Rabbi Stephanie M. Alexander

I have the honor of serving as rabbi at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina—er as we are more commonly known, KKBE. There was a time when nearly every synagogue in the United States had the letters K. K. affixed to its name. These letters identified the organization as a synagogue, a Kahal Kadosh or K’halah K’dosha, a holy congregation. Nowadays, most synagogues have dropped the prefix; it might show up on formal stationery every now and then, but very little else. KKBE, however, has proudly retained the two words, but as an integral part of our name and identity: We are a Kahal Kadosh, a holy community, and a Beth Elohim, a house of God.

And yet, on March 17, 2020—four days after our first (and, as of this writing, only) congregational worship service in our newly restored and renovated historic sanctuary—we could no longer use our house, and our community was unable to gather. What did it mean to be KKBE now?

Across the country, every congregation asked its own version of this question. As rabbis scrambled to figure out what to do next—for Shabbat, for Pesach, for Religious School, for (gasp) the High Holy Days—we joked amongst ourselves that “we’re doing fine, just fine, you know, other than having to reinvent Judaism!” It’s understandable why we felt that way. Very little on our long and growing “To Do Lists” resembled anything we had learned in seminary. Instead of putting heads together over coffee and around tables, synagogue teams were navigating how to share computer files and collaborate remotely with lay leaders and staff. Instead of orchestrating worship in the sanctuary, we were figuring out the mechanics of Zoom and Keynote, drive-in Shabbat services and quickly configured outdoor worship space. Cue sheets now had to guide the advancing of Visual T’filah slides and note which participants to mute/unmute and when. High Holy Day services—already an elaborate and carefully choreographed endeavor under “normal” circumstances—now became a full-on production.

At KKBE, we decided to contract with professional videographers to prerecord our High Holy Day worship services. At no point in my rabbinic training, I assure you, did we cover anything close to “Shot Lists” and on-camera training. Yet here I was outlining liturgical sequences for filming, the transitions required between them, and what needed to be placed where for continuity between shots. (Should ark doors be open? The Torah scroll out? Covered or uncovered? On the right or on the left?) The list went on and on.

Yet at least those things we could “reimvent.” How were we supposed to comfort the sick when we weren’t allowed to go to their bedside? Console the bereaved when we couldn’t take them in our arms? How could we rejoice with brides and grooms, welcome babies into the Covenant, or celebrate the accomplishments of our local mitzvah when neither family nor friends nor the members of our congregation could do the one thing we have always taught is most important: to just show up? These difficult questions reflect painful situations, but their answer is straightforward and simple: We do what we have always done. We do the best we can. And while that “best” has come up short in many areas, it has proven to be ever better in some.

It has been devastating to gather with but a smattering of loved ones in the cemetery for funerals; to watch as family members of different households go to their bedsides? Console the bereaved when we couldn’t be there for their answer is straightforward and simple: We do what we have always done. We do the best we can.

And there have been other silver linings, too: Congregants who have been unable to regularly participate in Shabbat and holiday services, even teach in our religious school. Families who live in different states, and normally attend different synagogue services, are able to rotate around and spend Shabbat together. Embracing new technology and formats has afforded Hebrew school teachers and students more opportunities to engage in “one-on-one” learning. Lifelong learning programs can recruit presenters from around the country and as far away as Israel and bring them into people’s living rooms.

The fact is, at no point during this pandemic have we actually been reinventing Judaism. Judaism has survived innumerable disruptions and destructions; we’ve endured pandemics and plagues before. Judaism has a long history of adapting and adjusting, of reforming to meet the moment. Some of those reforms—like the shift from sacrificial worship to liturgical worship—have proven enduring. Others have been more fleeting, ceasing to be meaningful once the moment necessitating change has passed.

Time will tell how much of this particular moment’s innovation is here to stay. But when this pandemic ends, and our holy congregation is once again able to enter its house of God, I truly believe we will do so as invested and engaged as ever.
A View from the Trenches: A Teacher’s Testimony

by Marla Kranick Palmer

I teach modern European history at a private high school in Greenville, South Carolina. Unlike most of the public schools, we returned to face-to-face classes full time in August, at the very time coronavirus cases were surging here in the Upstate. I am 52 years old, and while I do not have any of the underlying conditions that seem to provide fertile ground for COVID-19 to wreak havoc, I am in an age bracket that puts me at higher risk. And so, needless to say, I was not happy with my school’s decision to reopen so soon. Of course, I understood the financial pressures facing private schools. I knew our administration was trying to walk that fine line between accommodating parents, who couldn’t justify paying high tuition for their children to be taught over Zoom, and keeping their faculty and students safe. It was not an easy decision, and I do not think our administrators took it lightly. And so, as much as I dreaded it, I had no choice but to return if I wanted to keep my job.

We went back to school in mid-August with desks roughly six feet apart and everyone masked, and with hand and desk sanitizers and paper towels in every classroom. The students were visibly happy to be there after spending the spring attending class online. As one student remarked, “I never thought I would say this, but I am so happy to be back at school!” It certainly brought some “normalcy” into our lives, if one could call social distancing, mask wearing, and the perpetual application of hand sanitizer “normal.”

A few weeks and zero cases of COVID later, students became increasingly lax, especially with regard to social distancing. Besides constantly having to remind a number of them that they wanted to be closer to their friends. High schoolers are very hard to listen to them and really “see” them all the more difficult to listen to them and really “see” them behind our masks.

On top of the logistics of trying to teach during a global pandemic with different “rules” for teaching content and skills, connecting with students behind masks and plexiglass and six feet apart, and meeting new needs among the student population, there was the added burden of how to manage social distancing. As news sources have noted, there are so many students falling through the cracks now. For some, school is the only safe place, and our students at least have this refuge, but there seems to be more fear and anxiety in their eyes than I can ever remember. And it is all the more difficult to listen to them and really “see” them behind our masks.

We didn’t have our first wave of cases until November. Only a few students actually got sick, but we had to quarantine large numbers of students because of their proximity in the classrooms. We got through that relatively well, and none of our teachers were affected. In December, just before winter break, another wave passed through. This time, far more people were affected. Several students tested positive and a number of teachers were quarantined when spouses or family members who were considered close contacts were exposed to the virus. About a third of my students were in quarantine during midterm exams, and I had to quickly figure out how to accommodate them in a “virtual” environment. It was not ideal, but we made it through—although I am convinced some students took advantage of these circumstances and cheated. It is really hard to monitor students who are testing in class and virtually at the same time.

It is equally hard to pay attention to the emotional needs of students, many of whom struggle with anxiety and depression in the best of times. As news sources have noted, the number of well students taking advantage of the school’s testing program plummeted as parents became too fearful to bring their children to the office. The number of visits for children and teens with anxiety and depression skyrocketed, as they tried to navigate a world that none of us understood. The number of children dealing with obesity soared as well, as children spent all day in front of a screen attending virtual school because the public schools had closed. I became accustomed to hearing pleas like “When can we go back to school?” and “When can I see my friends again?” I referred more children to psychologists and psychiatrists than ever before, and I treated many of them myself when their symptoms became severe and our mental health specialists were overwhelmed. Meanwhile, most of the children who became sick with COVID actually did very well, although a few became seriously ill and were hospitalized.

I went home at the end of every long day wondering if I had done enough and also wondering if this was the day that I had been infected by one of my patients or their parents. The stress was overwhelming and continued to this day.

During the summer of 2020, I treated patients at my pediatric practice in Columbia, South Carolina. Healthy children and sick children sat in our waiting rooms and were treated in our exam rooms by doctors and staff wearing no protective equipment. During the summer of 2020, I treated those same patients both inside and outside of my office. Healthy children waited in their cars and were brought directly to an exam room. Our waiting rooms sat empty. Sick children were seen in the parking lot and tested for COVID-19 if necessary. All staff wore face masks. I wore an N95 respirator mask, goggles, and gloves, adding a face shield for high risk patients. This is still how I practice today, in February 2021.

The only major differences are that I now have easier access to essential protective equipment and that, as a frontline health care worker, I have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

As the pandemic took hold, I noticed a major difference in my daily schedule. The number of well child and immunization visits plummeted as parents became too fearful to bring their children to the office. The number of visits for children and teens with anxiety and depression skyrocketed, as they tried to navigate a world that none of us understood. The number of children dealing with obesity soared as well, as children spent all day in front of a screen attending virtual school because the public schools had closed. I became accustomed to hearing pleas like “When can we go back to school?” and “When can I see my friends again?” I referred more children to psychologists and psychiatrists than ever before, and I treated many of them myself when their symptoms became severe and our mental health specialists were overwhelmed. Meanwhile, most of the children who became sick with COVID actually did very well, although a few became seriously ill and were hospitalized.

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How did we get here? In Leviticus 19.18 we are taught, “Love your neighbor...
as yourself.” There is no greater commandment. Yet far too many people deny the existence of the pandemic and refuse to heed the guidance of public health experts. If we are going to turn this crisis around, it will involve truly loving our neighbors as we do ourselves. That will mean wearing a mask in public, maintaining social distance, washing hands frequently, and staying home when ill. It also means accepting the vaccine as it becomes more widely available. These are the changes that will need to happen in order for our schools to be open, our children to be safe, and our world to return to some semblance of normal. These are the changes that I hope and pray for.

Torah and Geriatrics in a Time of COVID
by David Greenhouse, M.D.

When Miriam became ill, Moses uttered the briefest of prayers, “Please God, please heal her.” I practice geriatrics and work only in long-term care facilities. I am no stranger to treating progressive illness for which we have no cure and death is certain. While the Torah teaches us to save a life (pikuach nefesh), helping families make end of life decisions is part of my job description. Yet I, like all of America, was unprepared for the pandemic of 2020.

By the middle of March, visits to nursing homes were restricted. Our doors that had been open 24/7 were now guarded by temperature checkers. The halls were very quiet. The Torah tells us to honor our mothers and fathers. The news from New York and Seattle was terrifying. Families understood that danger lurked in every breath and that their loved ones were the targets. Saving a life by avoidance was the new paradigm. Families and residents understood the restrictions as the virus crept closer to South Carolina. I found myself responsible for the safety of three populations: my patients, the staff, and families. And they were all a danger to each other.

Soon families were using FaceTime and Alexa to visit with their loved ones and to communicate with the staff. Our residents were pulled into a technological world they did not understand. Daughters visited at the windows and then called with concerns. There were noticeable changes amongst some of our residents. “The dwindled” soon became a diagnosis, even among residents who never developed COVID infections.

Honor thy parents and saving a life are important precepts for Jews and, for some four to six weeks, families seemed to accept the visitation restrictions. But like many Americans, people soon grew weary and lost their patience.

When the governor refused to issue a mask mandate and opened up the beaches, bars, and restaurants, the virus found the weak links and pounced.

Despite frequent testing and infection control measures, the virus still manages to find new hosts. Like a smoldering ash, one became three became seven became twenty. Any family member who visits puts her or his loved one, someone else’s loved one, and my staff at risk. Nursing homes are like college dorms, but with older residents who don’t party as much. Colleges should have accepted the visitation restrictions. But like many students, they were too busy with classes delivered remotely. This required significant adjustments and compromises. We wanted to be here for our students, to mentor and teach them in person, but also via Zoom for those who could not attend. We wanted to be the one place on campus where they could have meaningful interactions they could not get elsewhere, as most of the campus was still hunkered down and the majority of classes delivered remotely. This required quite a bit of innovative thought. Those among you familiar with our program and its history know very well that unconventional solutions to common problems have always been what we do here.

Spring 2021
Volume xxvi – Number 1

Wait and See
by Yaron Ayalon, Director of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, College of Charleston

2020 was a challenging year. In March, the College of Charleston, like most colleges and universities, closed. Students were sent home, and all instruction shifted online. For the Jewish Studies Program, this also meant putting student life (Hillel) activities on hold and presenting our public programming via Zoom. While that aspect of our work remains the same—we have not had an in-person event here at Jewish Studies for about a year—we decided early on to move as much of our operations as possible to in-person. In June, our staff returned, and we have been largely working from the Jewish Studies Center on the corner of Glebe and Wentworth uninterrupted since then.

To make this happen without a rise in COVID-19 cases required significant adjustments and compromises. We wanted to be here for our students, to mentor and teach them in person, but also via Zoom for those who could not attend. We wanted to be the one place on campus where they could have meaningful interactions they could not get elsewhere, as most of the campus was still hunkered down and the majority of classes delivered remotely. This required quite a bit of innovative thought. Those among you familiar with our program and its history know very well that unconventional solutions to common problems have always been what we do here.
All this growth and in-person work certainly had a high cost. Our faculty and staff have been laboring under grueling and emotionally demanding conditions for many months. Since August, they have been putting countless hours (without additional compensation or a pay raise in sight) into teaching remotely and in the classroom; meeting students and supporting them emotionally and academically; on Zoom and in person; serving hundreds of meals to students in the Jewish Studies Center and at The Citadel, and delivering them to those in quarantine; working with the Office of Admissions on recruiting Jewish students to the College; rehashing our marketing and branding strategies; reaching out to new constituencies; planning and managing events; preparing for a busy spring semester; and handling all the “under the hood” tasks associated with running such a complex operation.

Some of us, used to working 50+ hours a week, have long passed 70 and even 80 hours, wondering when was the last time we did not work. Stretched thin and exhausted, our people’s dedication and commitment has kept the enterprise going at this most challenging time. I can only say that I am fortunate and proud to be associated with such an incredible group of professionals. For most of you staying away from our campus and in-person activities, the changes I have discussed will positively affect the Jewish community in Charleston and South Carolina for years to come. Just wait and see.

Ashley Walters teaches a hybrid class at the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, College of Charleston, March 2021. Photo courtesy of Ashley Walters.

We can therefore proudly say that despite the challenges of the pandemic, our program continued to grow and expand in multiple ways, including with three new hires, in directions that will positively affect the Jewish community in Charleston and South Carolina for years to come. Just wait and see.

