



Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State  
Columbia, SC May 2-3, 2020

THE  
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of  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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JEWISH  
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On the cover: top (1 to r), Nettie Cahn Levenson of Bishopville, courtesy of Rachael Bowman Bradbury; Carrie Pollitzer, ca. 1905, from the Anita Pollitzer Family Papers at the South Carolina Historical Society. Bottom (1 to r), Hannah Gordin (Gorodinskaya) Yelman, Yelman's dry goods store, St. Matthews, ca. 1930; Ida Lomansky Kligman, Kligman's Army Store, Columbia, 1935; and Lena Schiawitz Collis, Collis Bakery, Charleston, 1940s. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

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## Letter from the President



I am honored to take over the presidency of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina from Mr. Jeffrey Rosenblum and know I have big shoes to fill. Jeffrey graciously stepped into the role on short notice, yet he had large and enduring ideas about the future of the Society based on his earlier tenure in office. Thanks to him, we have continued on the road of success and will build on his foresight. What cannot be overlooked is the fabulous staff support that the executive board, and the president, specifically, enjoys. The dedication and hard work of Executive Director Mark Swick, Administrator Enid Idelsohn, 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 75<sup>th</sup> 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](http://scetv.org/auschwitz).

Our spring meeting, "Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State," will be held in Columbia, South Carolina, on May 2–3, 2020. Please join us in celebrating and recognizing the state's Jewish women, who often worked

behind the scenes—metaphorically "behind the counter"—but pulled their weight in terms of economic productivity, family cohesion, and religious life. We will be highlighting an array of "strong women," unsung heroines, "necks that turned the man's head," recognizing historic individuals, including suffragists, medical pioneers, Holocaust survivors, and women who broke the glass ceiling, gaining access to the bimah and to

leadership positions in their congregations. August 18, 2020, will mark 100 years since the passage of the women's suffrage amendment, giving women the right to vote. It should be an electrifying year!

Lilly Stern Filler, MD  
JHSSC President

See page 22 for a special save-the-date message, plus other news from JHSSC Program Director Rachel Barnett.



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



# 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.

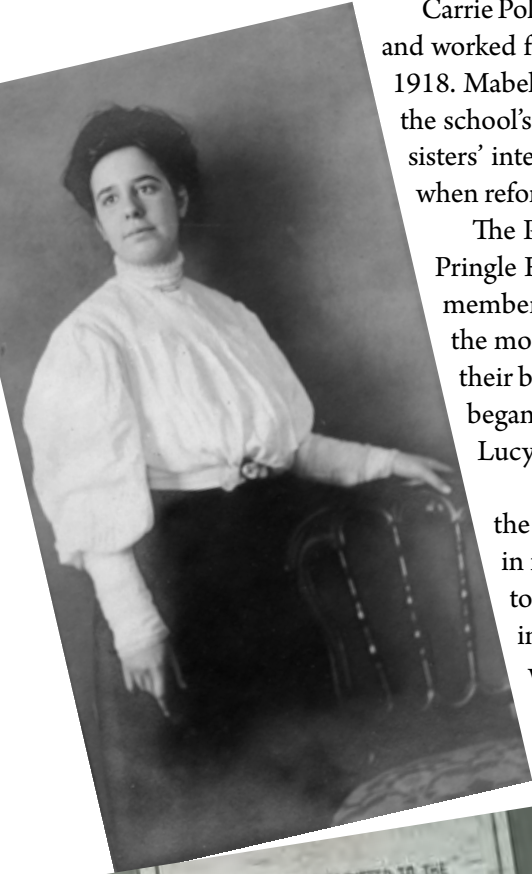
Anita joined the national campaign in New York in 1915. In June 1916, the CU formed the National Woman's Party, and, in January 1917, the NWP began to stage silent protests in front of the White House, calling themselves "Silent Sentinels." The government's initial tolerance for their picketing gave 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 1918, President Woodrow Wilson switched his position and endorsed the vote for women, and, on May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the 19<sup>th</sup> 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

*Top: Mabel Pollitzer, April 1906. Gift of Joan Fox, Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

*Left: Unveiling of the plaque commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College of Charleston's admittance of women in 1918. Left to right: Dr. Walter R. Coppedge, president of CofC, Mrs. Larry T. Riggs, president, Charleston Federation of Women's Clubs, and Miss Carrie Pollitzer. From the Anita Pollitzer Family Papers at the South Carolina Historical Society.*



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 '49. All three Pollitzer sisters labored for social reform for many more years, including advocating for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment—a fight that is still ongoing.

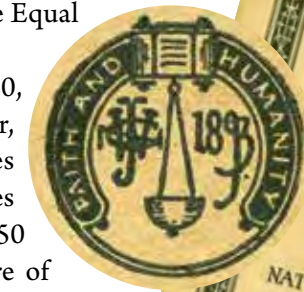
A century after women got the vote, in January 2020, Virginia became the 38<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the ERA. However, according to the *New York Times*, "Virginia's decision does not seal the amendment's addition to the United States Constitution. A deadline for three-quarters, or 38, of the 50 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.



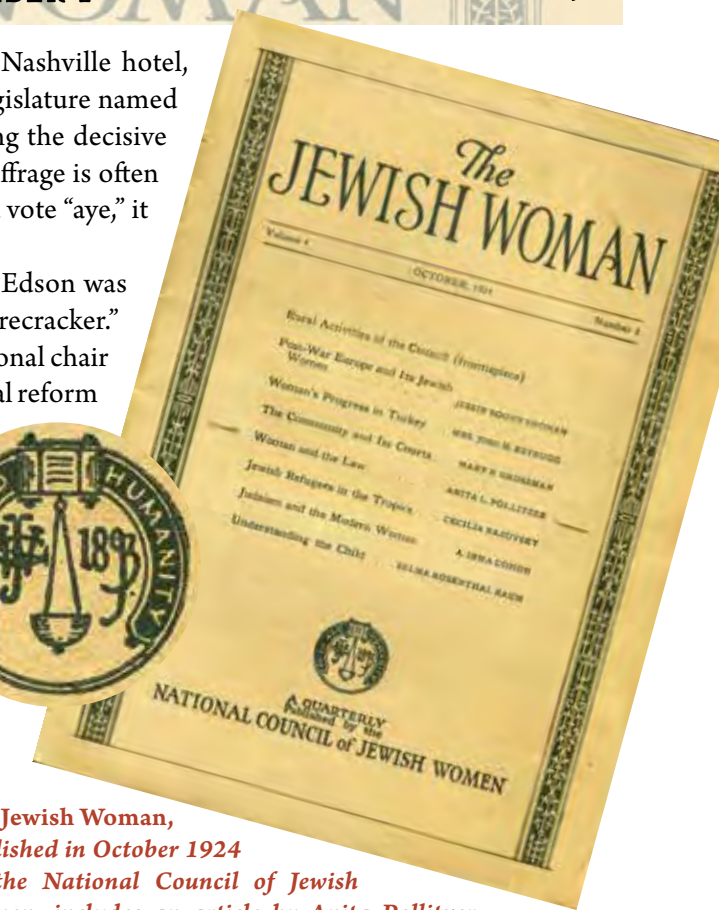
*Above: Officers of the National Woman's Party (Anita Pollitzer with hat in hand) meet in Washington in 1922 to complete the plans for the dedication ceremonies for the Party's new national headquarters opposite the Capitol.*

*Right: Anita Pollitzer meets with Tennessee Representative John Houk, Mayor Neal of Knoxville, and Representative Brooks [R. I. Johnson], outside the National Woman's Party Tennessee Headquarters, August 1920.*

*Courtesy of the Records of the National Woman's Party, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*



*The Jewish Woman, published in October 1924 by the National Council of Jewish Women, includes an article by Anita Pollitzer titled "Women and the Law." From the Anita Pollitzer Family Papers at the South Carolina Historical Society.*





## Rosa Hirschmann Gantt: Pioneering Doctor and Suffragette

by Diane Vecchio

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

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

After postgraduate training at the Aural and Ophthalmic

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

A year later she left Winthrop to marry Spartanburg attorney Colonel Robert Gantt and relocated to his hometown. Without delay, she established a practice as an ear, nose, and throat specialist, making her the first female physician in the city. In the 33 years she practiced medicine, she left an indelible mark on the health and well-being of Spartanburg County.

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

A highly respected doctor, Gantt served as an officer



Dr. Rosa Gantt, fourth from right, stands by an "American Women's Hospitals, Rural Health Service" mobile clinic out of Spartanburg County. From the Hilla Sheriff papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

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: "[S]he was one of the outstanding women of this section, not only a shining example of a physician standing for the highest and best in ethics, but a leading worker in social service."

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



Dr. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, ca. 1930. Courtesy of Marsha Poliakoff.

## "Miz Clara"

by Lorraine Lourie Moses

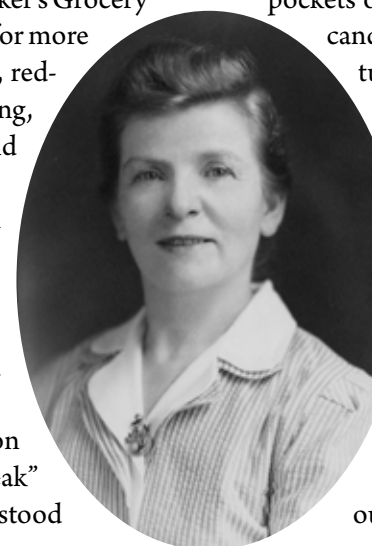
"Miz Clara," as she was ever so fondly addressed by her many loyal customers, was my grandma, Clara Kligerman Baker. She owned and operated Baker's Grocery on Park Street in Columbia, South Carolina, for more than 40 years. She was petite, freckled-faced, red-headed, blue-eyed, no-nonsense, hard-working,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

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

She would turn a blind eye when, on numerous occasions, customers would "sneak" food items from the grocery. She understood their desperation. In her decades behind the counter, no one ever tried to harm her. The

neighborhood would not have tolerated such. No crying child went unattended. Grandma Baker would reach into the deep pockets of her meat-stained apron and give the youngster candy and bubble gum. The crying ceased. Tears turned to smiles. The child was happy and she was happy.

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



Clara Kligerman Baker, ca. 1932.





Painting by Kathryn Baker Lotzoff, Esther and Jake Baker's daughter. All images courtesy of Lorraine Moses.

over everybody. After all, this was, literally, her home. She and Grandpa Baker raised their four children, Dave, Freda, Toby (my mother), and Alan, in a small house located directly behind the store.

Truly, it's not easy to tell someone why you think your grandmother was a remarkable woman. Working so many hours in the grocery provided the means for her children to grow up to become the honorable, wonderful adults they were. She understood children. She was most proud of hers, and they were most proud of her. I cannot tell you how many times my mother would say to me, "They don't make 'em like her anymore."

My grandmother died on September 4, 1969, of a massive heart attack. She was 77 years old. Through the years, she survived two painful bouts with breast cancer. My mother, Aunt Freda, and I spent hours in the hospital room with Grandma Baker, sitting by her bedside. We hoped this was not her time to go when she asked us to fetch her some ice cold watermelon. She loved watermelon. The request, however, was a ruse. She simply did not want us to be there when she gasped her last breath. She passed within minutes of our departing to grant her watermelon wish. To the end, she was most protective, most concerned about her family. This was my grandmother, Clara Baker.

With Grandpa Baker so busy with his inventions, his wife Clara knew she had to do intervention. With so many hungry mouths to feed, Baker's Grocery was opened to meet their many needs. This tiny store had a variety of meats, the most memorable of all being the pink pig's feet. Also there, you could find cookies, candies, and nuts, which most probably created the now famous "Baker Butt."  
—excerpt from a poem I wrote for my mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday

## Patty Levi Barnett: Steel Magnolia

by Tricia Barnett Greenberg

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



Patty Levi with her fellow senior class officers in Hi-Ways 1944, Edmunds High School yearbook, Sumter, SC. All images courtesy of Tricia Barnett Greenberg.

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 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Though not one of her favorite experiences, the school, snow, and dorm life broadened her horizons and fostered a sense of independence.

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

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

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

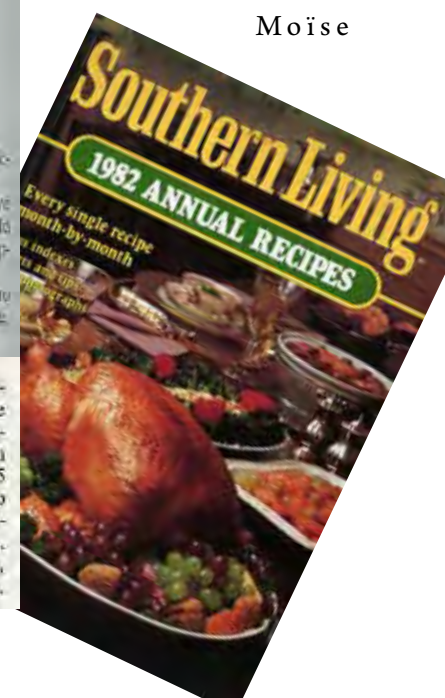
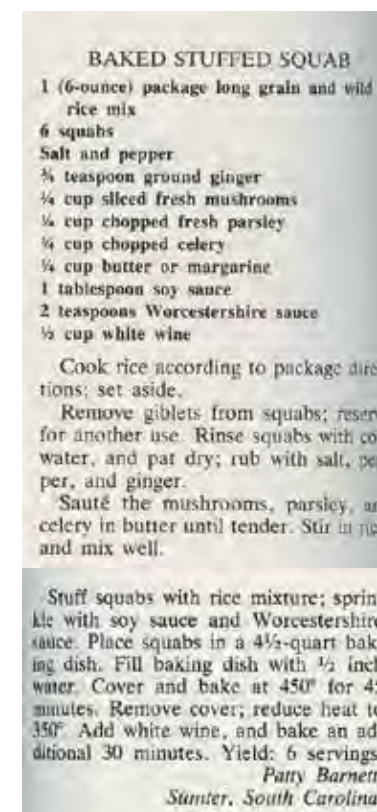
Summer of 1950, Mama was back in Sumter and met Henry Davis Barnett (Bubba), who had returned to the Midlands town to run the family farm after the death of his parents. They quickly fell in love and Mama traded her test tubes and graduate school for a wedding ring and a traditional role as housewife and mother, providing a happy home for Daddy, me, and my



Rabbi Samuel Shillman presided over confirmation exercises, Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC, May 24, 1942. Patty Levi is third from right. Her twin brother, Wendell, is on the far left. Other confirmands, according to the program, were Faye Romansky, Joan Schlosburg, Everett Ness, and Bernice Richman.

tree-ripened fruit. Not many, if any, could resist her charm and convincing salesmanship, so she became a pioneer in the concept of local sales, or, as we say now, "farm to table!" It was a huge success and a great sales addition for the business.

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





board members decided that Mama would be the best choice to step in and take over management of this unique and important family business. No shrinking violet, Mama did not hesitate to step up to the plate. So, for her first official paid job, she suddenly became CFO and CEO of America's largest producer of squabs for the table, as well as for medical and dietary research.

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 1982 *Annual Recipes*. She figured out what ethnic groups consumed squabs on special occasions and marketed to them as well. She increased sales and, therefore, production. She

taught herself the ins and outs of the business and got to know the customers and the employees. Meticulous, honest, and driven, she used her smarts and her charm to put the Pigeon Plant back on a profitable path and she remained at the helm for about 15 years.

Mama was a well-liked and respected leader in her volunteer work in the Sumter community. She was the first

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

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.



**Patty Levi Barnett (center) with her daughter Tricia Barnett Greenberg (r) and Tricia's mother-in-law, Ruth Brody Greenberg (l). Tricia's husband, Phillip Greenberg, is in background, ca. 2005.**

## Louise Levi Marcus: Behind the Counter in Eutawville, SC

by Ernie Marcus and Robert Berger

Ernie

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 decidedly proper, Victorian family in the Upstate town of Abbeville, to acclimate to the tedious routine of working in the store.



**Louise Levi**

Marcus Department Store was founded by my immigrant grandfather, Morris Marcus, in 1901; his death 16 years later left his wife, Janie, to support their two sons. My dad, Harry Marcus, was involved intermittently in the business until after his service in World War II. So, from 1917 to her death in 1962, my grandmother was running the store. Her niece Marie Karesh, who never married, operated her own store a few doors down until her death in 1975. Two of Janie's sisters, Katie and Mary, 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 some 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

*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.*



**Doing The Charleston**  
LOUISE L. MARCUS of Eutawville writes today's poem on Charleston. Don't let the last line throw you, folks:  
Ah, I can sit and rhapsodize  
About the Charleston hucksters'  
cries  
And other things, both seen  
and heard,  
That make this city my preferred.  
The streets that wind their cob-  
bled way,  
The houses old, the beaches  
gay,  
All cause one oft to wish to  
stop.  
But me — I just go there to  
shop!  
**WELL SHAME** on you, Miss  
Louise. But I guess if you shop  
at stores which advertise in The  
N&C, I'll have to forgive you for  
not being prompted by esthetic  
reasons to visit the Holy City.



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

## Robert

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

Mom's best friend, intellectually, was the African-American superintendent of schools. He would come by the store and

they would talk for hours. They were both voracious readers and discussed everything. She confided to my brother Arthur and me that he was "certainly more intelligent than any white man in the area." Her intelligence was amazing. I would open the dictionary and try to stump her. I would not be successful. She knew virtually every word's spelling and definition.

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

The bridge club was a talk-a-thon for women—not a serious game. The only thing that was competitive was the quality of the snacks served. The store was not very busy, usually, and we eked out a living. Mom and Harry spent very little money while Arthur and I were young. They didn't have much and never complained. It was a poor area and we had a roof over

our heads, enough to eat, and ambition for the future. Mom was proud of her children until the day she died.



Left to right: Ernie Marcus, Robert Berger (holding Ernie), Arthur Berger, Ellen Marcus (in front of Arthur), Harry Marcus, and Louise Levi Marcus, outside their Eutawville, SC, home, 1957.

## Joyce Antler, Keynote Speaker

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

Her most recent book is *Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement*, published in May 2018, which tells the previously unknown stories of nearly 50 women's liberation and Jewish feminist pioneers—women



who helped shape the politics and culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Joyce taught at Brandeis University for 37 years and recently retired as the Samuel J. Lane Professor of American Jewish History and Culture in the American Studies Program. She is also Professor Emerita of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and was a founder of Women's Studies at the university, chairing the program

for 10 years. She was an affiliate of the Departments of African and African-American Studies; History; Education; and Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation.

# Profiles in Valor: Jewish Women of the Palmetto State

May 2–3, 2020 ~ Columbia, South Carolina

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

All events take place in the Campus Room, Capstone House, USC, 898 Barnwell Street, unless otherwise noted.

## 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 Lourie 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

**NELSON MULLINS**

Reception sponsored by Nelson Mullins

## 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 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, but the state was home to some of the most famous—and infamous—fighters for women's right to vote. South Carolina suffragists were fearless, provocative, and persistent.

Panelists: Beryl Dakers, Director of Cultural Programming/Outreach, SCETV; Amy Thompson

McCandless, Professor of History, Emerita, College of Charleston; Betsy Newman, Producer, SCETV;

Katharine Purcell, Instructor of English and Director of International Education, Trident Technical College

## Hotel reservations

### Graduate Columbia

1619 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29201  
803.779.7779

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](http://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 Idelsohn, [idelsohne@cofc.edu](mailto:idelsohne@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—of a year or years. It is part and parcel of the great and noble fight to achieve full nationhood for our people." This woman who then traced the progress of the United Nations in its recommendation of the partition of Palestine, the "violence and bloodshed that followed," "the decision of the Yishuv to bring into being a provisional government of a new Jewish state," and the attempt by the Charleston chapter to raise \$5,000 in an emergency drive. This woman who described the formation of groups of ten Charleston women—"minyanim"—each of whom pledged to "redeem" a Jewish child in Palestine "by paying a tenth of that child's upkeep, estimated as \$630 a year," to Youth Aliyah. This woman who urged other members to further their education about Palestine and the world. This woman who, throughout, called out the names of 30 other women, thanked them for their work, and asked each one to rise.

My mother's life, which ended in 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 I call 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 depressions, which had to be kept secret. Afterwards, she was often lonely, depressed, angry, and scattered, and did little outside the house besides tending to her strong-willed mother, who had moved to Charleston.

When I was four years old, I asked Momma why people who worked for us were darker-skinned than we were. She said the system of segregation was wrong and that perhaps our generation would set things right. Her liberal 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 lively, active mind, her capacity for leadership, and her desire to change the world. Tragic, but also heroic in its own way.



Above: Walter H. Solomon and Mildred Cohen Solomon, Charleston, SC, 1963. Below: Mildred Solomon and her daughter Ellen, Ahmedabad, India, 1965. Images courtesy of Ellen Solomon.



## Doris Levkoff Meddin: To Make the World a Better Place

by Ann Meddin Hellman

My mother, Doris Levkoff Meddin (Mrs. Hyman J. Meddin), was born on February 27, 1917—a date we didn't know until 2007—in Augusta, Georgia, to Shier and Rebecca Rubin Levkoff, who were both born in Charleston, South Carolina. She always told us stories about going with her grandmother, Hannah Piatigorsky (Jacobs) Levkoff, to deliver charity to those in need in Augusta. This had a major impact on her and was the beginning of her wanting to make the world a better place.

Mama graduated from Winthrop College in 1937 with a bachelor of arts in psychology and sociology. She did social work for a year before she got married. As the story goes, she would go by the meat packing plant where her boyfriend, Hyman J. Meddin, worked, and he would fill her car with gas and give her food to deliver to her clients. She was continuing to do what her grandmother taught her.

After her children were grown, Mama discovered that the University of Southern Illinois was offering graduate degrees in Charleston. In 1980, she got a master's degree in education with an emphasis in counseling. The final requirement for this degree was to work for one year. This was a challenge as my father didn't want her to work. It was solved by Mama taking a job at the Family Service Agency as a "dollar a year person."

In her first year of marriage, 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. K. Beth Elohim Sisterhood. She was a board member of the City of Charleston Office of Economic Opportunity and the South Carolina Mental Health Association, and a chair of the UNICEF Year of the Child, Charleston. She helped start



Doris Levkoff's engagement photo, 1939.



Doris Levkoff Meddin (second from left) was named A Woman Who Makes a Difference by the Charleston chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women in 1998. With Doris in the Jewish Community Center auditorium on Raoul Wallenberg Boulevard, Charleston, SC, from left, are Ellen Katzman, executive director of JCC; Leah Chase, president of Hadassah; and Anita Moïse Rosefield Rosenberg, president of JCC and NCJW. All images courtesy of Ann Meddin Hellman.



Charleston Pink Ladies Volunteer Program at Roper Hospital, a collaborative effort of Charleston's NCJW and the Junior League. In pursuing her volunteer activities, she always let people know her ideas and actions personified her Jewish values.

Because her brother, Dr. Abner H. Levkoff, was head of pediatrics, Mama would visit the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) often. On one of these visits, she noticed that children were taken to procedures on hospital beds. This upset her, so she bought little red wagons and arranged for a playroom to make the kids'

experience in the hospital less scary and more fun.

Other programs Mama started were Cornerstone Incorporated for Mentally Ill, Charleston, SC; Relatives Group for Families of Mentally Ill State Hospital Patients; Teen Parent/Children Bonding Program at the Charleston YWCA; and Hot Line Program for Youth on Drugs (formerly known as Further).

Mama faithfully supported MUSC for more than 20 years, donating generously to the College of Pharmacy, the Storm Eye Institute, and the Children's Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, established by Dr. Abner Levkoff.

Mama believed children had to learn how to be kind. She developed a program for students in the lower grades in the City of Charleston to draw a picture of what they thought kindness was. To reward the winners, whose pictures showed that they knew what kindness was, she gave each an ice cream cone. About the same time, the *News and Courier* came out with a folder for 15 cents on how teachers could teach kindness in the classroom. Mama bought 200 of them and gave them to the Charleston County school board to distribute to teachers.

Mama believed in equal rights. When Burton Padoll was the rabbi at K.K. Beth Elohim in the 1960s, he wanted to have an interracial civil rights meeting. Mama let him hold the meeting at our house on Murray Boulevard. She was not

concerned about what others thought. She knew she was doing the right thing.

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

The South Carolina College of Pharmacy  
Medical University of South Carolina  
Cordially invites you to the Dedication  
of the

Doris Levkoff Meddin  
Medication Safety Education Program

Monday, April 24, 2006  
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

The Wickliffe House  
178 Ashley Avenue  
Charleston, South Carolina

Please RSVP by April 17, 2006  
Kelly James Draganov  
(843)792-4980



*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 (l to r): Abner H. Levkoff, Alice Fink Levkoff, Douglas Berlinsky, Brian Hellman, Max Hellman, Stuart Meddin, Amy Levkoff Hudnall, David Hudnall. Middle row (l to r): Dawn Berlinsky, Ann Meddin Hellman, Eve Meddin Berlinsky, Allison Levkoff Taylor. Front row (l to r): Kenneth Berlinsky, Ann Levkoff Reynolds, Doris Levkoff Meddin, Scott Hellman.*

patients statewide. Because of this program, Mama was inducted as an honorary member of Phi Lambda Sigma Leadership Society of the South Carolina College of Pharmacy, MUSC.

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

Mama's eating habits were looked down upon by the many doctors she knew, whether they were family, professors

at MUSC, or just friends, but thanks to her unlimited consumption of chocolate she lived to be 96. Knowing there was so much to be done to repair the world, she was determined to do as much as she could. She was a perpetual optimist. She had no boundaries and would call upon anyone at any level who she felt could make her dreams come true and help others have a better life.

Doris Meddin's Jewish Heritage Collection Oral History interview is online at [lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:11842](http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:11842).

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

by Margi Levinson Goldstein

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

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

The newlyweds opened their first store in Branchville, South Carolina. Her sisters lived nearby. Annie Lourie operated a store in St. George and Minnie Kalinsky lived in Holly Hill. 1927 was not a good year to start a new business and the Branchville store failed. Next they tried North, South Carolina; then Marion, North Carolina; and then Tocoa, 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

North Carolina or Georgia—she was moving back to South Carolina. Charlie chose Barnwell. In 1933, the Levinsons finally found a winning location. The Leader, a ladies' and men's clothing store, became a huge success.

As business conditions improved in the '40s and '50s, Libby became somewhat of a legend. Women came from all over lower South Carolina for Libby to dress them—from Bamberg, Denmark, Fairfax, and Estill.

Every Sunday, Libby and Charlie went to the wholesale houses in Charleston, Augusta, and Savannah, searching for merchandise. Libby could not find the fashions she knew she could sell. Instead, they returned home with kosher meat from Zalkin's and delicatessen from Mazo's.

In search of the latest styles, Libby, age 29, and her sister Annie made their first buying trip to New York City in 1939. They boarded the Seaboard train in Denmark and sat up all night (a Pullman was not affordable). War was coming to Europe and merchandise was hard to find. Nothing, however, stopped the sisters. Beautifully dressed

in their hats and gloves, they went from the Lower East Side to Upper Broadway. Because they were shrewd and relentless, they excelled in their businesses beyond expectations.

The United States entered World War II in December



*Libby Friedman, age 17, 1927. All photos courtesy of Margi Levinson Goldstein.*



1941. The army opened a radar school and a German prisoner of war camp in Barnwell. Jewish soldiers were stationed at both facilities. The Levinson home became a Jewish USO. The Passover Seders were unbelievable, some years with 20 or 30 servicemen in attendance. Charlie conducted the Seder with Libby continuously correcting his Hebrew. Libby always concluded the proceedings with a rousing Chad Gadya! \*

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.

Libby and Charlie established a warm relationship with the black community. They extended credit to African-American customers when other stores did not. The Leader was one of the first stores in lower South Carolina to encourage black people to try on clothes in the fitting rooms.

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

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

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

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

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

Charlie 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. As the years go by, we will tell Libby's story—a story of a woman who faced life with determination, commitment, independence, and courage. May her name be a blessing for generations to come. L'dor v'dor.

\*Chad Gadya, which means "one little goat" in Hebrew, is a playful song sung at the end of the Passover Seder.

Top: the author, Margi Levinson, and her brother, Arnold, pose for a family photo behind their parents, Charles and Libby Friedman Levinson, and Libby's mother, Baila, 1942. Above: the Friedman sisters (1 to r), Annie Lourie of Holly Hill, Minnie Kalinsky of Charleston, and Libby Levinson of Barnwell, 1955.

Libby Levinson's Jewish Heritage Collection Oral History interview is online at [lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:86557](http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:86557).