On another front, we have improved our academic appeal to students. The Jewish Studies major is the best and trains our students in unconventional thinking and inventive and innovative approaches to problem solving. We now have more Jewish Studies majors than we have ever had, and we are on track to become the Jewish Studies major with the highest number of majors nationwide. Just wait and see.
A Memorable Bat Mitzvah
by Rory Shaina Lipson

I planned to celebrate my bat mitzvah on April 6, 2020, in Israel at the Kotel (the Western Wall in Jerusalem) with 18 family members. By mid-March 2020, the dangers of the pandemic became well known and the entire world was affected. The first time I really understood the seriousness of the virus and fully comprehended that my bat mitzvah plan could change was when I visited a friend’s house and she asked, “So what’s your bat mitzvah going to be like?” In this moment, I felt very unsettled. Could we have a bat mitzvah from halfway across the world change my life and my bat mitzvah? Soon after, international travel was said to be unsafe and we canceled our Israel trip.

My family felt domestic travel was still safe, so we quickly pulled together a destination bat mitzvah at Temple Beth Tefilla in Brunswick, Georgia, with my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. As time passed, we realized that it was not safe to spend time with those outside your home, so we canceled again.

Then we decided to have the ceremony at my shul, Congregation Ohr HaTorah in Atlanta, Georgia, with my grandparents. Within a week, the synagogue moved to virtual, and social distancing from even grandparents was recommended. With each cancelation, I felt more and more disappointed. I wanted to experience my bat mitzvah in the Jewish homeland, where Jews are embraced as a culture and religion, and where I believe I am most connected to Judaism.

Although I was truly disappointed that I could not be in Israel or even with my immediate family members, my bat mitzvah was pretty much the kick-off of a new trend—Zoom Mitzvahs. My bat mitzvah was the first virtual religious event that my friends and family attended. My closest friends and relatives were thrilled to be part of this historic event and I was connected to Judaism.

One challenge was technology, especially since using Zoom was new to so many of us. I could have canceled or rescheduled, but this was my Torah portion and my date. As I look back, I feel I made the correct decision to keep the date, and although I did feel some disappointment, I had a memorable and wonderful bat mitzvah experience.

Uncharted Territory
by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

This issue of the Society’s magazine is unlike any other, as it is contemporary and not historical. But 2020 and 2021 have been years unlike any other. Contemplating a raging pandemic that upended every aspect of life and recognizing that we would not be able to have a bat/mitzvah this spring, our publications team decided to try and document the crisis in real time. We invited a few individuals, chosen to represent a range of ages and occupations, to write about their experiences of the pandemic.

In these pages, you will find firsthand accounts from front line doctors who treat patients at both ends of the life cycle; b’nai mitzvah students whose years of preparation did not culminate in their day on the bimah; a daughter who lost both her beloved parents within hours of each other; a high school teacher, a rabbi, and the head of a Jewish Studies program. We thank our contributors for opening their hearts and minds in their writings.

These times have indeed asked a great deal from us. As I write this in January 2021, it occurs to me that the past 12 months have been both a blur and yet very much in focus. For almost everyone, the pandemic has meant isolation from loved ones and the cancellation of social gatherings. Assuming the executive director’s position as we struggled to decide how best to continue communicating with our members, I was thrilled when Judge Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen stepped up and offered their assistance. Their monthly “Conversations” have proven to be a silver lining during a difficult time.

Technology presents both benefits and challenges, but I can say unequivocally, the power of technology has kept us together this year. Zoom has made it possible to connect with people across the country, to make new friends and reunite with old. We plan to continue Zoom events even as we look forward to meeting in person, we hope, in late fall 2021. Please let us know what topics for Sunday programs interest you by emailing me at jhssc2020@gmail.com.

I want to extend a big thank you and welcome to the more than 450 of you who have joined JHSSC as members and especially to those who made the commitment to become Pillars. You are the backbone and the lifeblood of the Society, and we need more of you!

My thanks also go to two-time past president Jeffrey Rosenblum, who has stepped up to lead our Endowment Fund campaign. A funded endowment will allow JHSSC to continue the work of preserving, recording, and remembering South Carolina’s Jewish experience, up to and including the present. To learn more about making an endowment gift, please contact Jenny Fowler at fjowler@jhecf.org.

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Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to address above.
The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Volume XXVI Number 2 ~ Fall 2021

Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History

JHSSC hosts the Virtual Southern Jewish Historical Society 45th Annual Conference

October 21–24, 2021
Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Letter from the President

Warm greetings to the members of the Southern Jewish Historical Society and to the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. Once again we find that we must convert to a virtual meeting. This decision was deliberate, but difficult. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we know it is the safest and best way to “get together.” Maybe next year in Charleston!

The past two years have been challenging, frustrating, and exhilarating all at once. Challenging because we had to “pivot” from in-person meetings to the virtual programs in March 2020, five months after our fall 2019 gathering in Spartanburg. We had to find new ways to maintain and exhibit the relevance of the Society and make our programming engaging and timely. We needed to serve our members and also to earn their annual dues. I am thrilled and delighted to report that our membership has grown during the past year and a half and attendance at our Zoom sessions has risen month by month, at last count reaching 250 participants from across the USA.

Do not underestimate, however, the frustrations entailed in figuring out how to deploy virtual technology and in recognizing that Zoom-only programming left behind some of our older and most loyal following. The burden was thrust on our new executive director, Rachel Gordin Barnett, who surmounted a steep learning curve and made it work, with a big assist from past presidents Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen.

Which brings us to the exhilarating part. Our team stepped up to the plate and hit the ball out of the park. Thanks to Rachel, who made everything look easy, thanks to our Society’s executive board and to Jewish Studies Director Yaron Ayalon and JHSSC Director of Operations Emid Idelsohn for their steadfast support. Thanks to the Honorable Richard Gergel and attorney Robert Rosen and the awesome guests they invited to their monthly “Sunday Conversations.” Their banter makes viewers think they are privy to an intimate tête-à-tête, concealing the prodigious preparation required for each encounter.

Thank you also to our partners the Breman Museum in Atlanta and the Southern Jewish Historical Society who shared our programming with their e-lists as we shared theirs with our members. And thanks to board member Terri Kaufman for proposing and implementing an innovative strategy to engage young people and encourage them to participate: a media contest called “My SC History” that enables the voices of the next generation to be heard.

I am elated to report that two-time past president Jeffrey Rosenblum, chairman of the Society’s new “Endowment Fund,” has demonstrated the persuasiveness and persistence for which he is known. His success will allow the Society to stay true to its mission—to record and remember the life experiences of Jewish South Carolinians—yet grow with the times.

Thanks as always to the editors of our biannual magazine, Dale Rosengarten and Alyssa Neely, and welcome to new associate editor Ashley Walter, Assistant Professor in Jewish Studies and Director of the Pearlsteine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. Working together we came up with relevant themes for the past two issues when there was no meeting to organize around and recruited willing contributors who devoted untold hours to researching and relating their stories. Thank you to all of them.

It has been an honor and a joy to be your president these last two years. I have the dubious distinction of presiding as president without even a formal president without ever meeting our members in person! Though I am stepping down from leadership, I plan to continue to be an active member of this wonderful and vibrant organization.

Stay safe, please get your vaccines and/or booster shots, and join (via Zoom) a wonderful, diverse group of folks that share the desire to perpetuate the history of southern, and especially South Carolina, Jewish history.

Best,
Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.
JHSSC President

Slate of Officers for 2022–2023

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Kimberly Richey, Columbia
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Sandra Lee Rosenblum, Charleston

In this issue

What Does It Mean to Expand the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History? — Jason Lustig — Confronted with crises in racial justice, public health, and climate change, archives can become “active forces, not passive repositories,” that shape the way we remember the past and envision the future. The southern Jewish collections profiled in this issue showcase a range of strategies designed to broaden their scope and reimagine their role and mission. — 4

The Future of the Past — Dale Rosengarten — Through collaboration with well-placed partners, the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston has put South Carolina on the map of Jewish America. But the work is not complete. Archives, the author contends, must expand their holdings and offer perspectives from sources whose stories have gone largely unrecorded. — 6

From Broom Closet to Industry Leader — Jeremy Katz — The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern Jewish History, at the Breman Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, has grown from a modest local collection to a vast two-state archive. While the Breman seeks to add to its Georgia and Alabama resources, it places a premium on accessibility and prizes itself on its state-of-the-art catalog systems. — 8

Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History — JHSSC hosts the Virtual Southern Jewish Historical Society 45th Annual Conference — October 21–24, 2021. — 10

Saving History after Harvey — Joshua Furman — In 2017, Hurricane Harvey caused devastating flooding in Houston, Texas; out of the destruction the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University was born. Stymied by the COVID-19 pandemic, once again, faculty, students, and the Jewish community have banded together to preserve history in the face of disaster. — 12

Jewish Mobile's Narrow Bridge — Deborah Gurt — Jewish residents of Mobile, Alabama, include old timers and newcomers from all walks of life. The Jewish Mobile Oral History Project, launched at a moment of national turmoil, aims to capture the diversity of Jewish experience in this Gulf Coast city, engage the public, and promote dialogue and understanding. — 13

Pursuing Justice — William Orobcho — Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives in Richmond, Virginia, opened in 1977 as the archival repository for congregations Beth Ahabah (est. 1841) and Beth Shalome (est. 1789). Moving into its own building in 1983, the collection expanded in scope. Recent social justice demonstrations have prompted serious soul searching and a focus on how our history contributes to understanding the present. — 14

Kugels & Collards — Rachel Gordin Barnett and Lyssa Kligman Harvey — Southern Jewish foodways reflect a multitude of influences and in turn have influenced the world around them. Developed as a food blog, Kugels & Collards demonstrates, in the eating habits and culinary practices of Jewish Carolinians, food meets culture and history. — 16

Through a Wide-Angle Lens — Nora Katz and Josh Parshall — The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) takes seriously its mission to preserve and interpret Jewish life across the region. Acknowledging its seminal role in the emergence of the field of southern Jewish studies, the organization established the ISJL Institutional History Archive in 2019. — 18

It Began with a Phone Call — Rachel Gordin Barnett — JHSSC is perfectly positioned to interpret Jewish life across the region. Acknowledging its seminal role in the emergence of the field of southern Jewish studies, the organization established the ISJL Institutional History Archive in 2019. — 19

On the cover: Lilly Zalkin Berberg in the doorway of Zalkin's Meat Market, 335 King Street, Charleston, SC, 1942. The image is actually a composite of two photographs created for use as a mural in the exhibition A Portion of the People. One photo shows Lilly holding a poster with the message “Save Waste Fats for Explosives.” In the second photo she is peering the door open. If you look closely at the window, you can see her reflection holding the poster. Courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.
What Does It Mean to Expand the Archive(s)

In a 1955 seminar on Jewish history, Jacob Rader Marcus, director of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) in Cincinnati, was asked by his students about local Jewish historical societies and archives. Somewhat condescendingly, he declared: “I don’t trust those societies.” It was a curious statement, in part because the AJA has long encouraged the development of local and synagogue archives. Marcus was not entirely opposed to local institutions, but he feared that, especially at a moment in the Cold War when the future seemed particularly precarious, irreplaceable historical materials might be lost if they were not brought to a central archive.

Nearly seven decades later, the rich landscape of archives of southern Jewish history and culture, as illuminated in this issue, seems to have proven Marcus’s fears misplaced. In fact, the collections described here showcase the vitality of local and regional archives and their singular importance for the continual exploration of collaborative and innovative approaches. Taken together, they offer a glimpse into the surge in archival activity across the South.

Dale Rosengarten in Charleston and Jeremy Katz in Atlanta detail how their efforts to document local Jewish life have broadened to a regional scope. Joshua Furman’s Houston Jewish History Archive and Deborah Gurt’s Jewish Mobile Oral History Project exemplify archival responses to rapid change and crises, whether demographic shifts of a “population in transition,” as Gurt’s Jewish Mobile Oral History Project exemplify Jewish life have broadened to a regional scope. Joshua

In scholarship, alongside new approaches in archival practice, has been the growing recognition that significant stories have been excluded from the archives. Given the legacy of racism and segregation in the United States, do Jewish repositories have a responsibility to ensure that the voices of the Southern Jewish community are documented? As climate change makes certain areas less hospitable, Jewish people, like most everyone else, may over time become climate migrants, whether within a city or on a larger scale, contributing to wider population movements. And as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc worldwide, Jews are forced to change how they practice their religion. In this remarkable era, we should actively document our lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We cannot alter the events of history, but we do have a chance to change how we present them to the public. In times of rigorous debate about memorials and texts that valorize the Confederacy, archives can help us interpret history in light of ongoing concerns. By accepting and speaking publicly about the power archives have always had in shaping views of history, archivists can highlight our agency over the past and thereby contribute to ongoing conversations about the tensions between historical events and historical memory. We have the power to reimagine how we tell the story of the past, whose experiences we celebrate, and whose we illuminate. In this fashion, we can speak of “expanding the archive” not just in terms of enlarging the scope of collections but also transforming how archives remember, research, and talk about the past.

In the spirit of being honest about history and pursuing the whole picture, including uncomfortable truths, archives must also document how our changing environment affects Jewish life. Extreme weather events, such as Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Katrina, have prompted archival rescue missions and oral history projects. As climate change makes certain areas less hospitable, Jewish people, like most everyone else, may over time become climate migrants, whether within a city or on a larger scale, contributing to wider population movements. And as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc worldwide, Jews are forced to change how they practice their religion. In this remarkable era, we should actively document these developments and better understand our society’s radical remaking. Nimble and deeply rooted in their specific local contexts, community archives are well positioned to experiment and respond to new circumstances.

All this speaks to what it means to “expand the archive.” It can mean expanding what we collect and study; it can mean expanding the boundaries of history. But it can also mean expanding the missions that archives take on. The most powerful tendencies in both critical archival studies and archival practice have been to perceive archives as active forces, not passive repositories.

In this issue, scholarship, alongside new approaches in archival practice, has been the growing recognition that significant stories have been excluded from the archives. Given the legacy of racism and segregation in the United States, do Jewish repositories have a responsibility to ensure that the voices of the Southern Jewish community are documented? As climate change makes certain areas less hospitable, Jewish people, like most everyone else, may over time become climate migrants, whether within a city or on a larger scale, contributing to wider population movements. And as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc worldwide, Jews are forced to change how they practice their religion. In this remarkable era, we should actively document these developments and better understand our society’s radical remaking. Nimble and deeply rooted in their specific local contexts, community archives are well positioned to experiment and respond to new circumstances.

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The Future of the Past

The Jewish Heritage Collection began in 1995 as a partnership among three organizations, each with its own agenda. Special Collections at the College of Charleston had recently acquired the congregational records of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim—a huge and exceptionally important cache brought in by the late Sol Brenbli; Library Dean David Cohen wanted to build on this gem of a collection. McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina aspired to develop an exhibition about the state’s Jewish history and culture. A few years earlier I had curated the museum’s highly successful Row Upon Row exhibit about the Lowcountry basket tradition, and McKissick Director Lynn Robertson thought the time was ripe to embark on ethnographic research on South Carolina’s Jewish population. And the new Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC), envisioned by Senator Isadore Lourie and fostered by CofC’s Jewish Studies Program Director Marty Perlmutter, wanted to record oral histories of what its members saw as a vanishing demographic: small-town Jewish merchants of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

It did not hurt that Izzy Lourie’s friend and desk mate in the state senate was Alex Sanders, the newly inaugurated president of the College of Charleston. As someone once said at a Harvard commencement, “It’s not who you know, it’s whom.” Thus, the stars lined up, we had powerful backers—including two state-funded institutions of higher education—and we were off and running. Izzy & Co. proposed we begin collecting oral histories, and it struck us all that it was the right thing to do. As it turned out, recording life stories was a perfect strategy for ferreting out exhibit objects.

We called our first brochure “A Call for Candlesticks” and we meant it literally. We wanted to gather Sabbath candlesticks that made the voyage to America from “the old world” and key them to a map—showing where people came from and what they brought with them. With associate curators Barbara Karesh Stender and Judith Alexander Weil Shanks scouring the country, we went after prized objects and narrators to tell it. After seven years of “primary accumulation”—discovering, documenting, researching, collecting, borrowing, and, of course, fund raising—McKissick mounted an exhibition titled *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* that traveled nationally and put South Carolina on the map of Jewish America.

Among southern states, South Carolina was late to the table. Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and Florida all had mounted exhibits, established archives, and published books about Jewish life in their localities. Yet outside the region the myth persisted that there were no Jews in the South. Who knew that Jews were first naturalized in Carolina in 1697, or that in 1800, Charleston boasted more Jewish inhabitants than anyplace on the continent? As the cradle of southern Jewry, South Carolina had a big story to tell, and we had a host of objects and narrators to tell it.

Our short-term goal of taping 18 interviews proved unrealistic. Like a snowball rolling downhill, our oral history archives swelled to dozens and then scores of recordings—25 years later, numbering close to 600. We were intent then, as we are now, on capturing family stories and everyday experiences, with an emphasis on what it means to be Jewish in the South. As opposed to the “Great White Men” school of historiography, we want to give “ordinary people” opportunities to recount their own life histories. The same approach animates the development of JHSSC’s bi-annual magazine: once we decide on a theme for the issue, we solicit content from individuals in the communities we serve.

In JHC’s manuscript archives, alongside such priceless items as Isaac Harby’s handwritten prayer book and a first edition of Penina Moïse’s hymnal, documents of everyday life occupy pride of place: family papers and photographs, diaries, memoirs, scrapbooks, correspondence, cookbooks, congregational and organizational records, minutes books, business ledgers, invoices, ephemera, and yes, bills of sale for enslaved people. Though we do not have space to acquire many objects, we have made exceptions for a set of bucane (medicinal cups) that crossed the Atlantic on an early voyage of the ill-fated *Lusitania*, a dollhouse sukkah built in 1925 by Harry Sholk for his daughter Mary, a 19th-century wimpel, Sonny Goldberg’s apron, and advertising paraphernalia from Pearlstine Distributors. Hard as we looked, we never could find a peddler’s pack!

With the acquisition of the Southern Jewish Historical Society papers, we broadened our range to regional. Beginning in 2000, the collection’s scope expanded again to include Holocaust history, with contributions from survivors, liberators, and other eyewitnesses with ties to South Carolina. We developed a website based on a memorial quilt fabricated by Gregg Middle School students in 1998–99, and we catalogued our Holocaust Archive to facilitate research by CoC students and provide primary sources for public programs sponsored by the SC Council on the Holocaust and the Charleston Jewish Federation, among other groups.

In 2007, Irene Rosenthal, widow of Rabbi William A. Rosenthal, donated to JHC her husband’s marvelous collection of Judaica, assembled over his lifetime, along with his professional and research papers. With funding from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), we were able to catalog, digitize, and post online, with meticulous metadata, the bulk of the Rosenthal Collection, creating an incomparable resource for researchers around the globe. Moving beyond our focus on the American South, we mounted an online exhibition curated by Samuel Gruber titled *Life of the Synagogue*. Constructed around images of more than 75 items from the Rosenthal Collection, the exhibition exemplifies our commitment to transform archival assets into public history accessible to people everywhere.

Taking another step in the direction of public history, JHC partnered in 2014 with CoC’s Jewish Studies Program and JHSSC to establish the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture—an engine of research that combines the strengths of Charleston’s Jewish historical and cultural institutions, contributes courses to the CoC curriculum, and sponsors a dynamic Fellowship Program in support of new scholarship, publication, and artistic production. In 2019, JHC was the staging grounds for an extraordinarily successful NEH summer institute that brought 25 young scholars from across the country to Charleston for a crash course on southern Jewish history.

Under the auspices of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center, we found a way to take history to the streets, so that anyone with a computer or a mobile phone could tour the urban landscape and engage with the archives while on site. We created an online exhibit titled *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, digitizing three historical and one contemporary map of Charleston for their aesthetic qualities and dates that marked turning points in the city’s Jewish life, then rectified the early cartography to current GIS coordinates. We identified places of Jewish interest and compiled a cast of characters, going out of our way to profile...
want to record more voices from outside the community. We want to document incidents of antisemitism, identify as LBGTQ, and secular Jews who are underrepresented in our database. We want to document incidents of antisemitism, identifying for example, flyers distributed by the Ku Klux Klan as they marched down main streets across the state, materials from white nationalist groups, and evidence of quotas that once restricted Jews from admission to law schools and medical schools.

Today, more than at any time since the end of World War II, it serves the interests of Jewish people to join in active partnerships with social justice movements and to recognize, for instance, the points of intersection as well as divergence between Jewish and African American history. It is not accidental that the 2020 page of Mapping Jews Charleston begins at Marion Square, site of the Holocaust Memorial and the recently removed Calhoun monument.

Jews have left their mark on every phase of South Carolina’s history. But if their saga is not recorded, collected, archived, exhibited, and published, the future of their past is uncertain. As both a scholarly repository in an academic library and a self-styled community archive, the Jewish Heritage Collection strives to invigorate the process of preservation and give people tools for taking ownership of the past.

Dale Rosengarten is the Founding Curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection, Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston.

From Broom Closet to Industry Leader by Jeremy Katz, Senior Director of Archives

What started in the mid-1980s as the Jewish Community Archives in a closet at the Atlanta Jewish Federation (now the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta) has since grown into the largest repository for Jewish history in the Southeast. Known today as the Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern Jewish History, the collection has been part of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum since the museum's founding in 1996. The museum's holdings now encompass millions of documents, tens of thousands of photographs, one thousand artifacts and textiles, and more than a thousand oral history interviews documenting Jewish life in Georgia and Alabama from colonial times to the present day.

Over the decades, the Breman Museum has expanded its collecting scope from Atlanta to the rest of the state and neighboring Alabama as well. We strive to highlight contributions Jews have made to the conservation of violent antisemitism, such as the lynching of Leo M. Frank and the bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple, and ensure that materials in the permanent collection reflect the diversity of the Jewish community. Special projects have focused on Jewish veterans, Holocaust survivors, Jewish-owned businesses, summer camps, Jewish women, Sephardim, Soviet Jewry, civil rights, and Jewish political involvement. These efforts continue today as we seek out collections documenting gender and sexual diversity, as well as Jews of color. The archives recently acquired, for example, the papers of Rabbi Josh Lesser, documenting the career of a native Atlantan and founding rabbi of Congregation Bet Haverim, the first LGBTIQ Jewish congregation in the area.

Spanning the full chronology of Jewish life in Georgia and Alabama is another central goal of the archives. The absorption of the Savannah Jewish Archives in 2015 filled a significant gap in the permanent collection. Measuring 200 linear feet, these materials provide evidence of Jewish settlement in Savannah and Chatham County dating back to the colonial period, including, for example, documents, photographs, and a Bible that belonged to the Minis family, one of the first Jewish families to settle in Georgia. Accessioning these resources confirmed the Breman Museum as the central repository for Jewish history in the state. The effort to close gaps continues today as we seek documentation of Jewish life during the antebellum period, Reconstruction, and World War I.

Growing and preserving these rich and expansive resources is vital, but the work is in vain if access is limited. Taking full advantage of the most advanced catalog systems, the Breman Museum has staked a claim at the forefront of the field by making audiovisual materials text searchable via time-stamped and annotated transcripts and indexes, displaying manuscript collections down to the document level, and creating virtual exhibitions that transport patrons into online gallery environments. What used to take our patrons hours of research and miles of travel can now be accomplished from the comfort of home with a few keystrokes. A simple search of names, places, events, or subjects yields results across tens of thousands of records spanning oral history, manuscript, artifact, and photograph collections.

We hope you will think of the archives at the Breman Museum as a resource for research and a place that preserves stories of Jewish life in Georgia and Alabama. To learn more, please visit: www.thebreman.org.

Archivist Sarah Dorpinghaus and intern Gillian Rogers sort postcards from the Rosenthall Judaica Collection in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 2011.

From top: Rhoda Kaufman (1888–1956), likely on left, and her sister Bernice, Columbus, GA, no date. Kiddush cup given to Emilie Baez and Abraham Rosenfeld on the occasion of their wedding in October of 1867. The Rosenfeld’s wedding inspired the founding of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple). Key to the city of Atlanta inscribed with the seal of the city and “Sam Massell, Mayor.” Massell, the city’s first Jewish mayor, served from 1970–74. Civil rights protesters outside Charles Lebedin’s deli, which, like other Atlanta restaurants, was not yet integrated, 1963. Images courtesy of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.
Expanding the Archive(s)

JHSSC hosts the Southern Jewish Historical Society

All sessions will be online, Eastern Daylight Time, and are free and open to the public.
To register, go to jhssc.org/events/upcoming

Thursday, October 21

2:00–2:15 P.M. Welcome by JHSSC president Lilly Filler and SJHS program co-chair Shari Rabin (Oberlin College)

2:15–3:30 Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History
Chair: Marcie Cohen Ferris (Emeritus, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill)
Moderator: Jason Lustig (University of Texas–Austin)
- Rachel G. Barnett and Lyssa Klingman Harvey (Kugels & Collards, SC)
- William Obrochta (Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond, VA)
- Joshua Furman (Houston Jewish History Archive, Rice University, TX)
- Deborah Gurt (Jewish Mobile Oral History Project, Mobile, AL)
- Jeremy Katz (William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta, GA)
- Nora Katz (Institute of Southern Jewish Life, Jackson, MS)
- Dale Rosengarten (Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston, SC)

3:45–5:00 Collecting Kentucky Jewish History
Moderator: Sarah Dorpinghaus (University of Kentucky Libraries)
- Janice W. Fernheimer (University of Kentucky)
- Heather Fox (University of Louisville)
- Abby Glogower (The Filson Historical Society)

Friday, October 22

2:00–3:15 P.M. Laura Leibman (Reed College) – The Art of the (Southern) Jewish Family
Janice Rothschild Blumberg Lecture on Culture, Arts, and Southern Jewish History
Introduction by Ashley Walters (College of Charleston)

3:30–4:30 Facts and Fictions: Archives of Literature and Performance
Chair: Adam Meyer (Vanderbilt University)
- Heather Nathans (Tufts University) – Judaism in the Background: Silent Spectacles and ‘Missing’ Archives in 19th Century American Theatre
- Michael Hobberman (Fitchburg State University) – Did You Ever Hear of Judah Benjamin?