## Regina Greene (née Kawer): A Woman of Valor

by Harlan Greene

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

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

She loved us in a way that maybe, again, was not like other parents. She was not southern, not sentimental, not particularly physical in her affection; her love blazed in her spark-blue eyes when she spoke to us, expressing her own intense affection and intelligence and challenging us to return it. If I came home bragging

of a 99 on a test, the inevitable question was, "Who got a hundred?"

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

It was survivor's guilt. For someone who spoke so directly about what was on her mind, she was always tight-lipped about her past. Born in Warsaw to a middle class Jewish family, she was left wing, attracted to my father, a poor working class youth from a shtetl. They married in June 1939 and were still in Warsaw as the German bombs fell and tanks rolled in. My father went east to his village, where my mother eventually joined him. A blonde with blue eyes, she could "pass." I'll

never know exactly what happened,

but there were mentions of guns smuggled in hay wagons, working in the underground, and her firstborn who died. She told me she had to bury him in a Jewish graveyard in stealth one night by herself. "Where was that?" I asked when I was about 13. She could not remember, she told me.



In her Polish passport, Regina Kawer Greene is listed as Rachela Grynblatt, born in 1920. Images courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.



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

When she survived breast cancer, she became a breast cancer volunteer immediately, helping other women adapt. She monitored politics incessantly, pursued social justice as zealously as she cleaned, and aged much too quickly. She would have nothing to do with Holocaust memorials, or with the survivor groups championed by her cousin Ben Mead. She told me there were too many holocausts still happening. Besides, thinking of Europe and the past brought up too many memories.



*Left to right: Regina Kawer; Ruchel Liebhaber, Regina's aunt; Yitzhak Kawer, Regina's brother; Edith Kawer, Regina's sister. This photograph was taken in Warsaw, Poland, on October 12, 1927.*

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

Images are from the Samuel Greene papers, Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston. To view more images from the Greene papers and to explore other Holocaust collections, see *The Holocaust Quilt*, an online exhibit, at [holocaustarchives.cofc.edu/panels/greene/index.html](http://holocaustarchives.cofc.edu/panels/greene/index.html).

## L'dor v'dor: A Daughter's Perspective

*by Representative Beth Bernstein, South Carolina House of Representatives*

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

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

University. Before moving to South Carolina, she worked as 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



*Left to right: Carol Osterweil Bernstein, unidentified woman, and Eleanor Hammer, Beth Shalom Sisterhood, October 1964.*

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, which allowed 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 or 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 by a drunk driver in an automobile 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.



*Back row (l to r): Michele Bernstein Perrick, Carol Osterweil Bernstein. Front row (l to r): Anne Bernstein, Beth Bernstein, Hilary Bernstein, at Beth Shalom's 85th Anniversary Trilogy Gala, Columbia, SC, January 16, 1993, celebrating the synagogue's 85th anniversary, mortgage burning, and 20th year on Trenholm Road. Carol and Rose Kline chaired the event. All images courtesy of Beth Bernstein.*



*Beth Bernstein's wedding day at Capital Center, Columbia, SC, March 22, 2003. Left to right: Lowell Bernstein, Hilary Bernstein, Isadore Bernstein, Beth Bernstein, Rip Sanders, Carol Bernstein, Michele Bernstein Perrick, and Anne Bernstein.*



## Up & Coming

by Rachel Gordin Barnett, Program Director, JHSSC

### SAVE THE DATE!

#### *Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History*

45<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Co-sponsored by JHSSC and the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture

October 23–25, 2020 | Charleston, South Carolina

SJHS is planning its next annual meeting to be held at the College of Charleston on October 23–25, 2020, with JHSSC and CSJC serving as local hosts. In honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Addlestone Library's Jewish Heritage Collection, the conference will examine how archives have influenced—and might continue to influence—the study of southern Jewish history and culture. How might we use archival material—or create new collections—to discover new southern Jewish voices and stories? How might digital humanities and digital archives help us achieve our archival mission? For more information, contact program co-chairs: Shari Rabin ([srabin@oberlin.edu](mailto:srabin@oberlin.edu)), Dale Rosengarten ([rosengartend@cofc.edu](mailto:rosengartend@cofc.edu)); Marcie Cohen Ferris ([ferrismarcie@gmail.com](mailto: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 connections to Judaism and to South Carolina. 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. Cash prizes total \$1,000. For more information, contest rules, and submissions form, visit: [jhssc.org/contest](http://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](http://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/](http://merchants.jhssc.org/). To book the exhibit contact: [steven.kramer@scmuseum.org](mailto: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](mailto:rgbarnettsc@gmail.com)).

## 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 BS's 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 as unwavering as their kindness. And, though Judaism was not necessarily a defining quality for either of them, the respect they demanded and their unflappable 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. Awed by the survivors of Europe's atrocities, such as Regina Kawer 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 edit 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 them women, who 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.

## Pillars

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Susan and Charles Altman, Charleston, SC  
Ellen Arnovitz, Atlanta, GA  
Rachel and Henry Barnett, Columbia, SC  
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Sandra Lee Rosenblum, Charleston, SC  
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Gail (Altman) and Ronald Spahn, Baltimore, MD  
Richard Stern, Boston, MA  
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Anita Zucker, Charleston, SC

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Jerry Zucker





THE  
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SOUTH CAROLINA

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Charleston, SC 29424  
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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 the address above.*

Register now for the **May 2-3 meeting in Columbia**. See page 13 for more information.



# THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

Volume XXV Number II ~ Fall 2020







THE  
JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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and designer

The magazine is published twice  
a year. Current and back issues  
can be found at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org)

On the cover: A mural by  
Charleston artist William  
Halsey portraying four of  
Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim's  
founders. Commissioned by  
Thomas J. Tobias and the  
Alexander family in 1950, it  
is one of two large paintings  
Halsey created for the  
synagogue's social hall. Photo  
by Jack Alterman, courtesy of  
Special Collections, College  
of Charleston. See Timeline  
entry for 1749 for more on  
the founders.

## 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 writ 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 19<sup>th</sup> century, the authors contend, "Charleston had become the unofficial Jewish capital of America." . . . 7

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**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 75 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 reimaged 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

**Sunday, November 1, 2020 ~ 5:30 P.M.**

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

A Charleston 350 edition of Sunday Conversations  
with Judge Richard M. Gergel and Robert N. Rosen, Esq.

With special guests, Charleston 350 Commission Co-Chairs:  
Mr. Jonathan Green, City of Charleston Ambassador for the Arts  
Hon. A. Peter Shahid Jr., City Councilmember, Ninth District

For Zoom registration information, visit [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)



## Letter from the President

The Yiddish expression "Mann tracht, 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 spring 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 had hit our world, and most of us wanted to crawl in or under the bed and hide until these terrible assaults disappeared. The health virus of the winter mixed with the hatred virus of the spring and emerged in the political virus of our summer.

What can we do during this unprecedented time? We will always remember 2020 as one of the most challenging years we've experienced, but how we handle it will be paramount. The Jewish Historical Society remains active and committed to our mission, even with the departure of our wonderful friend and executive director Mark Swick. The Society's leadership has the full-throated support of the College of Charleston's Jewish Studies Director Yaron Ayalon, and the concerted power of three women—Enid Idelsohn, 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 Keyserling and attracted more than 80 participants.

On August 23, we collaborated on an SCETV 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 biannual magazine will continue to appear both in print and online. This fall edition looks back 350 years to the founding of Charles Towne and forward to 2021. Having postponed our 2020 joint meeting with the Southern Jewish Historical Society until October 2021, we will continue quality educational programming online only for the coming year.

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

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

Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.  
JHSSC President

Bring your bagels and coffee.  
Annual Membership Meeting  
Sunday, October 18 ~ 11:00 A.M.  
Zoom info will be emailed.

Stay connected.  
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# 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.

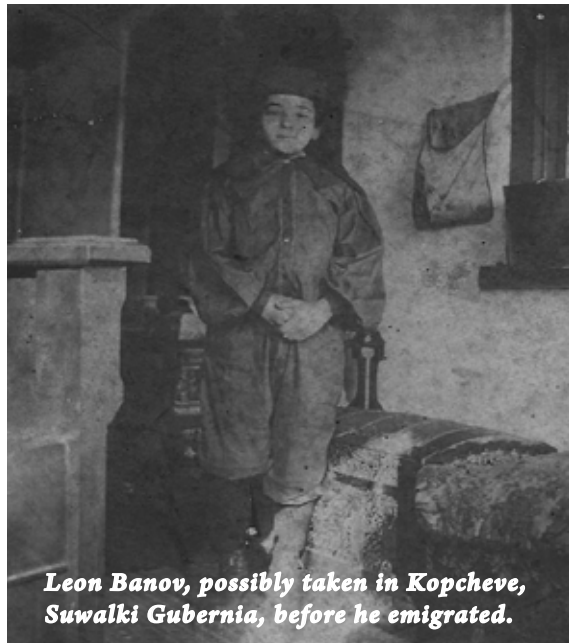
He also was my grandfather.

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

But before then, between 1917 and 1920, he was chief food inspector for the Charleston City Health Department. During that time, in 1918, the Spanish flu infected Charleston

and the world, with millions contracting the illness and hundreds of thousands dying. My grandfather witnessed the same challenges that people are encountering today: quarantining for days, wearing face coverings, restricting gatherings, and shuttering schools, businesses, and places of worship.

He described the situation in his 1970 book, *As I Recall: The Story of the Charleston County Health Department*: “Charleston was badly hit; and to make matters worse a great many doctors were in the service [in the Great War] and away from the city,” he wrote. “Our Board



Leon Banov, possibly taken in Kopcheve, Suwalki Gubernia, before he emigrated.



Leon Banov in his pharmacy on King Street, Charleston, SC.

of Health met frequently but so little was known about the etiology and treatment of the disease that very little could be done to combat it.”

## An Immigrant's Education

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. Leon crossed the ocean with his mother, his sister Rachel (Raye), and his brother David in July 1895.

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

For a few years, Leon operated a pharmacy on King Street. His slogan was “The Largest Drug Store in the South for its Size.” But his medical education did not end there. He

matriculated at the Medical College in 1908 and received his M.D. in June 1917. While earning his medical degree, he taught in the pharmacy school.

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

## The Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918

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



Dr. Leon Banov, graduate of Medical College of South Carolina, 1917.

## 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.

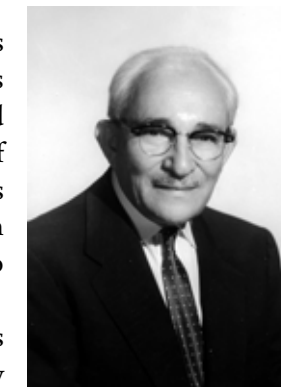
This automatically closed down schools and churches. One church objected to this interference with its religion and refused to curtail its worship service. The board of health, not being itself sure as to the benefits of the closing of churches, did not make an issue of it; and soon all the churches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

In those days a great many of the small retail stores kept their doors open until real late in the night. The merchants having been accustomed to remaining at their business until quite late, found themselves lost for something to do, with their stores being closed.

As I rode up and down the street, I saw a number of these merchants just standing listlessly in front of their closed doors waiting for their usual going-home time.

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



Dr. Leon Banov. Photo by Max Furchgott.

— Leon Banov, *As I Recall: The Story of the Charleston County Health Department* (R. L. Bryan Company, 1970), 22–23.



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 [dispensing 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 a printing establishment and ordered 1,500 whiskey labels for bottles; also the bottles themselves had to be gotten from wholesale drug concerns. Labels had to be gummed securely on and filled out.”

The following month, when the flu seemed to be subsiding, the mayor lifted the quarantine, over Dr. Green’s objections. The mayor also called for a public ceremony on November 11 to commemorate the end of World War I. More than 5,000 people gathered in Marion Square to celebrate both events. Today we might call these mass gatherings

“super spreaders.” Not surprisingly, the influenza returned to Charleston soon thereafter; thousands more became sick with it and dozens more died.



*Dr. Leon Banov and a young patient. Photo by E. H. Powell. All photos courtesy of Alan Banov.*

### Dr. Banov’s Legacy

The 1918 flu epidemic led to the creation of the Charleston County Health Department in the spring of 1920, and Leon Banov was named the director.

As health officer for the combined city-county health department, Leon left a profound legacy. Charleston became the first jurisdiction in the country to require pasteurization of milk. He instituted mass vaccinations of Charlestonians, including African Americans. He created wellness clinics for new mothers and dramatically reduced infant mortality. He also improved sanitation throughout the county, including giving restaurants scoresheets to be displayed in their windows and eradicating malaria through mosquito control in the marshes.

Public health physicians from around the world visited his health department to learn from his practices. He was rewarded for his many years of public leadership by having a new health department building on Calhoun Street named for him in 1960.

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. In 1944, my father married Rita Landesman of New Jersey; they had my sister, Jane Banov Bergen (born 1950) and me (born 1946). Morton and his wife, Ida Linke, had no children. Roslyn and George Wyman were parents of Stephen Jay Wyman (born 1944) and Leslie Wyman Lake (1952–2007). My grandfather had several great-grandchildren he never met.

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, he would have been well equipped to deal with the current coronavirus. He always respected science and disdained public health decisions made just to please politicians, as his book makes clear.

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

by Richard M. Gergel and Robert N. Rosen

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



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

European countries during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A broad array of officially sanctioned discrimination and harassment against Jews was part of the fabric of European life.

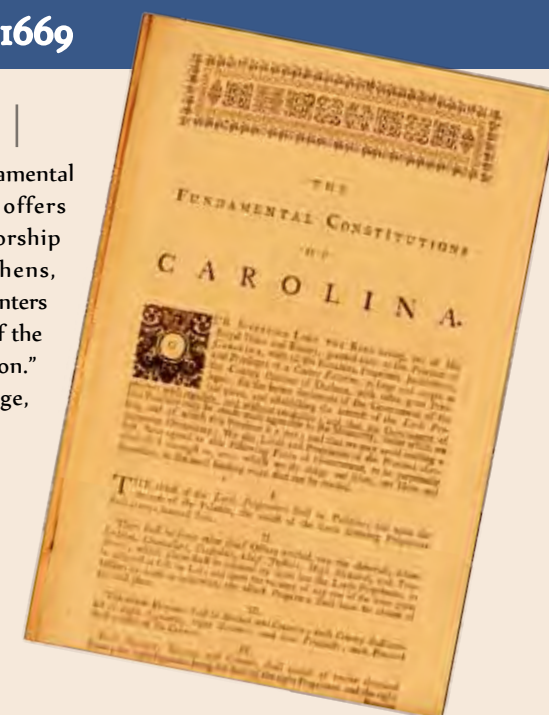
In 1661, King Charles II of England granted to eight English noblemen a massive tract of land lying between the Virginia colony and the Spanish settlement in Florida. This land grant, titled the Charter of Carolina, was bestowed in appreciation for the role these men, now known as the Lords Proprietor, had played in Charles II’s ascendancy 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.