7:00 Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Shabbat service, including, at 7:30 P.M., Listen to the Streets: How Old City Maps Can Enrich Our Historical Imagination – Guest presentation by Marni Davis (Georgia State University)

Saturday, October 23

9:30 A.M. Synagogue Emanuel Shabbat service, including, at 10:45 A.M., Willard Hirsch and The Menorah for the Six Million – Commemorative program honoring renowned Charleston sculptor Willard Hirsch, o.b.m., and the six-branched menorah he designed in 1972

of Southern Jewish History

45th Annual Conference ~ October 21–24, 2021

Program Committee: Shari Rabin, Dale Rosengarten, Marcie Cohen Ferris, and Ashley Walters

Saturday, October 23

1:00–2:30 P.M. Archives and the Discoverable Life
Chair: Ellen Umansky (Fairfield University)
- Austin Coke (University of Kentucky) – Lost History: Uncovering Lexington’s Early Jewish Business Community, 1867–1924
- Ray Arsenault (University of South Florida) – The Most Arrested Rabbi in America: Si Dresner’s Civil Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1961–1965
- R. Barbara Gitenstein (College of New Jersey) – Experience Is an Angled Road: My Journey from Florala, Alabama

3:30–4:30 Archives of Dislocation and Rescue
Chair: Eric Goldstein (Emory University)
- Marilyn Miller (Tufts University) – A Secret Program Revealed: Aid Organization Archives and ‘Enemy Alien’ Internment in the South during World War II
- Andrew Sperling (American University) – Creative Power: A Jewish Refugee in the Jim Crow South
- Joshua Furman (Rice University) – From Kiev to Cowboys: Houston’s Jewish Community and the Soviet Jewry Movement

4:45–6:00 Stephen Whitfield (Brandeis University) – Jewish Lawyers versus Jim Crow
Inaugural Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter Lecture on Southern Jewish History
Introduction by SJHS President Jay Silverberg

Sunday, October 24

11:00 A.M.–12:00 P.M. JHSSC Annual Meeting (election of officers)

3:30–4:30 Archives of Dislocation and Rescue
Chair: Eric Goldstein (Emory University)
- Marilyn Miller (Tufts University) – A Secret Program Revealed: Aid Organization Archives and ‘Enemy Alien’ Internment in the South during World War II
- Andrew Sperling (American University) – Creative Power: A Jewish Refugee in the Jim Crow South
- Joshua Furman (Rice University) – From Kiev to Cowboys: Houston’s Jewish Community and the Soviet Jewry Movement

4:45–6:00 Stephen Whitfield (Brandeis University) – Jewish Lawyers versus Jim Crow
Inaugural Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter Lecture on Southern Jewish History
Introduction by SJHS President Jay Silverberg

L aura Arnold Leibman is Professor of English and Humanities at Reed College. Her work focuses on how material culture changes our understanding of the role of women, children, and Jews of color in the early Atlantic World. Leibman is the author of The Art of the Jewish Family: A History of Women in Early New York in Five Objects (Bard Graduate Center, 2020), which won three National Jewish Book Awards, and Messiah, Secrecy and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life (2012), which won a Jordan Schnitzer Book Award and a National Jewish Book Award. Her latest book, Once We Were Slaves (2021), is about members of a multiracial Jewish family who began their lives enslaved in the Caribbean and became some of the wealthiest Jews in New York.

S tephen Whitfield holds the Max Richter Chair in American Civilization (Emeritus) at Brandeis University, where he taught from 1972 until 2016. He is the author of nine books, including A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till (1988), The Culture of the Cold War (1991), In Search of American Jewish Culture (1999), and, most recently, Learning on the Left: Political Profiles of Brandeis University (2020). Present at the rebirth of the Southern Jewish Historical Society in Richmond in 1976, Whitfield has served since 2009 as the book review editor of Southern Jewish History. In 2010, he received the Society’s Samuel Proctor Award for Distinguished Scholarship.
O
ver the course of three days in late August 2017, Hurricane Harvey overwhelmed Houston and Southeast Texas, dumping more than 50 inches of rain on the region and causing unprecedented devastation to the nation's fourth-largest city. In the aftermath of the storm, more than 95,000 homes within Houston's city limits had flooded. One of the areas most severely affected by Harvey was the Meyerland neighborhood and surrounding communities to the southwest of downtown that have served as the hub of Houston's Jewish residents since the 1960s—a low-lying zone that has been prone to flooding over the last several decades.

The Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University grew out of a spontaneous effort—a collaboration between Rice faculty and staff and local volunteers—to preserve documents and photographs recovered from flooded homes and synagogues. Since 2018, the archive's focus has expanded beyond Houston to the entire South Texas region, working to preserve historical records from smaller cities such as Galveston and Baytown, as well as from Jewish communities that have disappeared from towns such as Wharton. As of May 2021, we have accessioned more than 150 collections from families, synagogues, institutions, and Jewish-owned businesses across South Texas. Of particular interest are materials from Jewish World War II veterans, bulletins and correspondence compiled by Houston Action for Soviet Jewry, and the papers of local attorney Sherry Merfish, who engaged in a national campaign to discredit the Jewish American Princess stereotype in the 1980s and 1990s.

Because we work in a flood zone and have become used to acquiring collections that have been exposed to water and mold, it is especially critical that we digitize as much of our materials as possible, both for preservation purposes and for ease of access. In addition to creating our own digital catalog, which is connected to Rice's Fondren Library, we have partnered with The Portal to Texas History, an online database of Texas periodicals and primary sources maintained by the University of North Texas. With a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), we have been able to digitize large collections of Houston synagogue bulletins and commemorative books and share them with a wide network of researchers. I hope the improved accessibility will make it easier than ever before to incorporate Texas Jewish perspectives into broader historical narratives.

The pandemic brought certain aspects of our work to a sudden halt in March 2020—no more meeting with families in their living rooms to review scrapbooks and wedding albums! But the lockdowns also created an opportunity to launch an oral history initiative using Zoom to interview Jewish Texans about their family histories and experiences during the era of coronavirus. Many of these interviews have been edited and transcribed, and they are being published through our digital portal (https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/105156) and the Rice Humanities YouTube channel. The narratives, rich in colorful anecdotes and reflecting a diversity of perspectives, add an important layer to our work. To date, we have recorded more than 25 interviews with subjects who have spoken on a variety of topics, from growing up Jewish in small towns like Schulenburg and New Braunfels, to being the first openly gay pulpit rabbi in Houston, to running a Jewish senior care center during the pandemic.

Moving forward, as we continue to expand the archive's mission and reach, a concerted effort is underway to engage two populations within the wider Houston Jewish community whose stories have remained relatively obscure, and whose documents and photographs have not made their way into the archives yet. The Fondren Southwest neighborhood is home to a thriving ultra-Orthodox community that has seen tremendous growth in recent years, thanks to record numbers of transplants from New York, New Jersey, and California. Also centered around Fondren Southwest is a substantial Sephardic and Mizrahi population served by two synagogues and a day school. The full picture of Jewish life in Houston is incomplete without documenting the stories and contributions of Jews from the Middle East and Latin America, who have so much to add in enriching our understanding of southern Jewish identity today. It is my hope that our efforts to build contacts and nurture relationships with members of these communities will further diversify and strengthen the archive in 2021 and beyond.

The full picture of Jewish life in Houston is incomplete without documenting the stories and contributions of Jews from the Middle East and Latin America, who have so much to add in enriching our understanding of southern Jewish identity today. It is my hope that our efforts to build contacts and nurture relationships with members of these communities will further diversify and strengthen the archive in 2021 and beyond.

The Jewish Mobile Oral History Project (JMOHP) of the McCall Library at the University of South Alabama was developed with funding from the Alabama Humanities Foundation to record interviews capturing the history, communal development, and present-day experience of Mobile's Jewish citizens. The project was conceived at a moment of political turmoil following the tumultuous first years of the Trump presidency. An alarming rise in antisemitic hate-speech and violence had begun across the country. After the 2018 massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, leaders from Mobile’s law enforcement, city government, and local churches and mosques gathered for a hastily arranged vigil at Ahavas Chesed Synagogue to express support for Mobile’s Jews. This expression of solidarity was profound, but the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty persisted.

The JMOHP project was designed with three primary aims: to record and preserve early memories of community elders; to document the present-day experiences of new arrivals and younger people; and to share these stories with the goal of encouraging inter-communal dialog. Public engagement was a primary mission of the project, an objective the Alabama Humanities Foundation, specifically cited for support. Hence, we sought a variety of interlocutors to provide a range of viewpoints and, in this way, expand the Jewish archive.

Initially planned as a collaborative project with an active community steering committee and several student interns, COVID forced a reevaluation of method and
that encouraged him to see new possibilities for bringing Jewish values and social justice work into alignment. In Mobile, Crabtree channels that passion into work with the NAACP and the Alabama Education Association.

Other notable themes include the expansion of pro-Israel Evangelical Christian overtures toward the Jewish community that are welcomed in some quarters and viewed warily in others. For a community awakened to the threat of physical harm, the hand offered in support of Jews and Israel is comforting, even if the areas of actual policy agreement are narrow. One of the project’s central goals is to document and make accessible the perceptions of members of Mobile’s Jewish community. Our intern, who spent months proofing interview transcripts, notes that she had almost no familiarity with many of the concepts that are central to the experience of Jewish life in America. This suggests that the need at the heart of the original proposal—to gather resources that can promote dialogue and learning—remains acute.

Viewed in sum, the JMCHP interviews reflect a population in transition, holding on to certain vestiges of the past, casting off others, and wrestling to develop a new and different sense of itself and its place in the 21st-century American landscape.
Kugels & Collards

What began as a passionate personal interest in food, recipes, and South Carolina’s Jewish history has become a digital collection, now under development as a book. In 2017, when we approached Robin Waite, Executive Director of Historic Columbia (HC), about writing a food blog for the Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative, she readily agreed. Brainstorming sessions with HC’s directors of research and marketing led to a format and a plan. We would gather the stories, either by interviewing or soliciting from members of the local community.

HC Research Director Katharine Allen would provide historical assistance, investigating food stories, recipes, and photographs. We crafted an annual calendar with topics for each month and began gathering family food stories, recipes, and vintage photographs. We called our project Kugels & Collards to signify the marriage between traditional Jewish dishes, such as the classic noodle pudding known as kugel, and southern ingredients like collards. Over the next four years, the Kugels & Collards team produced 36 blog post entries and published more than 50 recipes. In 2019, editors of the University of South Carolina Press who had seen our blog approached us and solicited a proposal for a South Carolina Jewish cookbook. What we suggested, however, is not a typical cookbook but a compilation of essays and family recipes from contributors across South Carolina.

We sent out formal email requests to friends, relatives, and Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina members to submit their food stories, recipes, and photographs. Because the book encompasses South Carolina and not just Columbia, we needed representation from across the state and developed a “wish list” of families and recipes that would be geographically balanced. As a result of good contacts and productive leads, we will publish 65 essays and many family recipes that come to us from Jewish and non-Jewish individuals, those with roots in Europe and in Africa, women and men whose culinary traditions have borne fruit in the Palmetto State.

We learned that men as well as women were involved in creating southern Jewish cuisine—Jack Kahn, the pickle man from Charleston, Groucho Miller from Columbia, and Casey Manning from Dillon, to name just three—and that women were not only homemakers and caregivers but also creators of food businesses who worked outside the home. Arnold Wengrow, formerly of Columbia, writes about his grandmother: “Rachel Pearlstein Wolf lived one of those stories that are legend for southern Jews in small towns. Widowed in 1914, with three young children, she took over the businesses her husband had started on Main Street in Allendale in 1873. She also kept a kosher boarding house for Jewish salesman who needed to stay during cotton and watermelon buying season. She raised chickens and took them in crates tied to the top of the car to Augusta, Georgia, to be killed by the kosher butcher.”

Our initial intent was to celebrate the Jewish food table. As our exploration progressed, we became aware of the intimate connection between South Carolina’s Jewish food culture and the Black women who worked as cooks and housekeepers in Jewish homes. Just as we examine the diverse ingredients found in our favorite meals, we seek to acknowledge the contributions of individuals previously under-represented or altogether left out of our kitchen tales. African American influences combined with traditional Jewish recipes from our immigrant ancestors form the basis of what we now recognize as southern Jewish cuisine, with regional specialties such as collard greens, black eye peas, rice and gravy, and fried chicken coexisting alongside brisket, trimmings, and kugel.

We have received stories and recipes from families representing a broad spectrum of observance, from those who keep strictly kosher to others who unapologetically embrace southern foodways, no matter how treyf. Some, like Donald Sloan from Myrtle Beach, have adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when eating out. Natalie Moses, who grew up eating pork and plenty of shellfish in Sumter, South Carolina, characterizes her family’s food identity as “pretty diluted.”

The stories that have surfaced form a mosaic of ethnic identities. From the Moise family that arrived in Charleston in 1791, we received a rum cake recipe that heralds to the Sephardic roots. Jews exiled from Spain and Portugal were deeply involved in the Caribbean economy through the sugar cane industry. We chose this recipe because of the rum/sugar cane connection. From the descendants of the Ashkenazic Cohen family from Eutawville come a melange of recipes that feature readily available local produce: figs and peaches for southern jams and chutney; cabbage and fish for traditional East European recipes such as stuffed cabbage and gefilte fish. From Annie Gailliard, an African American woman who lived in the uptown neighborhood of Charleston known to some as “Little Jerusalem,” comes an okra gumbo recipe. Annie worked for and lived next door to the Firetag family, and this “told” recipe has been passed down to generations of Firetags.

Food is a powerful repository of memory and history, and we have assembled an unintentional archive through the lens of shared food memories. For example, when the Lash family was interviewed on Zoom about their parents and their business, Lash Kosher Meat Market in Charleston, the siblings told stories of family, festivities, life cycle events, and, of course, food. They laughed, cried, and reminisced. In preparation for the interview, Lyssa listened to and read the two-hour oral history of Lila and Alex Lash recorded in College of Charleston, Jewish Heritage Collection. From these sources, Lyssa wrote an essay for our forthcoming book that will serve as a permanent record of the family’s food history.

Rhett Aronson Mendelsohn, raised in Orangeburg, aptly describes the hybrid diet of southern Jews: “Truly, we ate like our southern neighbors but with a few notable exceptions—Granny and Mother did not cook with bacon grease or store it in a special little can on the top of the stove. They always used Fleishmann’s margarine. Our menus included things our neighbors knew nothing about—chopped liver, herring, blintzes, bagels, lox, brisket, potato and noodle kugel, matzo balls, matzo brei, and more. So, when we went to the beach every summer, we took along fried chicken, barbeque, and deviled eggs, as well as chopped liver, herring, and brisket.”

Kugels & Collards has been a joyful journey not only for us but also for our contributors, who have told us how much they have enjoyed recording or writing their memoirs for the book. When we started collecting Columbia’s food stories four years ago, we did not realize that we were actually gathering the history of a Jewish community. As we expanded the project across South Carolina, we were delighted to receive stories about families from small towns where Jews no longer live. Asked about his food memories, Ernie Marcus, who now resides in Washington DC, transported us to his grandmother’s home in Eutawville, where “a mix of traditional Southern fare like fried chicken, rice and gravy, okra and tomatoes, and dishes passed down from Eastern Europe” were served. Vivid and emotional recollections like his will live on in Kugels & Collards and help preserve the deep and multi-faceted history of southern Jews.
The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) supports, connects, and celebrates Jewish life in the South by providing educational resources, cultural programming, and spiritual services to communities and individuals across a 13-state region. Historical preservation and interpretation have been core components of the ISJL’s work since its founding. While our collecting efforts and archival holdings have changed in recent years, we continue to approach the Jewish South with a region-wide lens and with an ongoing commitment to the development of southern Jewish history as a subfield.

From 2000 to 2012, the ISJL operated the original Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) in Utica, Mississippi. While we once collected materials for the museum, that collection has passed on to the new MSJE, which recently opened in New Orleans. We no longer collect physical artifacts, but we do maintain archival holdings and participate in digital collection initiatives. Among the materials that stayed with the ISJL is our oral history collection, which precedes the founding of the organization itself and is comprised of 800 recordings from 17 states, including hundreds from Mississippi and 80 from Texas. Many of the interviews address small-town Jewish life in places where conventional historical sources are limited. As with other oral history collections, the ISJL interviews offer a rich resource for historical interpretation and fill in missing details, such as the lived experiences of women, whose voices are often absent from traditional repositories.

In a moment of transition—as the MSJE collection moved to New Orleans and the ISJL approached its 20th anniversary—we realized that our institutional records held significant value for others in the subfield of southern Jewish history. We formally established the ISJL Institutional History Archive in 2019. Archival materials provide us with a window into early conversations that shaped the organization as it exists today, and shed light on southern Jewish history and its development. The archive includes books, slides, photographs, scrapbooks, news articles, and oral history interviews, and even golf balls from charity tournaments.

The archive serves as a resource both for internal institutional memory and for outside researchers who want to learn more about the emergence of interest in southern Jewish history and heritage and its connection to questions of memory and identity. What does it mean to interpret and share this history? How has discussion about and scholarship on southern Jewish history changed in the past 50 years? This metanarrative has been largely overlooked in southern Jewish public history work, and we are excited to begin telling that story through the ISJL’s collection. The pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to expand the archive of southern Jewish life. Like other cultural institutions, the ISJL began recording our community members’ experiences during one of the most tumultuous years in recent history. We have conducted dozens of interviews via video calls, gathering accounts of daily life from southern Jews, and have joined forces with other organizations to document the impacts of COVID-19 across the region. One project, coordinated and hosted by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, aims to develop a digital collection telling the story of American Jewish life during the global health crisis. An oral history initiative spearheaded by the Council of American Jewish Museums includes partners from around the country, and we are focused specifically on adding southern voices to this national collection.

All of our archival and collecting efforts—which are ever-changing and adapting to the moment—are meant to uplift southern Jewish voices and explore the emergence of southern Jewish history as a topic of academic study and public history. A phone call and an email set in motion a chain of events that led to grand mitzvahs. On April 30, 2021, Gary Kramer, originally from Whiteville, North Carolina, left a voice message for Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC) curator Dale Rosenzweig asking for advice: what could be done with a memorial tablet from Temple Beth El in Rock Hill, South Carolina, that had been stored at Beth Israel in Whiteville since 1963? The year Beth El closed its doors? “We are looking to place this piece of South Carolina Jewish history in a respectful manner,” he wrote in a follow-up email. Dale immediately referred him to me.

How the sparsely populated plaque marking the yahrzeit, or anniversary of death, of 13 former Rock Hill residents had come to Whiteville and selling its building, the first order of business was to find the tablet a home. Dale sent me a list of contacts in Rock Hill, including several people interviewed for JHC in 1999, and the group began firing off emails and bringing others into the conversation. I just managed to keep up as the Rock Hill natives proposed ideas. Harriet Goode suggested as a resting place the Jewish section established in 1983 in Forest Hills Cemetery. She also mentioned a Friedheim family burial ground in Laurelwood Cemetery. We reached out to Noah Levine of the Jewish Legacy Project to ask if he knew of any “out of the box” options for the disposition of memorial plaques. He sent photos of a small building on the site of a Jewish cemetery in Messen, Pennsylvania, and a plan was hatched.

Gerry Schapiro, who has lived in Rock Hill more than 50 years and originally hailed from New York, called to discuss creating a small structure like the one in Messen but soon came up with a better solution. The City of Rock Hill owns a multi-purpose building adjacent to Laurelwood Cemetery. Gerry met with the Rock Hill City Manager and secured permission to hang the plaque on a wall in the building. A dozen or so emails later, the crated tablet was on its way back to Rock Hill. Meanwhile, I learned that when Beth El closed, the synagogue was sold to the Mormons who later sold it to an AME church. The building is standing—I was able to snag a Google photo of it—and with the help of local historian Paul Gettys, we are now researching the congregation’s history for JHSGC’s Documenting South Carolina’s Synagogue project.

The Society’s stewardship succeeded in repatriating the Rock Hill memorial tablet and opened a new avenue of activity for us—the preservation of objects orphaned when synagogues close or stores go out of business. We are fortunate to have Pillars and members whose financial support enables us to assist when such situations occur, and to be associated with organizations that can provide guidance and research assistance.

So, where will the plaque go to Whiteville? One explanation involves family connections between Rock Hill and Whiteville. Another is the circuit-riding rabbi program, funded by Charleston businessman and inventor I. D. Blumenthal, whose route included both towns.
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Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to address above.

Register now for the October 21-24 meeting at jhssc.org/events/upcoming. See pages 10-11 of this publication for program information.
The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Volume XXVII  Number 1  ~  Spring 2022

Calling Beaufort Home
Register now for spring meeting in Beaufort
June 10–12, 2022
In this issue

From Blue Collars to Blue Serge Suits: Beaufort's Jewish Settlers – Dale Rosengarten – The sparse Jewish population of 18th- and 19th-century Beaufort increased noticeably with the dramatic influx of Eastern Europeans to the United States beginning in the 1880s. Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, there were more than enough Jewish residents for a minyan, plus a healthy variety of tradesmen and businessmen contributing to the local economy. In this historical overview, Rosengarten illustrates the changes over time and captures a vivid and nostalgic snapshot of the early 1900s with observations from a Beaufort native................. 4

Store Stories and Family Stories

The stories are familiar: a young man flees conscription into the Russian army; a family emigrates in search of a better life; one sibling sends for another, and then another. The Beaufort natives who share their family histories in this issue have roots in Lithuania and Belarus. While their tales of success, struggle, and fellowship may seem similar, each family is unique in how its members made their way in this small southern town and how that past is remembered.

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Beth Israel: A Congregation Grows in Beaufort – Emilie Crossan – Now 117 years old, Beth Israel’s origins lie in a fast-growing Eastern European immigrant community that pooled its resources to build a synagogue and buy a burial ground. Through oral histories, photographs, and archival documents, members have left behind a historical record of a small but thriving congregation that continues to fulfill its mission. ....................................................... 20

Connecting the Dots – Rachel Gordin Barnett – JHSSC’s executive director makes the case for why the Society’s work is so vital. Resources made available through the acquisition of photographs, oral histories, and written records are invaluable in supporting genealogical and scholarly research and educating the public through exhibits and publications. To sustain the Society’s efforts into the future, JHSSC and the Jewish Heritage Collection have launched the Society’s endowment drive that to date has raised a little over $200,000. But we will need to raise a good deal more principal for the proceeds to be able to underwrite our Society’s mission in perpetuity. We have joined forces with the Jewish Heritage Collection in an ambitious South Carolina Jewish History & Heritage Campaign, to ensure that both organizations have stable funding in the years to come. Please consider making a substantial donation to the joint campaign. Help us tell YOUR family’s story!

Judy Hammer (l) and Bruce Siegal, who served as co-presidents of Beth Israel Congregation in Florence, SC, from 1995–97, oversaw the creation and dedication in 1996 of this plaque honoring donors to the Beth Israel Foundation. Courtesy of Beth Israel Congregation of Florence, SC.

Letter from the President

Thirty years ago, when I was elected vice-president of Beth Israel Congregation in Florence, South Carolina, one of the first things I remember was a visioning session with our rabbi and temple president about establishing an endowment fund. We realized it was unlikely that the congregation would grow substantially in the years to come and the expenses of maintaining the congregation would continue to increase. Our rabbi, who had worked with small congregations his whole career, told us that without an endowment to supplement our budget, Beth Israel’s long-term survival was not secure. He had seen congregations like ours forced to decrease services and sometimes close their doors due to lack of funding.

With an initial donation from one temple family, our board of trustees set out to raise money to establish the Beth Israel Foundation. The bylaws of the foundation stated that the principal and donations would remain in the fund and the proceeds from investments could be taken out annually, if needed, to supplement the congregational budget. In less than two years we reached a benchmark of $100,000, and with continued contributions and excellent management by the trustees, the balance of the fund has since increased.

Today the endowment fund provides 25 percent of the congregational budget. Without this substantial annual contribution, it is doubtful Beth Israel would still have the doors open.

The executive board of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC) has had the same discussion for the past couple of years. For a quarter century, the Society has been operating on money received from membership dues, pledges from our Pillars, and a great relationship with the Jewish Studies Program and the Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC) at the College of Charleston. We have received some funding from grants for specific projects. We have adapted to virtual programming, and our membership has actually increased since the Covid pandemic began. However, we cannot continue to operate as we have in the past.

JHC is evolving. The Society was founded to record and preserve the history and stories of our membership. Over the years we have had many successes, but there are still many stories to tell and much work to do. Our long-time executive director, Dr. Martin Perlmutter, has retired, and we now rely on a dedicated professional, Rachel Barnett, without whose services the Society couldn’t function. JHC’s founding curator, Dr. Dale Rosengarten, has announced that she will be retiring in the near future, and we have no guarantees about her replacement. We have to establish a sustainable income, we cannot live on dues and grants alone.

With leadership from Past President Jeffrey Rosenblum, the Society launched an endowment drive that to date has raised a little over $200,000. But we will need to raise a good

Lawrence S. Gordin, Trustee and Past President

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina
Spring 2022
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Past Presidents

Laudere Laurie, o.b.m.
Founding President
Elye Rahmman, o.b.m.
Richard Carpel
Jeffrey Rosenblum
Robert Rosen
Belinda Carpel
Edward Polidoff
Ann Medlin Hellman
Rachel Gordin Barnett
David Draisen
Ernie Marcus

The magazine is published twice a year. Current and back issues can be found at JHSOScar.org
A Keyserling excursion (1 of 3): front: brothers Joe and William with William’s son Herbert between them; Herbert’s older siblings Beth and Leon; unidentified child; and Harold, Joe’s eldest son on the running board. Back: Jennie Hyman Keyserling, William’s wife; Theresa Herfeld Keyserling, Joe’s wife; Roudyn, William’s daughter; and Leon, Joe’s younger son, ca. 1916. Courtesy of Paul Keyserling.

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

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When we launched the Jewish Heritage Project in 1995, I had no idea of the depth and breadth of Jewish history in this state. It didn’t take me long to become a true believer. Jewish settlement in Carolina began within a decade or two of the colony’s founding in 1670. The first documentation we have of a Jew in Beaufort dates to the 1760s, but it is likely that Jews were there before then. With the port cities of Charleston to the north and Savannah to the south, the deep harbor of Port Royal offered opportunities for trade and development of the interior. Charlestonians supported the establishment of Beaufort in 1711 for military purposes as well. Beaufort would become the first line of defense against incursions from Spanish Catholics and their Indian allies in Florida.

Among Beaufort’s early settlers was Peter Lavien, who moved from Danish St. Croix to South Carolina in 1765. Son of a Jewish merchant and half-brother to Alexander Hamilton, Lavien became a successful merchant, as well as church warden for St. Helena’s Anglican Church—yes, that’s right, church warden. Jews in the Palmetto State were ever ecumenical! And besides, no one who wasn’t Jewish was quite sure what it meant to be Jewish.

Of course, not every man had a boat and a library in antebellum Beaufort, but the town supported a genteel class of white people to which affluent Jews might aspire. Benjamin, you may recall, became a prominent attorney, owner of a sugar plantation near New Orleans, a United States Senator, and, when the South seceded, Confederate attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state.

Early in the Civil War, during the Federal occupation of the town, Moritz Pollitzer arrived in Beaufort with wife and children. The Pollitzers had left Vienna during the revolutions of 1848, settling in New York where Moritz worked for ten years in the silver-plating business. His decision to move to South Carolina in 1862 was influenced, no doubt, by the fact that his brother-in-law, Charles S. Kuh, a native of Prague, Bohemia, owned “Cottage Farm” near Beaufort, estimated to be worth $4,000, or $100,000 in today’s currency. Surely Moritz was also aware of the business vacuum created by the departure of cotton brokers who fled the region after “The Big Gun Shove” in November 1861, who, with the exception of Robert Woodward Barnwell, titled “A Town’s Peculiarity,” published in 1936: Books and the boats I sing: And this old town of note. Where each man had a library, And every man a boat.

In their number, he recalled, counting off the Jewish families— be it the Pollitzers, the Cohen brothers, the Graffs, the Schreiers, the Keyserlings and the Marxons. “Who could tell the difference?” he asked. “Some even had ‘K’ on their names. Jewish, and that remained true into modern times.”

Joseph Lipton (b. 1925) and his mother Helen Stern Lipton, 1926. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

J. Young – junk dealer, Joe Mark, Phillip Cohen – merchants, Dave Mittle – railway express agent and volunteer fireman, Sam Richman, Morris Schein, Morris Levin, Max Lipsitz, and Jacob Getz — merchants. “I can’t be sure,” the only [Jewish] professional in Beaufort was William N. Levin, attorney. Later came Dr. Herbert Keyserling, Dr. Sol Neidich, and Dr. Hymie Lipsitz, dentist, and still later Junie Levin, attorney. Today, [Joe remarked], Beaufort is loaded with the blue serge suit crowd.”