## TIMELINE

1669

Carolina’s Fundamental Constitutions offers freedom of worship to “Jews, Heathens, and other Dissenters from the purity of the Christian Religion.” See related image, page 8.

Timeline images courtesy of Special Collections unless otherwise stated.



1697

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

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 naturalization. See image, page. 9

1749



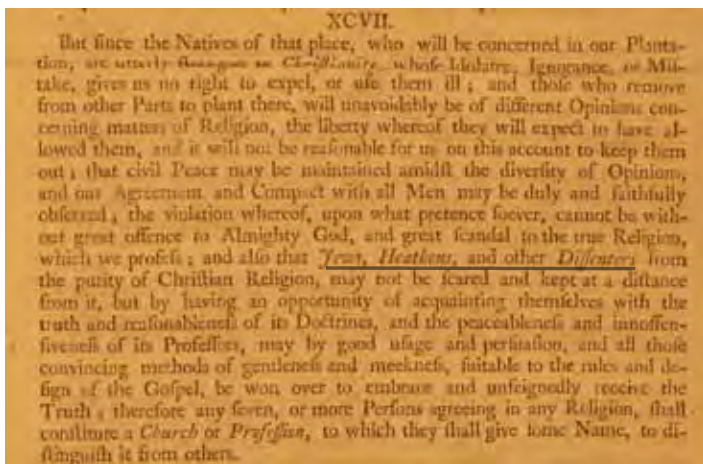
Among the promising sources of potential settlers were religious dissenters, who found themselves in unending battles with established churches in their home countries. These dissenters, including Quakers, Unitarians, Free Will Baptists, French Protestants, and Jews, were thought to be pious and family-centered people, ideal settlers for a growing and prosperous colony. Further, Jewish traders and merchants from the West Indies, particularly Barbados, were especially sought after to assist in building the commercial life of the new colony.

Driven by the pragmatic desire to recruit new settlers to the colony of Carolina and influenced by the idealism of the Enlightenment, John Locke, then secretary to Lord Proprietor Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, assisted in drafting the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, first published in 1669. The *Constitutions* provided 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 official state religions, which tolerated no dissent or alternate viewpoint. Leaving no ambiguity regarding the target audience, Article 97 expressly provided these protections to “*Jews, Heathens, and other Dissenters* from the purity of Christian Religion.”

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 unrelenting 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 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 Joseph Blake endorsed the petition and recommended adoption in an address to the colonial legislature, which responded by granting citizenship rights to all aliens and their



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

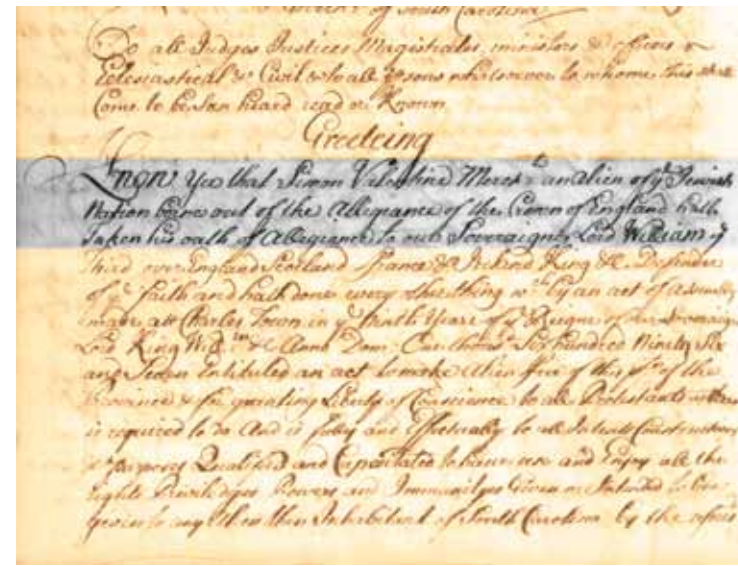
wives and children, regardless of their nation of origin. The legislation noted that a number of dissenters had come to the colony for religious freedom. Shortly thereafter, colonial records confirm that two Charleston Jews, Simon Valentine and Abraham Avila, were issued citizenship papers—40 years before such rights were given to Jews residing in England!

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

Charleston’s Jews created other organizations to support its communal life. In 1754, Isaac Da Costa established a Jewish cemetery. This was followed in 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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



*Naturalization of Simon Valentine, Merch: an alien of the Jewish nation, May 26, 1697. South Carolina Department of Archives and History.*

1774

1784

Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded to minister to the sick and bury 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.”

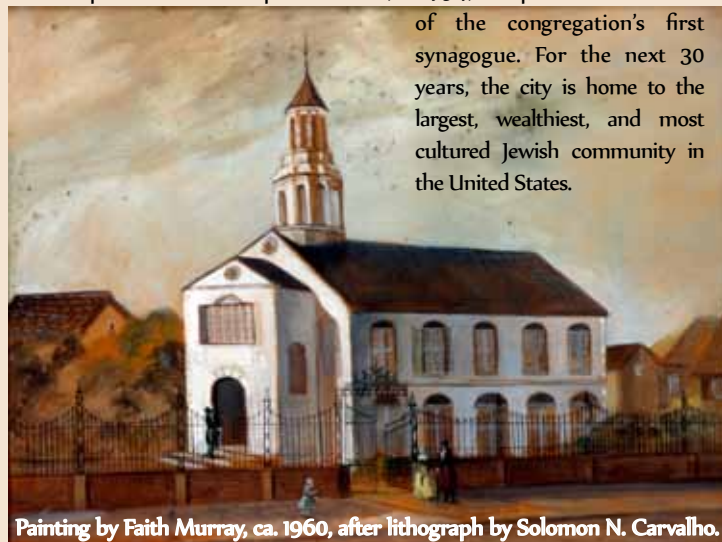


Francis Salvador is elected, at age 27, to the First Provincial Congress of South Carolina as one of ten deputies from Ninety Six, the first professing Jew in America to serve in a legislative assembly. Left: the Salvador family coat of arms on the grant of arms issued by the College of Heralds, London,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



1791

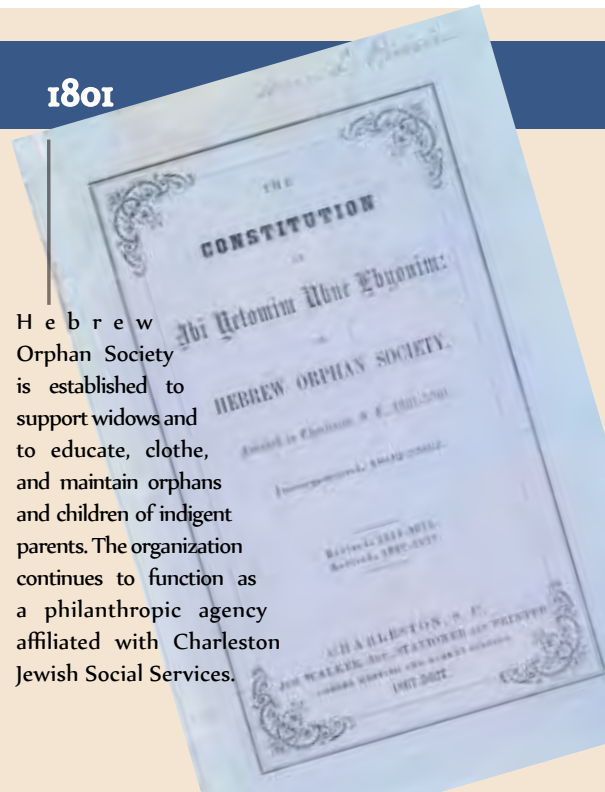
KKBE petitions for incorporation and, in 1794, completes construction of the congregation’s first synagogue. For the next 30 years, the city is home to the largest, wealthiest, and most cultured Jewish community in the United States.



*Painting by Faith Murray, ca. 1960, after lithograph by Solomon N. Carvalho.*

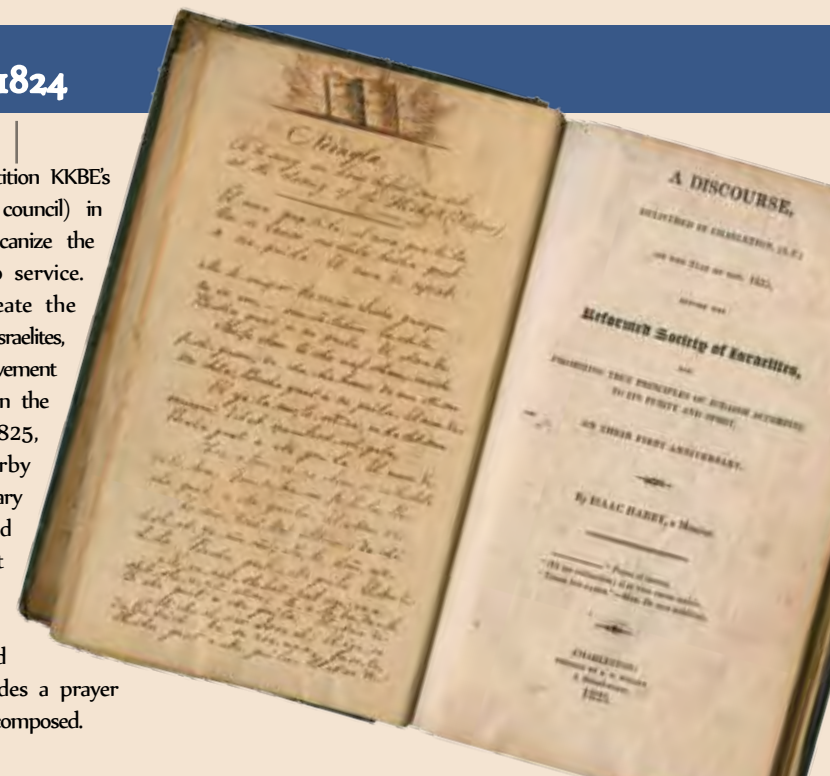
1801

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



1824

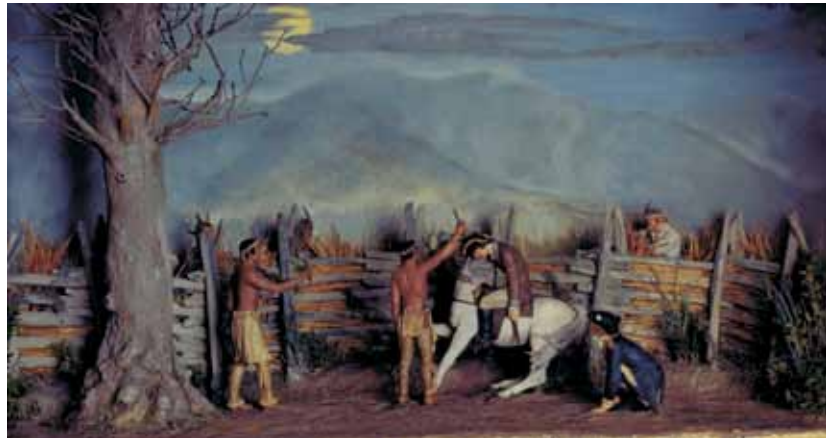
Forty-seven men petition KKBE’s adjuncta (governing council) in an effort to Americanize the traditional worship service. Rebuffed, they create the Reformed Society of Israelites, the first sustained movement to reform Judaism in the United States. In 1825, reformer Isaac Harby delivered an anniversary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





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

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



**The Ambush of Francis Salvador, August 1, 1776. Diorama by Robert N. S. Whitelaw, Charleston, SC, 1970. Image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.**

Charleston maintained its status as having the largest Jewish population in America for the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with one scholar noting that one-third of all

Jews in America in 1818 lived in the Lowcountry of South Carolina.<sup>2</sup> For all practical purposes, Charleston had become the unofficial Jewish capital of America. Not surprisingly, it was from Charleston that Isaac Harby wrote to then-Secretary of State James Monroe, issuing a kind of Jewish declaration of independence: Jews were “by no means to be considered a religious sect, tolerated by the government,” but “a portion of the people in every respect. . . . Quakers and Catholics, Episcopalians and Presbyterians, Baptists and Jews, all constitute one great political family.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James W. Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred O. Hero, Jr., “Southern Jews,” in *Jews in the South*, eds. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 232.

<sup>3</sup> Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 137–138.

## Rejuvenating the Study of Sephardic Jewry and Its Role in South Carolina Jewish History

by Rabbi Merrill Shapiro

Is 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 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The term “Ashkenazi” refers to Jewish settlers who established communities along the Rhine River in Western Germany and in Northern France dating to the Middle Ages. By the time of the founding of South Carolina in 1670, tens of thousands of Jews had migrated to welcoming lands

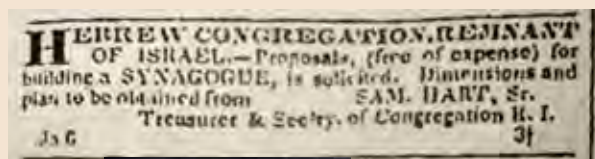


in East Europe, especially Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. The vernacular tongue of Ashkenazic Jews is Yiddish, a language derived from High German and Hebrew with elements of both Aramaic and Slavic from early Medieval Europe. The plural of Ashkenazi is Ashkenazim.

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

*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.*

1838



Sally Lopez establishes a Sunday school, the second in the United States, for KKBE. The synagogue is destroyed by a conflagration that burned much of downtown Charleston.

1840

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



1854



South Carolina's first Ashkenazic congregation, Berith Shalome (later Brith Sholom) grows out of an Orthodox prayer group led by Hirsch Zvi Margolis Levine, an ordained rabbi from Lithuania.

1861

Moses Cohen Mordecai's steam-sail ship, The Isabel, carries federal forces off Fort Sumter in the opening volley of the Civil War. Franklin J. Moses, Jr., is among the men who raised the Confederate flag over the fort. After the war, Moses joins the Radical Republicans and serves as governor of South Carolina between 1872 and '74—becoming the state's most notorious scalawag. Courtesy of John Sands.



1866

“Whereas the Congregation Beth Elohim has had its members disastrously diminished by death and casualty,— and by the ravages of war, its property has been seriously damaged & its finances greatly reduced — and whereas overtures have been made by the Congregation “Sherit Israel” for a union of both Congregations . . . the only surviving members present of Beth Elohim — do deem it expedient that the two Congregations should be united with a view to strengthen our bond of faith. . . .”