The Jewish population of Beaufort reached a critical mass in the first decade of the 20th century. Beth Israel received its charter from the state in 1905, and by 1908 its congregants had built a synagogue. In 1910, they purchased land for a burial ground and two years later established a cemetery. No wonder why Beaufort Jews have to be interred in Charleston or Savannah. They could spend eternity near home.

Beth Israel’s minutes book covering 1916 to 1954 offers a window into synagogue operations—not so different, it turns out, from current concerns. Fundraising, attracting new members, and improving attendance were top priorities. Through the Ladies Auxiliary Society, the women, as is often the case, took the lead in raising money. In 1917, the congregation formalized a constitution. It added a cheerer (Hebrew school) for boys and a Sunday school for all children, and, in 1920, Beth Israel acquired a parsonage.

Joe Lipton remembers attending High Holiday services—when Rosh Hashanah didn’t conflict with the World Series—conducted entirely in Hebrew, with women sitting apart, the patriarchs on the bima (Hebrew for platform from which the Torah is read), and Max Lipsitz davening: “A reverence and majesty descended upon that humble, simple edifice, and in that captured moment one felt holy and beloved. I viewed these immigrants humbly, selflessly, greedily—because I felt instinctively that this was the last time I would stand so close to sheitl Yadid.”

Joe was right. Beth Israel’s sheitel Yadid (the plural in Yiddish for Jews from small towns) are no more, and a lot of water has flowed to the sea and back. But the congregation is still here, and, I can report, a bit bigger and stronger than it was when I first visited two-and-a-half decades ago. Now it is graced by an official historical marker sponsored by the Beaufort County Historical Society and dedicated in 2014 by the town’s dynamic mayor, Billy Keyserling, who grew up well, not exactly in the temple, but playing hookey from shul, joining the Beaufort High football team for the Friday night game.
Morris Levin Builds a New Life in Beaufort

by Helen Levin Goldman

I met my grandfather when I was five and he was 75. He died the following year. I wish he could have told me stories. This is my attempt to tell his.

As Morris Levin approached the age for conscription in the Russian army, his older sister, Gretta, who lived in America, became very concerned. Gretta and her husband, John Levin, a cousin, lived in Beaufort, South Carolina, where they owned a mercantile business on Bay Street. They had come to Beaufort in 1880. Gretta and John sent for Morris, who emigrated in 1886 from Georgenburg, Russia (now Lithuania), on the Neman River. He came first to Baltimore where he worked as a laborer and arrived in Beaufort at age 19. Meanwhile, Gretta sent word to the Russian government that Morris had died in America, thus ending his responsibility to the Russian army. Many American Jewish families had their roots in escape from military service under the tsar.

Morris lived with Gretta and John and their two sons, Alexander and Sam, and worked with them in their store until he could purchase his own business in the neighboring town of Port Royal, acquired with a Mr. M. Herman who may have been a silent partner, related by marriage and living elsewhere. Many ships came into Port Royal in those days and Morris sold the bulk of his merchandise to those ships.

In 1895, Morris sent for his bride and cousin, Alice Kollicant, who lived in his hometown. During Alice's long passage she carried her personal effects in a large hamper-like basket, including a kiddush cup—a gift from her parents—and a pair of socks she was knitting for her new husband. She was sure he would need them in South Carolina.

As there were no synagogues in the area, the young couple were married in Beaufort's Arsenal on Craven Street. Their first child, Pauline, was born in Port Royal. Two years later their family moved to a new store in Beaufort on the corner of Craven and West streets, now the site of Nancy Rhett's gallery.

Morris and Alice lived above the store as did many young Jewish merchants on Bay Street. The couple raised six children there: Pauline (Polly), William (Willy), David (Buster), Bessie, and my father, Stanley. The sixth child, Melvin, died at age five. Our family story is that Morris and Alice were able to educate their oldest child, Pauline, and then each child helped the next until all had good educations and professions. They became a lawyer, an architect, a physician, and two teachers.

Jewish families in Beaufort needed a religious home, a synagogue. They had been meeting at the Masonic Hall and on the second floor of the Arsenal for ceremonial occasions. They applied for a charter or document of incorporation. In 1905, the charter was granted by the State of South Carolina, and by 1908, Beth Israel had built a synagogue downtown on Scott Street.

The members of the congregation helped with the construction. Morris, who was known to be a skilled carpenter, climbed on the roof to assist. They were not wealthy men. They knew they would have to work hard to make the synagogue they envisioned a reality, but they lived in a time when anything was possible with hard work. The original congregation numbered 36 paid adult members. Morris was elected treasurer and later became president.

The dedication of the synagogue took place in 1908. By all accounts, it was a grand event. Rabbi George Solomon of Mickve Israel in Savannah, Georgia, officiated, and many non-Jewish Beaufortians attended the ceremony. President Moses Epstein and treasurer Morris Levin took part in a formal procession that marched through the new sanctuary.

The year 1908 was one of celebration and of sadness for the members of Beth Israel. Morris and Alice's five-year old son, Melvin, died of a heart defect that would have been operable today. There was no Jewish cemetery in Beaufort so Morris and his cousin, Alexander, took the child by boat to Charleston where he was buried in the Beth Shalom cemetery with Cantor Jacob J. Simonhoff, leader of the St. Philip Street synagogue, officiating.

The next step for the congregation was to establish a Jewish cemetery in Beaufort. In 1910, Beaufort Jews raised over 300 dollars and purchased the entire city block between Bladen Street on the east, Adventure Street on the west, Washington Street on the south, and Green Street on the north. The cemetery was dedicated in 1912.

Beth Israel Synagogue became the center of Jewish life in Beaufort. As one of the early founders of the congregation, Morris participated in much growth and change. He also was active in the larger Beaufort community as a member of city council for his ward and as a member of Lodge 22 of the American Federation. In 1904, he travelled to the World's Fair in St. Louis and brought the first, newly invented, Burroughs adding machine back to Beaufort. Morris retired in 1926, selling his store to another member of the congregation, Bobby Hirsch.

When Morris's oldest son Willy was established in his law practice, he purchased a pre–Civil War home at 901 Craven Street. His brother Buster, an architect, supervised the renovation of the house, which was in great disrepair. In 1929, Morris and Alice moved into the new family abode with Willy and Buster and lived there for the remainder of their lives. Alice died in 1945 and Morris in 1946.

Morris Levin's life reflects that of so many immigrants who came to America to escape conscription into the Russian army: he was able to earn a good living, start a family, and become an integral part of his adopted nation.
The Keyserling Brothers Leave a Mark on Beaufort

by Billy Keyserling

Near the end of the Reconstruction Era that followed the Civil War, five young Keyserling brothers came to Beaufort and left a memorable mark as they leveraged their freedom from oppression to promote the common good in a town and region in recovery. Let’s start with William, the middle of the five boys. On the run in 1887, with tsarist operatives on his tail for allegedly organizing anti-tsarist activities at school in his small village in Lithuania, my paternal grandfather, William Caeserzki (changed to Keyserling when he entered the United States), tied himself to the undercarriage of a vegetable cart to escape. Following a circuitous route, he ended up in New York City’s Lower East Side.

Aware that his lifelong desire to farm would not happen in the city, he peddled his way south where, in 1888, at 18 years of age, he landed in Beaufort, South Carolina. He worked odd jobs until he became a “mechanic” (foreman) at one of the MacDonald, Wilkins & Company’s cotton gins. Before long he was dispatched to nearby St. Helena Island to farm Sea Island cotton in a community with only ten white families and 10,000 or more formerly enslaved African Americans. He raised his children in a house next to MacDonald’s store, where he worked. While William quickly moved into management at the company, he realized his dream of working the land after acquiring his own farms in the area.

Although the Reconstruction Era formally ended in 1877 when federal troops withdrew from South Carolina, the work of reconstruction—protecting the rights of African Americans—continued in Beaufort. Freed men and women, declared U.S. citizens under the Civil Rights Act of 1866, became self-sufficient, with many achieving success in agricultural, educational, business, and political pursuits. Seeing these achievements and wanting to promote further gains through education, William and one of his partners became the first local members on the board of Penn School. Established in 1862 on St. Helena Island while the area was occupied by Union troops, Penn educated newly freed people as part of what came to be called the Port Royal Experiment. William’s support of the school likely earned him the trust of his African American neighbors.

After working for MacDonald, Wilkins for about two years, William became a member of its board, bringing with him the close ties he had forged with Black residents of northern Beaufort County and the belief that working together would benefit all. A partnership agreement, forged around 1900, enabled William to bring his four brothers, two older and two younger, and their mother to Beaufort, where they joined the business. Years later, he became president of the company.

Besides the trust he earned among the islanders, William’s largest contribution to the company may have been engaging local farmers—large and small, Black and white—to participate in a buying and selling cooperative. My uncle Leon Keyserling recalls him saying, “We need not compete against each other. We grow the world’s best and most desirable long staple Sea Island cotton.” A second function of the cooperative was to jointly purchase (and perhaps finance) and distribute materials for cooperative members.

Growing exponentially through its alliances with other farmers, MacDonald, Wilkins added more cotton gins. It also assembled a small fleet of boats to reach members of the cooperative living on isolated islands. The boats brought materials to the farmers and transported their produce to larger ports for shipping to England.

The business model included seven “country stores” as outposts for co-op members. Each of the stores became the center of small crossroads communities, offering U.S. postal services, farm supplies, basic clothing, grocery products, and later, gasoline. Clearly, William cast a net of influence throughout the larger community. Yes, he was excluded from the Rotary Club and the country club because he was Jewish, but his stature as a business and community leader grew.

While William built a small cottage for his mother in downtown Beaufort so she could be close to Yiddish-speaking merchants, three of his brothers—Mark, Israel, and Michael—were dispatched to run the country stores. The fourth brother, Joe, worked in several capacities for the company. Just as William became a trusted and influential figure, his brothers followed suit, serving almost like mayors of the rural crossroads settlements.

When the boll weevil infestation of 1915 and 1916 took down cotton farming, Beaufort transitioned to become the largest grower of vegetables in the Carolinas, likely thanks to the company’s investments in varieties of vegetables that would help growers weather tough times.

Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren have followed the Keyserling moral compass of compassion, understanding, and leadership, giving back to the society that provided a safe haven for a family that had escaped tsarist oppression in Russia.

I would be remiss if I did not end with a story about William’s death in 1951. At a special session of the United Jewish Appeal at the Commodore Hotel in New York City, while making a powerful plea for support of Jewish communities around the world, he uttered what we have been told were his last words: “It’s time we turn this over to the next generation.”

Top: The Keyserling brothers (1 to r): William, Mark, Israel (standing); Joe, Michael (seated). Seabrook, SC, ca. 1916. Middle: William Keyserling (1) and unidentified man with tomatoes. Bottom: Mark Keyserling’s store at Sams Point, Lady’s Island, SC, ca. 1935. Photos courtesy of Paul Keyserling and Special Collections, College of Charleston.
Schein-ing a Light on Beaufort: An Interview with Bernie Schein
by Nora Kresch

T

he story of how Bernie Schein's family ended up in America isn't unusual. It's a common one in many American Jewish families. Fleeing an increasingly difficult life and escaping to freedom in an unfamiliar environment resonates today more than ever. It takes an inordinate amount of bravery to emigrate with only the hope of a better life for yourself and your family.

"My grandfather Samuel Schein was a captain in the tsar's army in the late 1800s," says Bernie Schein in an interview recorded on December 27, 2021. "He lived with his wife, Esther (née Mark), and daughter, Nettie, in a town near the German border called Tourage, in the state of Kovno. He knew that if he stayed, as a Jew he would be among the first to be sacrificed in any confrontation. Jewish men were treated horribly in the army, and the threat of pogroms was constant."

In 1896, the story goes, Samuel left his family and headed seven miles to the German border. He bought with him enough homemade vodka to get the border guards drunk, and then he crossed over. From there, he got on a boat destined for Ellis Island. Once in New York, he found there were too many peddlers," Schein says. "Then, he was told there was no room for more. He jumped out of a window and ran. His father was slumped over the counter. He died at the age of 49, leaving behind his wife, his oldest daughter, Nettie, his youngest daughter, Lena, and Morris. Later, it was discovered that the man who shot Samuel Schein was the baby boy he had adopted many years before. The shooter, whose name was Gardner, was tried and convicted of murder and was electrocuted.

After Samuel's death on December 11, 1917, the Scheins moved into town and set up shop—Schein's Grocery—on Bladen Street in what is now called the Northwest Quadrant. The building, which no longer exists, was on the site where the Pilates studio is now. According to Bernie, the denizens of the area—the Scheins' regular customers—were mostly African Americans and mostly poor.

Morris had to drop out of school to run the store. He did well taking care of his mother and sending both sisters to college. In 1940, he was invited to Charleston to meet his future wife, Sadie Garber, a native of Williston, South Carolina. She and her sister, Dot, were brought up to be musicians, with the idea that both of them would go to Juilliard in New York. Though the Great Depression ended their dream, they went to Haywood Carolina. Sadie played the grand piano, and Dot, the violin. They were quite a pair. Dot was first chair violinist for the Charleston Symphony Orchestra for 40 years.

Morris and Sadie were married in 1940. Sadie's father, Aaron Garber, from Williston, bought them a house on Ribaut Road. They had three boys—Stanley, Bernie, and Aaron. Stanley and Aaron were born at Roper Hospital in Charleston. (Beaufort had no public hospital until 1944.) Aaron was born at Beaufort Memorial Hospital, just down the street from the Scheins' home.

When World War II broke out, Morris was deferred from service because he had bad eyesight. He foresaw the need for rationing as the war went on. He stocked up on goods and stored them in empty apartments he had been renting to men now serving in the war. When rationing started, word got out that you could get goods at Schein's store. However, when prices rose, Morris would normally shop at the more upscale grocery stores downtown showed up. Morris informed them that those goods were saved for his "regulars."

Morris set the example for his sons that everyone was equal; he had many friends, both African American and white. Like many white kids then, so did Bernie and his brothers, until they began school. Bernie says, "We grew up not really knowing there was a difference between Blacks and whites. The first time I saw Blacks treated differently was when I went to school. The schools were segregated. We didn't know anything different."

"The [Ku Klux] Klan really wasn't very threatening to Jewish residents in Beaufort," Schein observes. In a follow-up to his interview, he explains "it would have been bad for business, plus we were the Chosen People, People of the Book. We were assimilated." The Klan "would march downtown every once in a while, but people really didn't pay them much attention." In fact, according to Schein, the rumor was that Josie Lipsitz, who owned Lipsitz Department Store, could tell who each of them was because he had sold them their shoes. Nevertheless, Morris used to say, "If I'd been on the Blacks, it would be the Jews." As for the family's practice of Judaism, Bernie remarks that there was no way to keep a kosher kitchen in such a small community. "We had about 50 Jewish families in Beaufort when he was growing up in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Scheins observed kashrut only on the High Holidays, shopping at a kosher grocer in Charleston.

According to Bernie, the oneg [festive gatherings on Friday nights after Sabbath services] at Beth Israel were wonderful. However, Sadie couldn't find a way to participate; she had never learned to cook growing up. She was always practicing her music. Sadie asked Thedie Keyserling, who led the Sisterhood, what she could bring to the oneg. Thedie assured her she didn't have to make a thing. She should just play the piano. And play she did. She played at onegs and at her home with her sister on the violin. They would clear the house of furniture and raise money for United Jewish Appeal.

"Being in Beth Israel Synagogue always made me feel at home," Bernie reminisces. "Everyone was so welcoming there.

When Rose Mark smiled at you, you felt like you were the most important child on earth." The Scheins went to services every Friday night at Beth Israel, and all three boys were bar mitzvahed under the guidance of Rabbi Julius Fisher. It was a very active synagogue. "You have to understand that, when we were coming up, it was shortly after World War II, and people were learning the details of the Holocaust," Schein continues. "Over six million dead. We were the new hope for the Jewish people. People had lost families back in Europe. All of us children were valued and revered at our synagogue. In the eyes of the congregation, we were special, indeed precious. And we always felt that way."

Morris died in 1978, a decade after the Schein store closed. When Bernie and his wife, Martha, moved to Beaufort in 2006, Sadie still lived in the same little house on Ribaut Road where she and Morris raised their children. Bernie and Sadie attended Friday night services at Beth Israel together until Sadie's death in 2008 at the age of 97. Bernie says it felt like he was back at home. His brother, Aaron, and his wife, Nancy, had already returned to Beaufort; his brother Stanley and wife Isabel visited frequently. He reconnected with his old friend Pat Conroy, who had moved back to Beaufort in the 1990s. "Things were good until Pat died in 2016," Bernie reveals. "His death really shook me. Since then, I've felt even more connected to Beth Israel. They even let me sing the Kiddush at Friday night services like I did when I was a kid. It's home."
Calling Beaufort Home
June 10–12, 2022 ~ Beaufort, SC

Friday, June 10
7:00 P.M. Shabbat services, Beth Israel, 401 Scott Street
Oner Shabbat hosted by Beth Israel Congregation

Saturday, June 11 Beth Israel Synagogue, 401 Scott Street
11:30 A.M. Registration opens | Box lunch, social hall
12:30 P.M. Welcome and opening remarks – Alex Cohen
12:45 From Blue Collars to Blue Serge Suits: Beaufort’s Jewish Settlers
Dale Rosengarten

Monday, June 13

Family Stories
Moderator: Dale Rosengarten
Panelists: Helen Goldman, Barbara Mark, Elizabeth Schein-Pearson, Philip Young

Sunday, June 12 Learning Center, corner of West and Washington streets
9:00 A.M. Open board meeting
10:30 Reconstruction: An Unfinished Revolution – Judge Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen
in conversation with special guests Thomas C. Holt and Lawrence S. Rowland

COVID Protocols:
We are aware that COVID guidelines may change by June. Vaccinations are required to attend the conference.
We plan to follow CDC recommendations and continue to update our protocols.
The Lipsitz Family

by Neil Lipsitz and Alyssa Neely

Around 1900, Lithuanian immigrant Max Saul Lipsitz (1886–1964) arrived in Beaufort, SC, where he joined his older brother, Elias Meyer Lipsitz (1879–1913). Soon after, Max opened a grocery store at 823 Bay Street, the main street along the Beaufort waterfront. In 1905, Max helped build Beth Israel synagogue. As a founding member of the congregation, he was honored to be the first married in the sanctuary when, in 1913, he took Bertha Rubin (1886–1956) as his bride.

Max and Bertha lived above the store, which eventually became Lipsitz Department Store, selling dry goods, general merchandise, and clothing. The three Lipsitz children were born above the store: Ethel (1911–1997), who married Henry Rabinowitz (1907–1964); Joseph (1920–2014), who married Lucille Bass (b. 1930); and Hyman (1913–2002), who married Helen Jacobson (1923–2000); Ethel and Joseph, joined the U.S. Army, Ethel took over much of the management of the business. The three Lipsitz children were born above the store: Ethel (1911–1997), who married Henry Rabinowitz (1907–1964); Hyman (1913–2002), who married Helen Jacobson (1923–2000); Ethel (1911–1997), who married Henry Rabinowitz (1907–1964); Ethel and Joseph, joined the U.S. Army, Ethel took over much of the management of the business.

The Mark Family

by Barbara Mark and Alyssa Neely

In 1908, he took Bertha Robin (1886–1956) as his bride. Of Max and Bertha’s grandchildren, only Neil Lipsitz was interested in taking over the store. Joseph and Lucille’s son had been helping out since he was in elementary school. Just before Neil graduated from college, Joseph told him that if he wasn’t going into the family business, Joe would close the store immediately. Neil had planned to pursue a career in banking or law, but felt a duty to take over the store and jumped—it turned out happily—into retail. In 1998, Neil opened Lipsitz Shoes across the street from Lipsitz Department Store. In the 1930s, Lena Mae and the children moved into town. Joseph joined them in 1940 and opened a liquor store after his Burton shop was destroyed in a storm. The building had fallen on him and he was rescued by his employee and friend, Frankie Lawrence. The family lived at 506 Craven Street.
From Russia to Beaufort: A History of the Neidich/Rudowitz Family

by Linda Neidich Hoffman

In 1915, when my mother, Evelyn, was three months old, her father, Abe Rudowitz, took the train to Savannah, Georgia, to visit his brother David, who had a shoe repair store there. David said Savannah was too small to support two shoe repairmen. He suggested Abe go to Beaufort, South Carolina, where they had no cobbler. As a hunter and fisherman, my grandfather fell in love with the area. He and Mama Fannie (née Papish) opened dry goods stores in Beaufort and nearby Yemassee and Gardens Corner. The original store in Beaufort was at the southeast corner of Bay Street and Scott Street, next to the Habersham House, where the family lived on the top two floors. The store included a shoe repair shop in back where Abe’s father, Shaya Rudowitz, worked. David and Abe brought their parents and most of their siblings to America. (Shaya’s wife, Sadie Sendirski Rudowitz, had died in New York.) The Yemassee and Gardens Corner stores closed in 1930. Joseph “Josie” Lipsitz, son of Max and Bertha Lipsitz and one of my mother’s good friends, described the downtown store, Rudowitz & Co., as long, narrow, and dimly lit, with wide steps descending from the back of the building down to the waterfront. Unfortunately, my grandfather became very ill in 1930 and, as there was no hospital in Beaufort, he was taken to Charleston by ambulance. He passed away shortly after arriving at the hospital. Not long after his death, Mama Fannie moved the store across the street to 807 Bay. My other grandfather, Morris Neidich (Papa), was Mama Fannie’s first cousin. He had always celebrated two birthdays, one when he was born and the other on the date his ship landed in Ellis Island. Before he was to be sent to the front with the Russian army in 1905, he stuck himself with a needle to get a urinary infection. Upon learning he was to be released from the hospital after a three- or four-week stay, he made plans to flee Russia. His older brother Aron, a boat captain, had connections and provided him with a passport and a boat ticket. Before making his escape to America, he promised to send for Rose Lewen. He had been apprenticed to her father, a tinsmith/riveter in Minsk. She arrived in New York City in 1908, and they married that same year. Morris worked in a tinsmith shop and ultimately was fired for trying to form a union. He went on to open a series of restaurants in the city. In 1936, Papa and my grandmother Rose moved to Beaufort. Morris’s New York business had failed, a victim of the Great Depression. His best friend and cousin, Fannie Rudowitz, now a widow, lived in Beaufort. He went into partnership with Mama Fannie, selling low-priced merchandise to workers and to marines. It was one of the first retail businesses in Beaufort that allowed African Americans to shop in the store and try on clothing. After experiencing discrimination themselves growing up in Russia, they definitely empathized with their Black customers. In 1935, Beth Israel was barely functioning as an Orthodox synagogue, with no rabbi and few members. Papa provided leadership in the transition to the Conservative tradition, which became official in 1949 and attracted more than 50 congregants for Shabbat and twice that number for the High Holidays. The synagogue hired a rabbi and offered special programs, including a community Seder and Sunday services for Jewish marines. Beth Israel remains one of the very few synagogues in South Carolina outside of the major cities that still has Shabbat services every Friday. Papa served as president of the congregation for more than three decades. In 1951, he and his best friend, William Keyserling, for whom Keyserling is named, raised the money to build an addition to the synagogue, a social hall. He and other members drove to Parris Island every Sunday morning to conduct services for Jewish marine recruits. (This service to the marines was continued by the congregation until the late 1990s.) In 1956, Morris and Rose were among the first Jews in South Carolina to go on a United Jewish Appeal study mission to Israel. On this trip Israel’s Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion presented Papa, as representative of Beaufort, an award for the most money raised by a Jewish community of its size.

My father, Sol Neidich, was born in 1913; my mother, Evelyn Rudowitz, in 1915. They were second cousins and were married December 25, 1938, in Beth Israel Synagogue. My brother, Alan, of blessed memory, was born in 1940; my sister, Marilyn, in 1943, and I was born in 1945. My husband and I were also married in Beth Israel, as was our daughter. From my extensive research of the Beaufort Jewish community, I believe that we are the only family with three generations who were married in the synagogue. From the time he was a teen until he graduated from college, my father worked as a bellhop and waiter in the Catskills. The tips he earned were used to pay his tuition for the previous semester and for books for the new term. During his sophomore year, he decided he wanted to be a physician. He knew that he probably could not get into a medical school in New York because of the admission quotas in effect for Jewish students at that time. Somehow, Mama Fannie knew the dean of the Medical College of South Carolina (now the Medical University of South Carolina). He told her that if my father transferred from Long Island University to the University of South Carolina and received good grades, he could be admitted to the Medical College. He was admitted and he graduated in 1938.

My mother graduated from Winthrop College in 1934 and received a master’s degree in geography from Peabody College in Nashville, now part of Vanderbilt University. In 1936, she went to Washington, D.C., where she worked for the Department of the Interior drawing maps. My parents moved to Beaufort in 1940 and became passionately involved in the business, political, and social activities of the city, county, and state. My father felt that he owed a debt to the Medical College for giving him the opportunity to become a doctor. He practiced medicine in Beaufort for over 50 years and was one of the original members of the medical staff at Beaufort Memorial Hospital, serving also as its chief of staff. For almost 30 years, my father and Herbert Keyserling were the only full-time doctors in the Beaufort area. My mother started the first eye and hearing testing for the Beaufort County Schools. She also started a sex education program for sixth graders. She was PTA president and won a life membership award from the South Carolina PTA for her service. Besides her involvement in numerous civic organizations, she played violin in the Beaufort Orchestra and was an avid painter. Both my parents passed away in 1996 from injuries they suffered in an automobile accident.

Right: Rudowitz & Co. storefront is seen in right foreground, Bay Street, downtown Beaufort, SC, 1950s. From the Russell J. Arnberger Postcard Collection, courtesy of Beaufort County Library (SC).
The Young Family of Beaufort

by Arnold Young, Sharon Shavin Rosenstein, and Neil J. Young

For the Young family, Beaufort is and always will be home. Our forebears, Jews who resided in the Belarus region or the Young family, Beaufort is and always will be home. Our forebears, Jews who resided in the Belarus region of the Russian Empire (within The Pale of Settlement) escaped hard lives. Julius “Yudah/Jay” Young (always “Papa” to us), born 1879, in Dubrovno, Vitebsk, immigrated around 1904, and ended up in Boston, where he had family. He arrived with the last name Yaguden, later becoming Young. Tobe (Tillie) Rosenblatt, born 1886 in Brest-Litovsk, also landed in 1904, in Boston, where she had family. As was the custom, a marriage was arranged, and the couple was married in Boston in 1905, and lived there for three years, before moving to Montreal, birthplace of Abe and Joe.

The family then moved to upper New York state where they tried chicken farming, and thereafter to Pittsburgh where Julius was a peddler. Oscar and Sara were born in Pittsburgh. Tragically, three of their children died very young, but seven children would survive and prosper. Next Julius and Tillie moved with their four children and their meager possessions to Charleston, where he worked for a scrap metal business.

Soon Papa discovered Beaufort and they moved there in 1916. Beaufort felt like home. It offered good flat land, lots of horses (which Papa loved), and it was a wonderful place to live. Papa engaged in numerous businesses: scrap metal, dry goods and shoes, lumber and sawmills, among others. Mama, in full charge of the home and children, was the loving balabote (Yiddish for good homemaker). The family prospered as it grew. Lena, Sanie, and Morris (Mikey) were born in Beaufort. The Youngs, now with seven children, lived sequentially in several houses in the area of Prince Street, near what was then Beaufort High School and near the USO.