Unable to sustain separate congregations in the aftermath of the Civil War, Shearit Israel and KKBE negotiate a merger.



KKBE Resolution



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 considerable Jewish history to life are themselves more comfortable moving about in the world of Ashkenazim than they are among the Sephardim.

Sephardic Jewry’s era of greatest popularity, vigor, and prosperity is much further removed in time. The customs of the

Sephardim are less known to us, and their world view, vision, and outlook are different and more difficult to understand than those of our own ancestors. The study of history is, of course, more than a regurgitation of names, dates, facts, and places. The study of history involves the interactions of great ideas, concepts, and movements. While Ashkenazic Jewry “grew up” in perennially 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.



*Havdalah Service (to mark the end of the Sabbath), ca. 1340. Detail from a miniature in the Barcelona Haggadah, Sephardic rite. British Library, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.*

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 16<sup>th</sup> 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?



*Engraving of Spaniards killing women and children and feeding their remains to dogs. From Illustrations de Narratio regionum Indicarum per Hispanos quosdam devastatarum, 1598. Joos van Winghe (1544–1603) and Theodor de Bry (1528–1598). De Bry’s works are characteristic of the anti-Spanish propaganda that originated as a result of the Eighty Years’ War.*

1886



1895



Charter members, NCJW, Charleston section.

The Charleston Council of Jewish Women is founded; in 1906, the organization affiliates with the National Council of Jewish Women.

1910



Charleston Hebrew School is organized by Brith Sholom. Beginning in 1912, classes were held in the Daughters of Israel Hall, 64 St. Phillip Street, two doors down from Brith Sholom Synagogue.

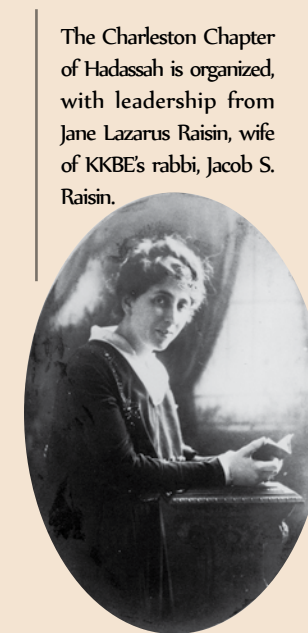
1911



Beth Israel's first synagogue after sale to Masonic lodge, ca. 1948.

Recent immigrants, including a substantial contingent from Kaluszyn, Poland, found Beth Israel. Locally known as the Little Shul, the Kalushiner Shul, or the Greener Shul, Beth Israel meets several blocks north of Brith Sholom on St. Philip Street.

1921



The Charleston Chapter of Hadassah is organized, with leadership from Jane Lazarus Raisin, wife of KKBE's rabbi, Jacob S. Raisin.

1922



The Jewish Community Center and Hebrew School opens on George Street.



# Mapping Jewish Charleston: 2020

by Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten

As the 21<sup>st</sup> 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

This essay was written as the introduction to the 2020 "page" of *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, an online exhibit sponsored by the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. See [mappingjewishcharleston.cofc.edu](http://mappingjewishcharleston.cofc.edu)



Performance by adult and youth choirs at Emanu-El, in the congregation's original army chapel building on Gordon Street, Charleston, SC, ca. 1950. At the far left is Rabbi Lewis Aryeh Weintraub. Cantor Jacob J. Renzer stands behind the piano. The violinist is Fannie Turteltaub. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

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.



Architect's rendering by Simons, Lapham and Mitchell of the proposed Jewish Community Center on Millbrook Drive (now Raoul Wallenberg Boulevard), west of the Ashley, Charleston, SC, ca. 1960. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

1938

1947

1948

1954

1956

1966

JCC, St. Philip Street, ca. 1949.

Conservative congregation Emanu-El breaks from Brith Sholom and begins meeting on Gordon Street in Charleston's northwest section.

JCC Camp Baker, a day camp, accepts its first campers.

Charleston Hebrew Institute is established by Brith Sholom and Beth Israel. Classes were held in later years at the JCC on St. Philip Street.

Beth Israel dedicates a new synagogue on Rutledge Avenue, May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Brith Sholom and Beth Israel merge to become Brith Sholom Beth Israel (BSBI); the "Big Shul" moves into the "Little Shul" on Rutledge Avenue.

Dedication of the new Charleston Hebrew Institute (now known as Addlestone Hebrew Academy) behind BSBI on Rutledge Avenue.

JCC dedicates new building on Millbrook Drive (now Raoul Wallenberg Boulevard) on 25 acres west of the Ashley River, purchased in 1959. See campus skyview above.



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 next door for Addlestone Hebrew Academy. The Federation moved to new quarters, and the Community Center rebranded itself Charleston JCC “Without Walls” (WOW), communicating electronically and through social media,

first producing and now supporting Jewish programming at various venues.

East of the Cooper River, the Center for Jewish Life inaugurated, in 2016, a 16,000-square-foot building on a shaded campus off Mathis Ferry Road in Mt. Pleasant. Affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement, Rabbi Yossi Refson and Rebbetzin Sarah Refson arrived in town in 2007 and began hosting Sabbath dinners, educational programs, and social gatherings at their home. Nine years later, with local support, large and small, they expanded their activities and created flexible space for preschool classes, adult education, cooking, eating, and gatherings of all sorts.

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



*Congregants of Dor Tikvah bringing in the Torahs for the dedication of their newly remodeled and redecorated facility, which includes a sanctuary, chapel, and lobby, August 2018. Courtesy of Congregation Dor Tikvah.*

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

In 2016, a kosher/vegetarian/vegan dining hall, Marty's Place, was built as the anchor in the expansion of the Jewish Studies building. The eatery was named for the program's visionary director, Dr. Martin Perlmutter, who was also founding director of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, a statewide membership organization established in 1994, housed physically and administratively within the Jewish Studies Program.

As of 2019, only two of the historic Jewish dry goods stores remained in business on King Street—Berlin's at the corner of Broad, and Dumas at Society. The heyday of the Jewish

retail merchant is past. As the value of real estate on upper King 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.

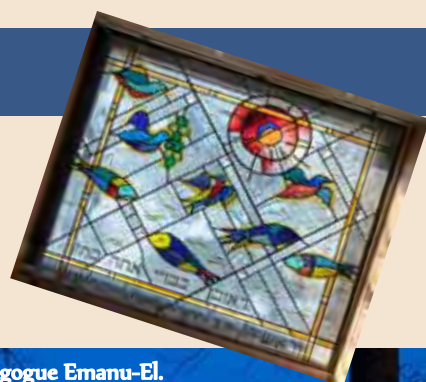
Today occupations pursued by Charleston's Jews are as varied as the population itself. The community's Blue Book, a directory of “Jewish Residents of Greater Charleston” compiled every other year by KKBE, keeps up not just with names and addresses, but with changing demographics, institutional histories, and professional shifts. Passionate partners in all the major movements in the area, never static, always in flux, Jewish Charlestonians are inscribed in the landscape of the old port city with streets, parks, schools, and municipal buildings named for famous members of the tribe.



*On April 16, 2018, the stretch of King Street between Mary and Reid streets was dedicated as Sokol Family Block by Mayor John Tecklenburg and members of city council, in honor of the family that had been in business at 510 King Street from 1919 to 2015. L to r: Freida Sokol, Mayor John Tecklenburg, Joe Sokol, and the Sokols' grandsons Elliot Nakios (holding the street sign) and Theo Nakios. Photo by Dale Rosengarten.*

1979

Emanu-El dedicates a new synagogue on Windsor Drive, west of the Ashley.



Photos courtesy of Synagogue Emanu-El.



*Emanu-El, post-renovation, 2019.*

1984



The College of Charleston initiates a Jewish studies program as a result of a gift by Henry and Sylvia Yaschik (above), matched by Norman and Gerry Sue Arnold (below).



1994

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina is organized and headquartered at the College of Charleston.



*JHSSC founding members, October 1998.*

1995



The Jewish Heritage Collection is established in Special Collections at the College of Charleston. Its first big exhibition project, “A Portion of the People,” premiered at USC's McKissick Museum in 2002. JHC's founding curator, Dale Rosengarten, holds her 2003 Governor's Archives Award, presented by the South Carolina State Historical Records Advisory Board.

1999

Holocaust Memorial on Marion Square is dedicated on June 6<sup>th</sup>.



2002

An independent Orthodox minyan begins meeting west of the Ashley, using facilities on the JCC campus.

Construction of the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center at the College of Charleston is completed. Photo by Reese Moore/College of Charleston.





## “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](http://jhssc.org/contest)



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

The 2021 contest will open in January. Go to [jhssc.org/contest](http://jhssc.org/contest) or follow us on Facebook for updates.

## Change and Challenge

by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

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

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

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

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

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

If you have an idea to contribute or would like to volunteer your time, please email me at [rgbarnettsc@gmail.com](mailto:rgbarnettsc@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 Arnovitz, Atlanta, GA  
Rachel and Henry Barnett, Columbia, SC  
Doris L. Baumgarten, Aiken, SC  
Harold Brody, Atlanta, GA  
Alan and Rosemary “Binky” Cohen, Charleston, SC  
Alex and Dyan Cohen, Darlington, 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 Meddin Hellman, Charleston, SC  
Alan and Charlotte Kahn, Columbia, SC  
Jerry and Sue Kline, Columbia, SC  
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Susan Pearlstine Norton, Charleston, SC  
Andrew and Mary Poliakoff, Spartanburg, SC  
Edward and Sandra Poliakoff, Columbia, SC  
Alan and Anne Reynier, Columbia, SC  
Deborah Ritter, Columbia, SC  
Benedict 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  
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  
Haskell and Dale Toporek, Augusta, GA  
Anita Zucker, Charleston, SC

### Foundational Pillars

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

### Of Blessed Memory

Betty Brody  
Harold and Carolee Rosen Fox  
Harvey and Mimi Gleberman  
Ruth Brody Greenberg  
Ronald and Anne Oxler Krancer  
Isadore Lourie  
Raymond Rosenblum  
Raymond and Florence Stern  
Raphael and Lois Wolpert  
Jerry Zucker

2012

The West Ashley Minyan (WAM) formally organizes as a new Modern Orthodox congregation, Dor Tikvah.



The Jewish Community Center campus on Raoul Wallenberg is sold and the Center rebrands as JCC Without Walls.

2015

First classes are held in Addlestone Hebrew Academy's new building.



Photo by Jack Alterman.

2016

Rosenblum Coe Architects



Congregation Dor Tikvah opens in its newly remodeled and redecorated facility on the former JCC campus.

Photo © John D. Smoak/SmoakStack Studios.

A kosher/vegan/vegetarian dining hall opens at the

College of Charleston. Named for Martin Perlmutter, director of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program from 1991 to 2018, Marty's Place anchors the expansion of the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center.

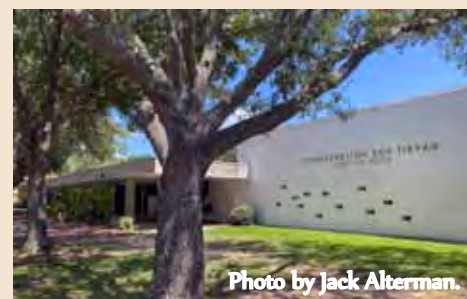


Photo by Jack Alterman.

2018

Chabad breaks ground on the Charleston Center for Jewish Life.



Photo by Jack Alterman.





THE  
JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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You may purchase or renew your JHSSC membership online. Go to [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org), click on Support and then choose your membership category.

2021 Annual Dues (Jan.-Dec.)

_____ Individual/Family/Gift	\$54
_____ Friend	\$200
_____ Patron	\$500
_____ Benefactor	\$1000
_____ Pillar (\$1,000 per year for 5 years)	\$5,000

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.





# THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

Volume XXVI Number 1 ~ Spring 2021







THE  
JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
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OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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Alyssa Neely, assistant editor  
and designer

The magazine is published twice a year. Current and back issues can be found at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org)

On the cover, top: A conversation via Zoom with Adam Domby, assistant professor of history at the College of Charleston, about his recent book, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory*, November 10, 2020. Sponsored by the Yashik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program. Bottom: JHSSC's first in a series of virtual workshops, led by architectural historian Samuel Gruber, on "How to Document Your Synagogue (and Other Buildings) for Planning, Protection, and Posterity," March 21, 2021.

## In this issue

**The Best Laid Plans Laid to Rest ~ Nancy Polinsky Johnson** ~ JHSSC founding members Arline and Gerald Polinsky were among the victims of the coronavirus in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. The Polinskys lived in Columbia, South Carolina, for 45 years and lost their lives to a contagion that negated their last wishes and upended the family's burial and mourning customs. A daughter shares the heartbreaking story and tells how she found solace. .... 4

**Reinventing Judaism ~ Rabbi Stephanie M. Alexander** ~ Restrictions on gatherings imposed because of the pandemic have presented synagogues and their leadership with new challenges, from mastering the latest technology to re-thinking rites of passage. The results? 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. .... 6

**A View from the Trenches: A Teacher's Testimony ~ Marla Kranick Palmer** ~ The demands of teaching high schoolers in person during a pandemic amplify the usual concerns and introduce new preoccupations, such as keeping teens physically separated and teaching simultaneously in a classroom and online. Exhaustion and worry are constant. If I go to work, I may get sick. If I don't go to work, I'll lose my job. When will life return to normal? .... 8

**Pediatrics in a Pandemic ~ Deborah Greenhouse, M.D.** ~ Medical professionals in this year of COVID have been subject to unrelenting stress, with concern for their patients at the forefront. This pediatrician sounds the alarm about the effects of the crisis on the health of children. Many are not coming in for routine medical care and growing numbers are suffering from anxiety and depression. .... 9

**Torah and Geriatrics in a Time of COVID ~ David Greenhouse, M.D.** ~ One expects to confront death in a long-term care facility, and one expects to take precautions against the spread of viruses like the flu, but the pandemic has brought vigilance to new heights and the well-being of residents to new lows. As this geriatrician notes, a visit to a nursing home by one person puts everyone at risk—the staff, his patients, and their family members. .... 10

**Wait and See ~ Yaron Ayalon** ~ The director of the College of Charleston's Jewish Studies Program describes his faculty and staff's return to campus in June 2020, and the students' return to "hybrid" classes in September. Undaunted by the pandemic, the program has proceeded full steam ahead with its mission, recruiting new students, bringing on new hires, and sponsoring public events via Zoom with virtual attendance exceeding the usual in-person numbers. The proof is in the pudding: the popularity of the Jewish Studies major continues to grow. .... 11

**My COVID Bar Mitzvah ~ Max Raynes** ~ Some say timing is everything. The author's May 2020 bar mitzvah was not to be. Postponement to fall 2020 led to disappointment again. With his sights set on May 2021, this young man says he will go forward with the ceremony even if it has to be virtual. In the meanwhile, remembering his "rehearsal" in Israel in December 2019, on a family trip arranged by his grandparents, makes him feel lucky and well-loved. .... 13

**A Memorable Bat Mitzvah ~ Rory Shaina Lipson** ~ Like dominoes falling, this young woman's April 2020 bat mitzvah plans toppled in rapid succession after the global threat of COVID-19 was made public. A ceremony in Israel was rescheduled for a domestic destination—Brunswick, Georgia—then plans shifted again to the family's shul in Atlanta, and finally the event was held "virtually," broadcast via Zoom from the hallway of the Lipson house. As it turned out, Rory was a trend setter, and she was happy she stuck with her Torah portion. .... 14

**Uncharted Territory ~ Rachel G. Barnett** ~ In these unprecedented times, the Society has chosen to devote this issue of the magazine to how the pandemic has affected the lives of several individuals who agreed to share their stories. Thanks to the wonders of technology and the strength of its membership, JHSSC continues to educate, inform, and preserve. .... 15



## 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.

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 hurrah for these two past presidents who have made this difficult year easier for us all.