Over time, the family grew through marriages that began in the mid-1920s. Abe married Sayde Goldberg and they had three children (after Sayde’s passing, Abe remarried and had another child). Joe married Ethel Cohen and had six children; Oscar married Lillian Minkow and had two; Sanie married Ben Fox and had four; Lena married Max Stein, and had three; Sara was married and had no children; Mikey married Ethel Lee Kravitz and had four children—a total of 22 first cousins, plus parents and grandparents, all in Beaufort or nearby Hampton.

In the mid-1930s, Joe Young and his brother-in-law Max Stein bought a furniture store in Allendale and moved there, where one child was born to each. They sold the store and, with proceeds, purchased a sawmill in Bluffton, then dismantled it and moved it to Allendale. They ran it for two years before returning to Beaufort. They relocated the sawmill to Burton and continued operations.

Everyone remained close, physically, and in every other way. Nearly every Sunday was a de facto family day. We gathered at someone’s house, the children played, the men competed in pinochle, and the women fixed dinner and talked. As children, we often wound up eating or sleeping at a cousin’s house. Every Friday night, we all went to shul; many of the children could not stay awake for the full hour.

Pesach was the best of times; our Seders were wonderful. Everyone was there—except those not yet born—and then they were! Papa conducted each Seder, always wearing a big hat. Of course, services were long and there was a lot of wine. Everyone played, the men competed in pinochle, and the women fixed dinner and talked. As children, we often wound up eating or sleeping at a cousin’s house. Every Friday night, we all went to shul; many of the children could not stay awake for the full hour.

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While each of the Young family businesses was usually an individual person, things operated more like a large corporation with various divisions. Various family members worked in the various businesses and held key positions within the Young family. Papa recognized the potential for disagreements, especially among the wives. His edict was that there be no discussion with wives about who made what or who got what. Any issues that cropped up were ultimately directed to and decided by Papa. That included who would put up how much money to help someone in the family for whatever reason.

While the Youngs were successful both in the family sense, as well as financially, there was no college education among the first generation, and some did not complete high school. The
next, and currently older generation, all went to college and a number went on to professional education and careers. All have done well.

As of 2022, our family has dispersed all over the country and Israel, but with the magic of technology, we meet twice a month for two or more hours. Additionally, we have had several well attended family homecomings in Beaufort and Jacksonville—truly wonderful! But it must be said: not actually living together is not the same as the magic of technology allowing us to connect with family. 

Beth Israel: A Congregation Grows in Beaufort

Although the Jewish community of Beaufort dates to the late 19th century, it was not until 1905 that a number of prominent Jewish businessmen sought to establish a congregation. On October 16, 1905, the state of South Carolina formally granted a charter establishing Beth Israel as a religious corporation.

Young family reunion, Jacksonville, FL, 2004. About 135 people attended, wearing color-coded T-shirts. Red was worn by Tobe and Julius Young’s children (second generation American) and their spouses; dark blue by the third generation; light blue by the fourth generation; and orange by the fifth generation.

The Jewish community bought land for a cemetery in 1912, with the general population, community expanded along the next 50 years, the Jewish synagogue’s structure reminded one of a Lithuanian wooden shul, perhaps a nod towards the congregation’s founding families, such as the Keyserlings, who came as Eastern European immigrants was taking on roles traditionally reserved for men. Some members felt the strict Orthodox practiced by Eastern European immigrants was driving away younger members.

When attendance started to decrease in the 1940s, Dr. Sol Neidich, son of Morris Neidich, Beth Israel’s president at the time, suggested that the congregation hire a Conservative rabbi. After some discussion, they did just that, bringing in Dr. Julius S. Fisher. Beth Israel officially made its transition from Orthodox to Conservative Judaism in 1949 by joining the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. At the time, the congregation numbered 44 heads of households, five of whom were women. In the early 1950s, an annex was built to serve as a recreation hall.

In 1996, Rose Mark became Beth Israel’s first female president. Mark was born in Baltimore and moved to Beaufort after World War II to raise her family. When she assumed the presidency, membership had declined to 25 families, and it was then she took on the role of leader, and the congregation grew.

Children’s Passover Seder, Beth Israel, Beaufort, SC, 1949. Donna Young, father of Neil J. Young, is at the head of the table, and seated, clockwise from left to right: Sarah Rosenthal, David Young, Stanley Fox, next two unidentified, Michael Greenly, next two unidentified, Fred Young, unidentified, Linda Young, unidentified, Bernie (or Aaron) Schein, Aaron (or Bernie) Schein, Arnold Young, Lewis Young, Philip Young, Standing (1 to 0): Ben Fox, Gertie Lipov, Marsha Gail Fox, Barbara Mark. Adults seated, right side: unidentified, unidentified, unidentified.

The Julia Mittle Ladies Auxiliary Society raised funds to help purchase the burial grounds and maintain the synagogue. With their cemetery formally established in 1912, Beaufort Jews no longer had to transport their loved ones to Charleston or Savannah to be laid to rest.

The Midtown Ladies Auxiliary Society raised funds to help purchase the burial grounds and maintain the synagogue. With their cemetery formally established in 1912, Beaufort Jews no longer had to transport their loved ones to Charleston or Savannah to be laid to rest.

Postcard image of the Beaufort Volunteer Arsenal, corner of Craven and Scott streets, Beaufort, SC. Beth Israel Congregation built its synagogue on Scott Street, next door to the former arsenal, now a museum. From the Russel J. Arnberger Postcard Collection, courtesy of Beaufort County Library (SC).
difficult to gather a minyan, though they still were able to afford a full-time rabbi. According to long-time member Helen Levin Goldman, the congregation did not “have the luxury of being Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform,” and by necessity learned to accommodate a variety of Jewish practices.16 In 2022, Beth Israel remains Beaufort’s only Jewish congregation, serving 85 family members and hosting services conducted by lay leaders nearly every Friday evening.17

NOTES
3. “Jewish Community of Beaufort in 1905.”
4. Ibid.
5. Beaufort County Deed Office, Deed Book 26, p. 305.
8. Jewish Community of Beaufort in 1905.”
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
12. Original minute book and photocopied reproduction, 1916-1961, Box 1, Folder: 1-2, Beth Israel Congregation (Beaufort, SC), records, Mss. 1076, Special Collections, College of Charleston.
13. “Jewish Community of Beaufort in 1905.”
15. Ibid., 289-292.
20. “Jewish Community of Beaufort in 1905.”

Connecting the Dots
by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

We receive email inquiries from folks around the country and the state on a variety of topics. Lately, requests have been trending toward inquiries about family history, particularly questions involving South Carolina’s Jewish merchant community. People seek for information on relatives who tried to make it in business in South Carolina but, for various reasons, left the state and moved on, often to the Northeast; or forebears who were merchants in small South Carolina towns now long gone. Thanks to an able researcher working diligently on the Merchant Project, we can often help with these explorations. Eric Friendly with Historic Columbia has been pursuing leads and using technological tools to connect the dots. Alyssa Neely, Dale Rosengarten, and their colleagues at the College of Charleston’s Addlestone Library provide resources from the Jewish Heritage Collection’s extensive photo, oral history, and manuscript archives. None of this work happens without funding, and JHSSC is grateful for the generous support of an anonymous donor, the Stanley B. Furstein Endowment, and the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation.

Why are we documenting merchants? It is for posterity and for those who send us emails, hoping to find family connections. It is for scholars and genealogists. It for public historians and historic preservationists, and for members of JHSSC dedicated to understanding the past.

The Merchant Project is just one of many enterprises the Society has embarked on over the past five years. We have continued to survey Jewish burial grounds and sponsor historic markers across the state. We have recruited Mitch Litwer and his wife, Di, to photograph and document synagogue buildings, past and present, under the guidance of architectural historian Samuel D. Gruber. Our deep-rooted history is becoming part of the South Carolina lexicon.

How do we sustain the momentum we have built? We are happy to announce the inauguration of the South Carolina Jewish History & Heritage Campaign, a joint effort by both organizations. A gift to the Campaign will impact all our work—from curating exhibitions and recording life stories to collecting images, manuscripts, heirlooms, and mundane objects that chronicle the Jewish history of our state; from holding meetings (virtual and real) to designing web sites and publishing magazines.

There is more digging to be done….more dots to connect. The future of the past is in our hands.

Of Blessed Memory
Betty Brody
Alan Cohen
Harold and Carolene Rosen Fox
Harvey and Mimi Gliberman
Bennie Goldberg
Ruth Brody Greenberg
Ronald and Anne Oxler Krakover
Isadore Litwer
Mark Mandel
Raymond Rosenblum
Raymond Elia
Florence Stern
Raphael and Lois Wollpert
Jerry Zucker

Foundational Pillars
Nathan and Marlene Addlestone Foundation
Sherman Charitable Trust
Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation

Pillars
Susan and Charles Altman, Charleston, SC
Anonymously
Ellen Arnovitz, Atlanta, GA
Baker and Baker Foundation, Inc., Columbia, SC
Rachel and Henry Barnett, Columbia, SC
Jane and Les Bergen, Arlington, VA
Harold Brody, Atlanta, GA
Rosemary and ‘Binky’ Cohen, Charleston, SC
Alex and Dyan Cohen, Darlington, SC
Joan Cutler, Columbia, SC
Neil and Carolyn Draisen, Charleston, SC
Meyer Drucker, Conway, SC
Lowell and Barbara Epstein, Charleston, SC
Rebekah and Howard Farber, Los Angeles, CA
Lilly and Bruce Filler, Columbia, SC
Richard and Bellinda Gerdel, Charleston, SC
Steven J. Gold, Greenville, SC
Claire Goldberg, Charleston, SC
Stuart and Rebecca Greenberg, Florence, SC
Max and Ann Meddin Hellman, Charleston, SC
Alan and Charlotte Kahn, Columbia, SC
Jerry and Sue Kline, Columbia, SC
Michael S. Kogan, Charleston, SC
Charles and Eva Lipman, Atlanta, GA
Jan and Larry Lipos, Charleston, SC
Susan R. Lowrie, Columbia, SC
Audrey Mandel, Mt. Pleasant, SC
Albert and Robin Mercer, Athens, GA
Susan Pearlstine, Charleston, SC
Edward and Sandra Poliakoff, Columbia, SC
Alan and Anne Reymar, Columbia, SC
Deborah Ritter, Columbia, SC
Dick and Brenda Rosen, Myrtle Beach, SC
Robert and Susan Rosen, Charleston, SC
Jeffrey and Mickey Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
Sandra Lee Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
Joseph and Edie Rubin, Charleston, SC
Stephen and Jennifer Savir, Columbia, SC
Fred and Ellen Seidenberg, Columbia, SC
Mark and Gayle Sloan, Myrtle Beach, SC
Gail (Altman) and Ronald Spahn, Baltimore, MD
Richard Stern, Boston, MA
Haskell and Dale Toporek, Augusta, GA
Anita Zucker, Charleston, SC

Ronald and Anne Oxler Krancer
Bennie Goldberg, Charleston, SC
Isadore Lourie
Mark Mandel
Betty Brody
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Raymond Elia
Florence Stern
Raphael and Lois Wollpert
Jerry Zucker

Thanks to an able researcher working diligently on the Merchant Project, we can often help with these explorations. Eric Friendly with Historic Columbia has been pursing leads and using technological tools to connect the dots. Alyssa Neely, Dale Rosengarten, and their colleagues at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library provide resources from the Jewish Heritage Collection's extensive photo, oral history, and manuscript archives. None of this work happens without funding, and JHSSC is grateful for the generous support of an anonymous donor, the Stanley B. Furstein Endowment, and the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation.

Why are we documenting merchants? It is for posterity and for those who send us emails, hoping to find family connections. It is for scholars and genealogists. It is for public historians and historic preservationists, and for members of JHSSC dedicated to understanding the past.

The Merchant Project is just one of many enterprises the Society has embarked on over the past five years. We have continued to survey Jewish burial grounds and sponsor historic markers across the state. We have recruited Mitch Litwer and his wife, Di, to photograph and document synagogue buildings, past and present, under the guidance of architectural historian Samuel D. Gruber. Our deep-rooted history is becoming part of the South Carolina lexicon.

How do we sustain the momentum we have built? We are happy to announce the inauguration of the South Carolina Jewish History & Heritage Campaign, a joint effort by both organizations. A gift to the Campaign will impact all our work—from curating exhibitions and recording life stories to collecting images, manuscripts, heirlooms, and mundane objects that chronicle the Jewish history of our state; from holding meetings (virtual and real) to designing web sites and publishing magazines.

There is more digging to be done….more dots to connect. The future of the past is in our hands.

Connecting the Dots
by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

We receive email inquiries from folks around the country and the state on a variety of topics. Lately, requests have been trending toward inquiries about family history, particularly questions involving South Carolina’s Jewish merchant community. People seek for information on relatives who tried to make it in business in South Carolina but, for various reasons, left the state and moved on, often to the Northeast; or forebears who were merchants in small South Carolina towns now long gone. Thanks to an able researcher working diligently on the Merchant Project, we can often help with these explorations. Eric Friendly with Historic Columbia has been pursing leads and using technological tools to connect the dots. Alyssa Neely, Dale Rosengarten, and their colleagues at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library provide resources from the Jewish Heritage Collection's extensive photo, oral history, and manuscript archives. None of this work happens without funding, and JHSSC is grateful for the generous support of an anonymous donor, the Stanley B. Furstein Endowment, and the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation.
The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

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You may purchase or renew your JHSSC membership online. Go to jhssc.org, click on Support, and then choose your membership category.

Annual Dues (July 1, 2022–June 30, 2023)

___ Individual/Family/Gift                                          $54
___ Friend                                                                        $200
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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.

Register now for the June 10–12 meeting at jhssc.org/events/upcoming.
See pages 12–13 of this publication for program information.