Thanks also to another past president, Jeffrey Rosenblum, 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

## JHSSC Sponsors New Historic Marker



Spandrel Development Partners and Armada Hoffer Properties, builders of student apartments called Hoffer Place at 595 King Street in downtown Charleston, worked with the city and state to recognize the Lincoln Theatre, an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre for African Americans that once stood on the property and was demolished after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The company hired BVL Historic Preservation Research to document the history of the theatre as well as the Jewish immigrant neighborhood known to locals as Little Jerusalem in which the theatre was located. The developers asked JHSSC to sponsor the project, and in February 2021, a state historic marker commemorating both the Lincoln Theatre and Little Jerusalem was installed in front of the new building. Photos courtesy of Armada Hoffer Properties.





# 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 scribbled notes in my mother's lovely handwriting. Her first notation is, "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 seders over the years have sprigs of those flowers peeking up in the foreground.

Other funeral wishes and instructions were outlined in documents my parents filled out when they pre-arranged for their funerals in 2012 and during conversations they had with me and my sister, Joanna, over the years. Mum wanted to be buried in the white suit she wore to her youngest grandson's bar mitzvah. Daddy thought his navy suit would be most appropriate and wanted as little fuss made as possible. Both wanted the ritual cleansing of *tahara*.

In the end, none of their wishes mattered.

On the day they were buried, there had been no cleansing. There were no special clothes. And there were no roses in shades of peach and pink. Arline and Gerald Polinsky were buried in the hospital gowns they were wearing when they were zipped into body bags after dying four hours apart at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, Florida. Cause of death: COVID-19.

It was April 2020, the early days of the coronavirus pandemic here in the United States, and gatherings everywhere were limited to ten people. So, when my family arrived at the Columbia Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery, the caskets had already been lowered into the ground to eliminate the need for two people to be present to perform that task.



Arline Furman and Gerald Polinsky's wedding day, Boston, MA, December 26, 1955.



Gerald Polinsky, Voorhees College, 1973.

I actually caught my breath when I first looked down into the large grave hole and saw the two caskets sitting side by side, six feet below. Suddenly tears were welling up in my eyes, and I'll confess that, of all the thoughts running through my mind at that moment, the predominant one was that my beautiful mother—a woman who took the utmost care to always look her best—was being laid to rest in a hospital gown, her hair unbrushed, wearing no lipstick. Frankly, the idea of it would have killed her if the coronavirus had not.

But the surroundings offered comfort. Spring breezes were blowing and the sun was shining on the nearly 200-year-old cemetery with its weathered brick walls. It was as if God was saying, "Welcome home."

Mummy and Daddy had lived in Columbia, South Carolina, for 45 years, having moved there in 1968 so Daddy could take a position teaching history at Voorhees College, a historically Black college in the small town of Denmark, about an hour's drive from the Capital City. It was decided early on that Daddy would make the daily commute so he and Mum could live and raise their two girls in a city with a substantial Jewish community. Committed to Reform Judaism, they immediately joined Tree of Life Congregation, led at the time by Rabbi James Apple. They soon became active members of both the Jewish community and the community at large—particularly Mummy, since Daddy was out of town all day and arrived home late because of his commute.

In the 1970s, Mummy co-chaired Columbia's first Symphony Designer Showhouse, and she continued to add to the region's vibrancy in the decades that followed, founding the Tree of Life Jewish Food Festival and serving on the organizing committee and as a charter member of EdVenture Children's Museum.

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 Lourie, 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 games, dinner parties, and life cycle events. Now that Mum and Daddy have returned to the city and are in their final resting place, they lie 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 there. 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 fashion, 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.



Arline Polinsky lighting candles, Passover, 1999.



The Polinsky family's last gathering in Columbia, SC, December 2013. L to r, seated: Gerald and Arline Polinsky, their sons-in-law, David Johnson and Eli Berens. Standing: grandson Samuel Berens, daughter Joanna Berens, grandsons Michael and Eric Johnson, and daughter Nancy Johnson. All photos courtesy of Nancy Polinsky Johnson.



# Reinventing Judaism

by Rabbi Stephanie M. Alexander

I have the honor of serving as rabbi at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina—or 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'hilah 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, not merely as a prefix, 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 (gulp) 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.



*Above: Shula Holtz records a High Holiday Torah Reading on the bimah at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE) in advance of Rosh Hashanah, September 2020. Below: Jason Gould celebrates his bar mitzvah in KKBE's sanctuary with immediate family in attendance, and many more friends and family on Zoom, November 21, 2020. Photos: Mark Swick.*



Yet at least those things we could “reinvent.” How were we supposed to comfort the sick when we weren’t allowed to go to their bedsides? 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 b’nai 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 even 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 refrain from embracing when we know for certain this is one time when we are meant to embrace. Yet technology has enabled more people than would ordinarily be able to gather in person to “participate” in funeral services, and there’s something to be said for being embraced by dozens or hundreds of loved ones, while simultaneously having an intimate and deeply personal graveside experience, as well.

I have enjoyed watching the creative ways in which “chat” and “comment” features on various technology platforms allow participants to offer their congratulations and encouragement, gratitude and support during the course of a shared worship experience without disrupting it. We may

not be able to throw candy at the conclusion of a bar or bat mitzvah or lift a bride or groom up on a chair, but somehow the rapid-fire “Great job!” comments feel just as sweet, and the cacophony of “mazel tovs” once everyone is unmuted even sweeter.

And there have been other silver linings, too: Congregants who have moved away are able 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.



*Above: Larry Lipov and Eileen Fried pose with a table full of offerings available during KKBE's Virtual Nosh, November 2020. Below: Mark Swick and Larry Lipov greet congregants, friends, and customers as they pick up their Nosh To-Go orders. Photos: Irene Gilbert.*





## 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 wearing a mask under one's nose does not protect anyone, the hardest part of my job was the ongoing need to separate students who wanted to be close to their friends. High schoolers are very physical: they want to hug and grip each other's hands, etc. I felt more like a social distancing coach, whose primary job was to keep students apart, than I felt like a teacher.

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, 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.

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 lunch hour, especially once the weather turned colder. The school first tried dividing students up to eat in classrooms, as well as larger spaces in the school. But when they put 20 students in my classroom for two days in a row for 45-minute



Marla Palmer with her high school history class, Greenville, SC, 2020. Photo courtesy of the author.

periods—maskless, of course, because they were eating (and I had to eat too) and laughing and gathering in groups—I thought that if I did not contract the virus then, it would be a miracle. Thankfully, I did not.

Perhaps the most difficult part is how tired we all feel, all the time. I don't know if it's trying to get enough air through the masks to teach and engage with students or all the extra preparation required to meet so many needs in such a strange environment, but I feel as if I am always working and never able to catch up. To some extent, that is perennially true of

educators who love what they do and strive to be better, but it seems especially true this year.

Finally, although vaccine distribution has begun, it is not clear how or when things will return to "normal." That is something we all are living with, old and young, rich and poor. It is a strange thing to think that there is nowhere in the world we could go right now that is untouched by this public health crisis, but in a sense that is comforting too. We are all in this together. We suffer as a community, and as a community, G-d willing, we can also heal.

## Pediatrics in a Pandemic

by Deborah Greenhouse, M.D.

During the summer of 2019, 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.

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 continues to this day.

How did we get here? In Leviticus 19:18 we are taught, "Love your neighbor



Dr. Deborah Greenhouse making a "car visit," wearing face shield and mask and carrying supplies, 2020. Photo courtesy of the author.



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 dwindles” 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.

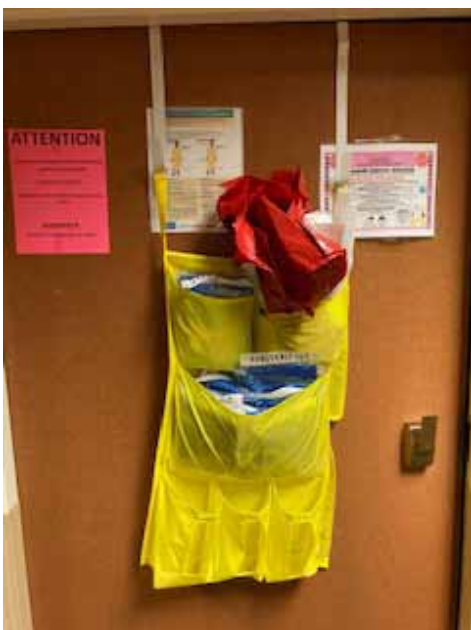
Despite frequent testing and infection control measures, the virus still manages to find new hosts. Like a smoldering ash, one became three became seven became twenty. Any family member who visits puts her

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 looked to us for inspiration on how to keep safe.

Vaccines have arrived at nursing facilities and new infections have been cut in half. Vaccine hesitancy among staff is still a barrier. We are so close to getting back to normal that now is not the time to let our guard down.



*Left: Dr. David Greenhouse dressed in personal protective equipment (PPE), preparing to see a new patient at one of his nursing facilities. Right: COVID-precautions signs and PPE supplies cover this door to a patient’s room. Photos courtesy of David Greenhouse.*



## 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 uninterruptedly 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.

And so, we set out to make this work, and make it work we did. We experimented with technological setups to optimize communications in and outside the classroom. We served to-go meals behind plexiglass dividers instead of the traditional sit-down dinners. We spent hours talking (on the phone and Zoom) to prospective students and their parents. We hosted significantly more events than in ordinary times, taking advantage of Zoom’s capability of bringing together people from all over the country and abroad, and engaging hundreds more people than we previously did. And we took time to strategize for when the pandemic subsides.

Our program also went through some changes that would affect us in the long term. In late August, we welcomed Dr.



*The pandemic forced College of Charleston Hillel to offer take-out only for all its meals. Masked and socially distanced, these students picked up their food in the lobby of the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center during the 2020 fall and 2021 spring semesters. Photos courtesy of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, College of Charleston.*





Ashley Walters, an expert in American Jewish history, who in January replaced Dr. Dale Rosengarten as director of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. That month, Kim Browdy joined us as our Associate Director for Community Relations. In a few months, our team will grow again, as another faculty member, (soon to be Dr.) Chad Gibbs, joins us as the Director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies. Chad will teach courses and position our program as a national leader in the area of the Holocaust.

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



*Ashley Walters teaching 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 second major any student can pursue. It is made up largely of electives, makes one stand out in a competitive job market, works with almost any other major/minor combination, 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 program with the highest number of majors nationwide. Just wait and see.

to those in quarantine; working with the Office of Admissions on recruiting Jewish students to the College; reshaping 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 here may not be too obvious. But you will notice them once the pandemic is over. Just wait and see.

## My COVID Bar Mitzvah

*by Max Raynes*

In May 2020, I was to become a bar mitzvah, but six months before that, in December 2019, my maternal grandparents, Lilly and Bruce Filler, took my family and me to Israel for an intergenerational tour and bar mitzvah ceremony with nine other families. Since it was my bar mitzvah year, I was eager to go on this trip.

On the morning of the ceremony, we woke up early to get to Masada to watch the sunrise. The bright blue backdrop with dashes of orange and red across the sky was like a painting, and I’ll never forget it. The bar mitzvah, led by an Israeli rabbi, began shortly after we arrived. I dreaded reciting my Torah verse, even though I had spent a lot of time studying it, but I was also very excited to be bar mitzvah’d in Israel. This was an accomplishment for me because I was finally recognized as an adult in the Jewish faith and I knew it meant a lot to my family.

Throughout that fall and winter, my parents and I had been making plans for my bar mitzvah in May in Redlands, California, where I live. By mid-March we realized we couldn’t hold the ceremony because a deadly virus was spreading across the United States. I was relieved because I knew there were hours and hours of preparation ahead of me, but I was disappointed, too, because my bar mitzvah is very important to me and my family. My parents postponed the date to October 2020, but we had to delay it yet again because COVID-19 was still surging. I began to wonder if it would ever happen, and if my Israeli bar mitzvah would be THE bar mitzvah.

As of now, my long-awaited celebration has been rescheduled for May 2021. My cantor and I have joked multiple times about how I might finally have my bar mitzvah when I am 20! All kidding aside, if it is still too dangerous to have an in-person bar mitzvah in May, we will hold it virtually. I have had different feelings each time my bar mitzvah has been postponed, but this time will be the last, so I know I will have to study before that date, and my Israeli experience will be the foundation.

This year will be memorable because my bar mitzvah was postponed twice due to the pandemic. But I am lucky to have had a bar mitzvah in Israel, and to be free to practice my religion. As a great-grandchild of Holocaust survivors, I know I am fortunate to reach bar mitzvah age and to be recognized and loved by my family.

*Top: Max Raynes leads the introductory prayers prior to the bar mitzvah ceremony held for him and nine others at the ancient and historic fortress Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea in Israel, December 2019. Right: Max is surrounded by family during his recitation from the Torah. L to r: Rabbi Oded Mazor, Max’s grandparents Bruce and Lilly Stern Filler, parents Derek and Rachael L. Raynes, and sister Josephine “Josie” Raynes. Photos courtesy of Lilly Filler.*





## 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 a virus 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 a happy occasion. My parents and I sent out virtual invitations and created an online Siddur, a ceremony booklet, and a film location in the hallway of my house!

One challenge was technology, especially since using Zoom was new to so many of us. We had to continuously remind our guests, especially members of the older generation, how to use mute. Zoom was definitely a different experience than I imagined, but it was historic. One positive was I was less nervous because I wasn't standing in front of a large audience. My rabbi, Adam Starr, gave a D'var Torah (a lesson from the Torah) at the end of the service and said, "This is a bat mitzvah I will never forget," and my family feels the same.

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.



*Rory Lipson, accompanied by her parents, Aaron and Leslie Kulbersh Lipson, and her older sibling, Kay Lipson, was a trendsetter, conducting her bat mitzvah over the internet via Zoom videoconferencing software, April 2020, after the coronavirus pandemic made meeting in person unsafe. Photos courtesy of the Lipson family.*

## 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 meet in person 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](mailto: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 [fowlerj@cofc.edu](mailto:fowlerj@cofc.edu).

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The magazine is published twice a year. Current and back issues can be found at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org)

*On the cover: Lilly Zalkin Bebergal in the doorway of Zalkin's Meat Market, 535 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 propping 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.*

## 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 prides 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 45<sup>th</sup> 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 and staff found opportunity in the face of adversity, recording oral history interviews over Zoom and publishing them online. .... 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 Obrochta ~** Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives in Richmond, Virginia, opened in 1977 as the archival repository for congregations Beth Ahabah (est. 1841) and Beth Shalom (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 reexamination of Beth Ahabah's historical ties to slavery and the Confederacy. .... 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 assist in preserving "orphaned" objects—ritual items from defunct synagogues, store signs too large for an archive, etc. This year the Society helped repatriate a memorial tablet that once hung in Temple Beth El in Rock Hill and is now working to document the bygone congregation and a family burial ground unknown to us before. .... 19



## 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 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 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 the Society's executive board and to Jewish Studies Director Yaron Ayalon and JHSSC Director of Operations Enid 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

pry 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 attract 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 also 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 Walters, Assistant Professor in Jewish Studies and Director of the Pearlstone/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 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 who 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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## 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 puts it, or dramatic climatic transformations that force us to reevaluate the ways we have lived and what we must do in the future.

William Obrochta’s Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives in Richmond confronts issues of difficult history—specifically, the congregation’s relation to the racial order of the past. We must reckon with history, both the bad and the good. In “Kugels & Collards,” Rachel Barnett and Lyssa Harvey demonstrate how Jewish interactions with southern society can be documented through a focus on foodways. And paying attention to the present, Nora Katz and Josh Parshall at Mississippi’s Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) note the historic value of their own records.

The ISJL and other Jewish archives have turned toward documenting their constituents’ lived experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this and other ways, southern repositories are part of a wider phenomenon of community-based archives. The term, which has been popularized in archival circles over the past 15 years, refers to efforts, often undertaken by minority groups, to possess their own history by establishing local archives and determining how their stories should be told. The gist is: everyone has a history, and it belongs not in the control of state archives or centralized repositories, but in one’s own hands.

As Jews have come to understand the importance of preserving their past, historical records have grown

in meaning and value. Southern Jewish archives mirror the continuing impulses of what I have dubbed a “time to gather” in modern Jewish culture, when Jews have sought to bring together the sources and resources of Jewish life in diverse and exciting ways.

While southern archives are part of the bigger picture, they present unique opportunities to expand the record of Jewish history, too. Since the 1980s, one thrust of the “archival turn”



*Above: Sisterhood convention in Savannah, GA, with Ahavas Chesed delegation in attendance, 1955. Congregation Ahavas Chesed Papers, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama. Below: Contact sheet of photographs taken by Bill Aron in 1992 at Temple Agudath Achim in Little Rock, AR. Institutional History Archive, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.*



## of Southern Jewish History? *by Jason Lustig*

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 record and remember voices left out of the historical narrative? Attempts to document servants and enslaved people in Jewish households, and also Jews of color, represent a welcome movement to broaden our perspective, and a shift away from archives as celebratory monuments toward critical engagement with difficult aspects of our history.

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 vigorous 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, teach, 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. Archives that document the Jewish South face tremendous opportunities and, as demonstrated in the pages that follow, have the institutional diversity to innovate, explore, and broaden the archive of southern Jewish history.



*Above: Party for Carolee Rosen’s first birthday, Asheville, NC, 1931. Below: Commemorative quilt, created in 1998–99 by eighth graders studying the Holocaust at Gregg Middle School, Summerville, SC. The quilt, now part of the Jerry and Anita Zucker Holocaust Collection, resides at the Charleston County Public Library. Images courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



*Jason Lustig is a Lecturer and Israel Institute Teaching Fellow at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies, University of Texas at Austin, and author of A Time to Gather: Archives and the Control of Jewish Culture, forthcoming from Oxford University Press in November 2021. He is also the host and producer of the Jewish History Matters podcast, which is online at [www.jewishhistory.fm](http://www.jewishhistory.fm).*





Top to bottom: JHSSC tour of historic sites, Charleston, SC, October 1998. Display case, A Portion of the People, Yeshiva University Museum, 2003. Photo: Nico Sardet. Mindelle Seltzer (l) and Dale Rosengarten interviewing Raymond Stern in the shoe department of his store, Stern's, in Andrews, SC, March 1995. Photo: Norton Seltzer. All images courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.

## 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 Breibart; 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 heirlooms, including portraits and miniatures, and mundane items like a bar of kosher soap. 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

by Dale Rosengarten

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.

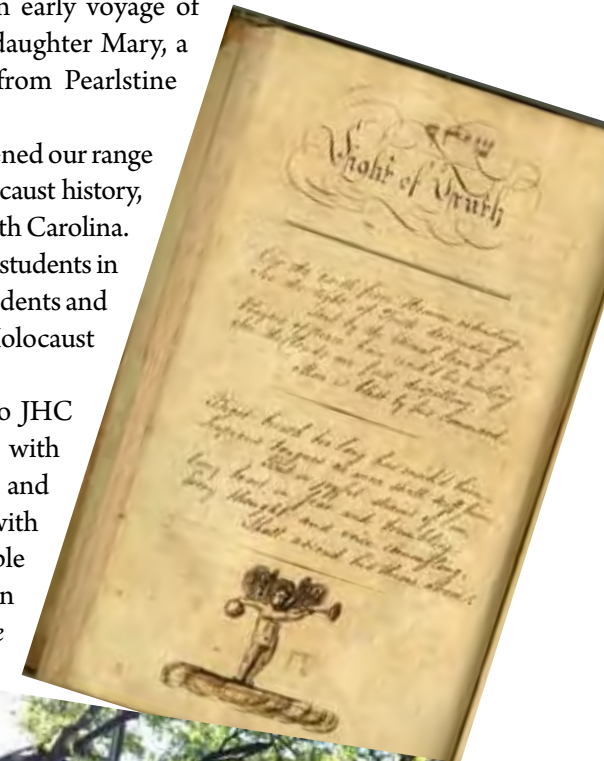
In JHC's manuscript archives, alongside such priceless items as Isaac Harby's handwritten prayer book and a first edition of Penina Moïse's hymnal, documents of everyday life occupy pride of place: family papers and photographs, diaries, memoirs, scrapbooks, correspondence, cookbooks, congregational 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 bancas (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 19<sup>th</sup>-century wimpel, Sonny Goldberg's apron, and advertising paraphernalia from Pearlstine Distributors. Hard as we looked, however, 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 CofC 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 CofC'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 CofC 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 chosen 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



Page from manuscript prayer book written by Isaac Harby, ca. 1825. Special Collections, College of Charleston. Harlan Greene leads scholars on a walking tour of Charleston, SC, for the NEH summer institute, "Privilege and Prejudice: Jewish History in the American South," May 2019. Photo: Dale Rosengarten.



individuals—especially women—who were not necessarily movers and shakers but were representative of social and demographic trends. With help from ace property researcher Sarah Fick, we pulled narrative material and quantifiable data from our archival holdings and secondary sources, and from public records such as censuses, city directories, Sanborn maps, registers of real estate transactions, wills, newspaper accounts, and advertisements. We fashioned this “thick description” into short, illustrated entries pinpointed on the relevant maps, now accessible through portable technology outside the quiet solemnity of the reading room.

Over the past quarter century, we have done a lot to broadcast South Carolina’s rich Jewish heritage. Our goal ahead is to tell a more comprehensive story. We can do this by “expanding the archives” and acknowledging that museum exhibitions and archival collections privilege the privileged, that silver tea services, miniature portraits, and carefully crafted objects of Judaica are more likely to come to rest in a vitrine or vault than the less dazzling material legacies of the poor.

We are proud to celebrate Jews who joined freedom fighters not only in Mississippi, but in Sumter County and Greenville, South Carolina. Yet while we are mindful that color is only one basis for discrimination, we must be forthright about Jewish complicity in the institution of slavery and the oppressive regimes of Jim Crow and segregation. For our oral history archives, we want to record more voices from outside the community. We want to hear from the Black women and men who worked in

Jewish kitchens, stores, and synagogues. We want to record younger people. We want to seek out Jews of color, Jews who identify as LGBTQ, and secular Jews who are underrepresented in our database. We want to document incidents of antisemitism,

collecting, 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 Jewish 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.*



*Archivist Sarah Dorpinghaus and intern Gillian Rogers sort postcards from the Rosenthal Judaica Collection in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 2011. Photo: Leslie McKellar/College of Charleston.*

## From Broom Closet to Industry Leader

*by Jeremy Katz, Senior Director of Archives*

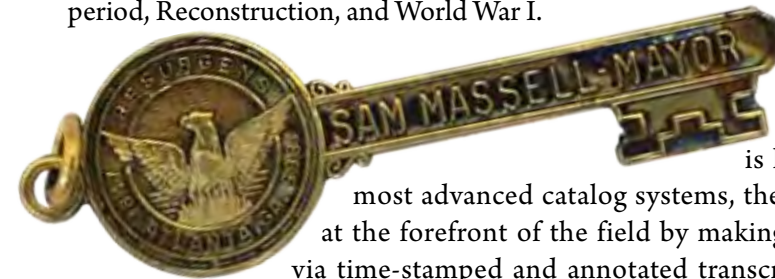
What started in the mid-1980s as the Jewish Community Archives in a closet at the Atlanta Jewish Federation (now the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta) has since grown into the largest repository for Jewish history in the Southeast. Known today as the Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern 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 region, preserve evidence 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 LGBTQ 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.

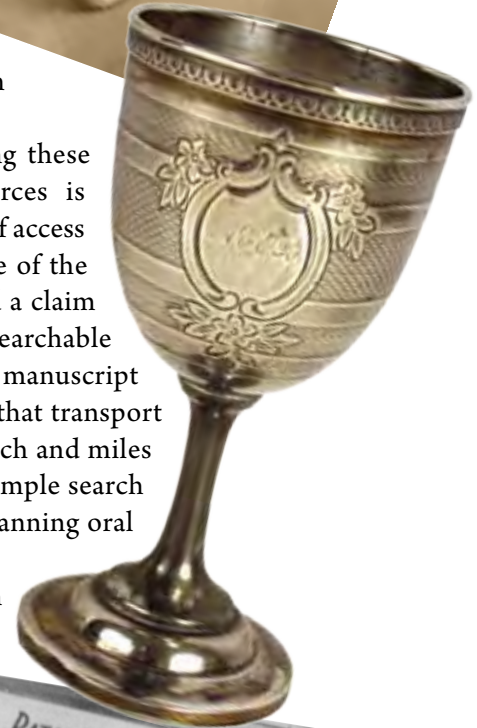


Growing and preserving these rich and expansive resources is vital, but the work is in vain if access is limited. Taking full advantage of the most advanced catalog systems, the Breman Museum has staked a claim at the forefront of the field by making audiovisual materials text searchable via time-stamped 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](http://www.thebreman.org).

*Jeremy Katz is the immediate past Senior Director of Archives at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, and author of The Jewish Community of Atlanta (Arcadia Publishing, 2021). He recently accepted the position of Archivist at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York.*

*From top: Rhoda Kaufman (1888–1956), likely on left, and her sister Bernice, Columbus, GA, no date. Kiddush cup given to Emilie Baer 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](http://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 Kligman 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 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Theatre
- Michael Hoberman (Fitchburg State University) ~ Did You Ever Hear of Judah Benjamin? Fictional Representations of the Jewish Confederate

**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 Emanu-El 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

## 45<sup>th</sup> 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

### Sunday, October 24



With generous support from Nelson Mullins

**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 (Tulane 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 Kowboys: 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



Laura 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 *Messianism, 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.



Stephen 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.



## Saving History after Harvey

by Joshua Furman

Over 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



*Above: Joshua Furman, September 2017, assisting with recovery of Beth Yeshurun congregational records from the devastating flooding left behind by Hurricane Harvey. Photo: Michael Duke, Jewish Herald-Voice. Below: Beth Jacob World War II service banner donated after the owner learned Furman was "collecting Houston Jewish history." It was restored with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Photo: Jeff Fitlow, Rice University.*



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.

*Joshua Furman is Associate Director of Jewish Studies and Curator of the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University.*

## Jewish Mobile's Narrow Bridge

by Deborah Gurt

Mobile, Alabama, is home to a Jewish community formally established in 1841, when members purchased land for a burial ground. Approximately 1,000 in number, today's Jewish residents are deeply entwined with the fabric of the city—in business, education, medicine, and civic life. Among them are Holocaust survivors and their descendants, families who have lived here for generations, Jews of color, transplants from the North, LGBTQ Jews, and converts to Judaism, unified primarily by their experiences as members of a religious and cultural minority in Alabama.

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



*In his interview, Donald Zivitz describes Jackie Robinson's 1951 visit to his father's store, which was located on Davis Avenue in the heart of Mobile's Black community. Image courtesy of Donald Zivitz, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama.*



a recalibration of expectations. The mode of interviewing was shifted to virtual, using a podcasting platform. Student intern Abigayle Edler, rather than participating in communal activities, found herself editing interview transcripts and joining Zoom events and services. The culminating public event planned for November is, however, currently expected to be in person, and we hope it will bring a festive closure to the work.

To date, 25 interviews have been completed and a handful are upcoming. Interviewees include members of Mobile's Reform congregation, Springhill Avenue Temple; the Conservative synagogue, Ahavas Chesed; plus a few unaffiliated and non-Jewish but deeply engaged friends of the community. Mobile has an unusual array of cooperative organizations that bridge religious divides, notably the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue and the Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education. Several narrators are converts to Judaism who brought perspectives on communal life that reflect a genuine grappling with questions of identity more easily ignored by Jews by birth. In some instances, these narrators expressed great enthusiasm for Jewish life and practice that is notably missing in other interviews. A general pessimism was evident among many older narrators.

Patrick Crabtree, who identifies as a gay man, referred repeatedly to his "home" synagogue, Bet Haverim in Atlanta, which was founded by and for LGBTQ Jews. He discussed the activism of Rabbi Josh Lesser as something

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 JMOHP 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 21<sup>st</sup>-century American landscape.

*Deborah Gurt is Assistant Librarian and Interim Director of the McCall Library at the University of South Alabama and President of Congregation Ahavas Chesed in Mobile.*

## Pursuing Justice

*by William Obrochta*

The Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives in Richmond, Virginia, was established in 1977 by an agreement between Congregation Beth Ahabah and the Museum and Archives Trust. The purpose of the Trust is to provide for the care, maintenance, and safekeeping of the congregation's museum and archives collection, promote its availability, and provide access to its members and the general public.

Initially, the Museum & Archives focused on preserving the papers and ritual objects of Kahal Kadosh (K.K.) Beth Shalom, founded in 1789, the sixth-oldest congregation in the United States, and its successor K.K. Beth Ahabah, established in 1841 by German immigrants who, unlike the members of Beth Shalom, followed Ashkenazic tradition. Almost immediately the Museum & Archives began collecting materials from

Jewish organizations, businesses, and families throughout the Richmond area.

In 1983, the Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives officially opened to the public in a free-standing building owned by Congregation Beth Ahabah. Since then, our publications and exhibitions have concentrated on the history of Richmond's Jewish population and on Jewish practice in general. Our most recent exhibition, *Beyond the Temple Walls*, showcases the contributions of the city's Jews, through their chosen pursuits in the fields of health care, government, education, social work, and the arts, to the lives of all people in Richmond.

The Museum & Archives has enlarged the scope of southern Jewish history not so much by expanding our collecting protocols, but rather by looking at our collections with fresh eyes and asking different questions.

Richmond's Black Lives Matter protests and the effort to remove the city's Confederate monuments took place a few blocks from the museum. In fact, the congregation's administrative building was vandalized when a protest in May 2020 turned violent. These confrontations led to a good deal of soul searching and prompted Beth Ahabah's Brit Olam (Social Justice) Committee to ask the Museum & Archives to survey its records to get a better understanding of the historic relationship between the African American and Jewish communities. Specifically, the committee asked the museum to research 20 events in the modern civil rights era and examine the Jewish community's response. The committee is using this information to help guide the congregation's discussions about the appropriateness of several Civil War memorials in the Temple.

Another area of concern is Jewish Richmond's support of slavery. The Museum & Archives' genealogical records have helped several African American researchers trace their ancestry to enslaved women owned by Jews. Several of these individuals are descended from Isaac Judah, the first reader (hazzan) at Beth Shalom.

The Museum & Archives also maintains the records of the Hebrew Cemetery, which may contain African American burials in a portion of the graveyard the city of Richmond sold to the cemetery at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Staff members have given tours and talked with groups that include



*Postcard images of the Hebrew Confederate Soldiers Cemetery, 1900, (top) and Beth Ahabah Synagogue, 1924, in Richmond, VA. William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

descendants of individuals buried in what once was the Second African Burial Ground. Our archives assisted a local historian who worked with community activists to place a historical marker at the site. The marker was approved in mid-June 2021.

The Museum & Archives continues to work with the Brit Olam committee and community groups to come to a better understanding of our shared past and how we use that past to inform our actions in the future.

*William Obrochta is Executive Director of Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives.*



## 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 Waites, 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 submissions from members of the local community. HC Research Director Katharine Allen would provide historical assistance, investigating food stories from Columbia's past.

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 Pearlstine Wolff 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,



**Above:** Lyssa Harvey (l) and Rachel Barnett in a field of broccoli at Clayton Rawl Farms, Lexington, SC, January 2021. **Below:** Renowned cookbook author Joan Nathan shares culinary tips in the kitchen of Richland Library Northeast, Columbia, SC, February 2019. **Photo:** Megan Plott. *Courtesy of Historic Columbia.*



by Rachel Gordin Barnett and Lyssa Kligman Harvey

with regional specialties such as collard greens, black eye peas, rice and gravy, and fried chicken coexisting alongside brisket, tzimmes, 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 *treif*. 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 Moïse family that arrived in Charleston in 1791, we received a rum cake recipe that harkens to their 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 mélange 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 by the College of Charleston's 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.

Rhetta 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.

Rachel Gordin Barnett and Lyssa Kligman Harvey are authors of the food blog *Kugels & Collards*.

**Top to bottom:** Annie Gailliard (1904-2003). **Photo:** Lynda Denberg. **Lyssa Harvey's rendition of Mrs. Gailliard's okra gumbo.**

**Rose Louise Rich Aronson and her kugel recipe were featured in The Times and Democrat, Orangeburg, SC, July 1986. Images courtesy of Kugels & Collards.**





## Through a Wide-Angle Lens

by Nora Katz and Josh Parshall

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 a core component 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 interest in 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 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary—we realized that our institutional records held significance 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, internal correspondence, publicity and marketing materials, recordings of events and 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.

*Nora Katz is Director of Heritage and Interpretation and Josh Parshall is Director of History at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.*



*Nora Katz, Director of Heritage and Interpretation (center), with History and Heritage interns Rose Steptoe and Mimi Brown in the ISJL Institutional History Archive, 2019. Courtesy of Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.*

## It Began with a Phone Call

by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

A phone call and an email set in motion a chain of events that led to a grand mitzvah. On April 30, 2021, Gary Kramer, originally from Whiteville, North Carolina, left a voice message for Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC) curator Dale Rosengarten 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 became clear later, but with Beth Israel disbanding 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 hails 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 JHSSC's *Documenting South Carolina's Synagogues* 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 why did the plaque go to Whiteville? One explanation involves family connections between Rock Hill and Whiteville. Another is the circuit-riding rabbi program, funded by Charlotte businessman and inventor I. D. Blumenthal, whose route included both towns.

## Pillars

Anonymous

Susan and Charles Altman, Charleston, SC  
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Rachel and Henry Barnett, Columbia, SC  
Harold Brody, Atlanta, GA  
Alan and Rosemary “Binky” Cohen, Charleston, SC  
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Jeffrey and Mickey Rosenblum, Charleston, SC  
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Stephen and Jennifer Savitz, Columbia, SC  
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Larry Simon, Isle of Palms, SC  
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Volume XXVII Number 1 ~ Spring 2022







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*A Keyserling excursion (1 to r), 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 Herzfeld Keyserling, Joe's wife; Rosalyn, William's daughter; and Leroy, Joe's younger son, ca. 1916. Courtesy of Paul Keyserling.*

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### From Blue Collars to Blue Serge Suits: Beaufort's Jewish Settlers ~ Dale Rosengarten ~

The sparse Jewish population of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-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 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were more than enough Jewish residents for a minyan, plus a healthy variety of tradesmen and businesspeople 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

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**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 South Carolina Jewish History & Heritage Campaign to create a joint endowment that will assure the pursuit of knowledge continues. . . . . 22

## 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.

JHSSC 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 Jeffery 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

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!

L'shalom,  
Alexander Cohen, M.D.  
JHSSC President



*Judy Kammer (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.*



# From Blue Collars to Blue Serge Suits: Beaufort's Jewish Settlers

by Dale Rosengarten, based on a talk delivered at the dedication of the Beth Israel historic marker, Beaufort, SC, January 12, 2014

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, and that remained true into modern times.

Saul and Hart Solomons, immigrants from Germany, moved to the vicinity in the early 1800s and became cotton agents in Savannah and Beaufort. Several members of the Sheftall family of Savannah lived and died in Beaufort. Meyer Jacobs, of England, was listed as an officer in the Beaufort Volunteer Artillery by 1825. Jacobs welcomed the Marquis de Lafayette to Beaufort that year, and six years later was elected mayor. In 1833, he represented St. Helena parish in the state legislature.

The man who would later become the Confederacy's most revered and reviled Jewish son, Judah P. Benjamin, came to

Beaufort for extended visits with his mother and sisters in the 1840s—bearing gifts of books and indulging in the dangerous sport of devil fishing with his “stout Negro companion,” by the name of Hannibal.

Which calls to mind a verse from a paean to Beaufort by 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.

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 Shoot” in November 1861, when Union troops occupied Port Royal Sound. In 1869, under Republican rule, Charles Kuh was elected to the South Carolina legislature (he was said to be a “most honest man” who had favored emancipating the slaves).



Permission pass for M[oritz] Pollitzer to land on Hilton Head Island, 1862, signed by Brigadier General Thomas West Sherman (1813–1879), who led Union land forces to victory in the Battle of Port Royal, after which Hilton Head became headquarters for the Department of the South. From the Anita Pollitzer Family Papers (24-26-01) at the South Carolina Historical Society.

Moritz Pollitzer operated the most productive cotton gin in town, and by 1871 was mayor of Beaufort. (It is interesting to note: Pollitzer's great-grandson Henry C. Chambers, a fourth-generation Beaufortonian, served as mayor from 1969 to 1990, and ran again, unsuccessfully, in 1999.)

In 1878, some 29 Jewish people were living in Beaufort. Over the next 50 years—during the era of mass immigration from Eastern Europe—the number increased four-fold. Early in this new wave came William Keyserling of Lithuania, who dreamed of becoming a farmer. But Jews were forbidden to own land in Lithuania so he immigrated to America in 1888, headed south towards an uncle in Walterboro, and settled in Beaufort, from where he sponsored the immigration of his mother, four brothers, and a niece and nephew. Starting as a cotton gin machinist, William became a business partner in MacDonald, Wilkins & Company. He and his wife, Jennie Hyman Keyserling, had four children, including Leon Keyserling, the renowned New Deal economist, who, in the tenth grade, won an award for an essay entitled “A Bigger, Better, More Beautiful Beaufort.” A framed copy hung in his office and, after his retirement, at his home.

By the early 1900s, Beaufort's main thoroughfare, Bay Street, supported many Jewish-owned stores. These days were vividly recalled by Joseph J. Lipton at a meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina many years ago. “My mother would take me as a very young child with her to the stores that lined Bay Street: Schein, Lipsitz, Mittle, Rudowitz, Rosenthal, Weinberg, Hirsch. It wasn't so much shopping as visiting. An interesting sight for me was to see Mr. Goldberg, a watch repairman, sitting in front of his establishment with Mr. Rubinowitz, the local Bolshevik, immersed in a game of chess. The required time clock was absent. One move on occasion took days. But then where was the urgency?”

Lipton's recollections are worthy of a *midrash* (a commentary on Hebrew scriptures).

In their number, he recalled, counting off the Jewish businesses, were tradesmen, artisans, and craftsmen: “Caspar Farbstein – electrician, Sam Levin – printer, Esau Levy – plumber, Abe Rudowitz, Sam Lipton – cobblers, Mr. Goldberg – watch repairman, Leopold Schoenberg – baker, the Keyserling brothers, William, Israel, J. B., Mark – farmers and merchants,

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. [At the time], 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.”



Joseph Lipton (b. 1923) and his mother Helen Stern Lipton, 1926. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

The Jewish population of Beaufort reached a critical mass in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 longer would 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 *cheder* (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 *bimah* (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 believed. I viewed these immigrants hungrily, selfishly, greedily—because I felt instinctively that this was the last time I would stand so close to *shtetl Yiddin*.”

Joe was right. Beth Israel's *shtetl Yiddin* (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 hooky 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

Beaufortonians attended the ceremony. President Moses Epstein and treasurer Morris Levin took part in a formal procession that marched through the new sanctuary.

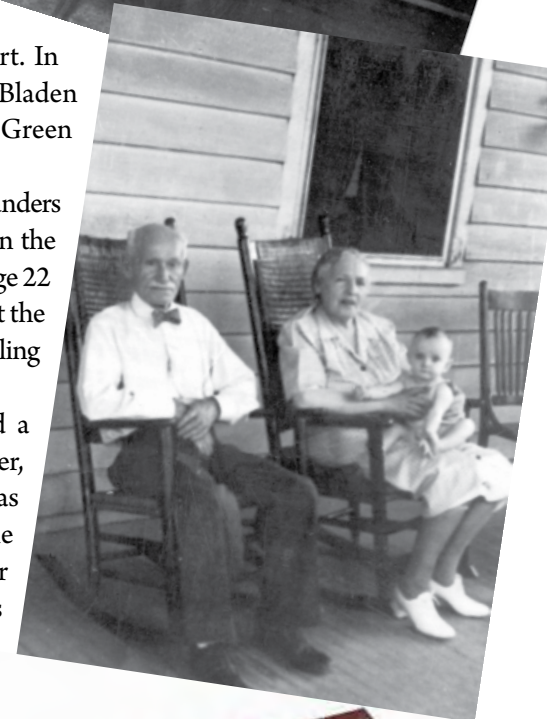
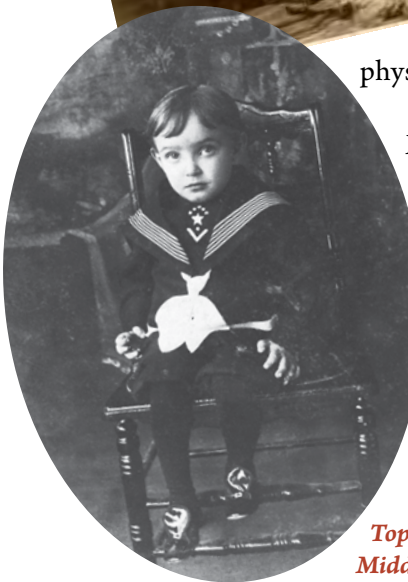
The year 1908 was one of celebration and of sadness for the members of Beth Israel. Morris and Alice's five-year old son, Melvin, died of a heart defect that would have been operable today. There was no Jewish cemetery in Beaufort so Morris and his cousin, Alexander, took the child by boat to Charleston where he was buried in the Brith Sholom 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.



*Top: Morris Levin (l), with his sister Gretta Levin and her husband John Levin.*

*Middle: Morris and Alice Levin, wedding portrait.*

*Bottom: Melvin Levin, Morris and Alice's youngest child, who died at age five. Courtesy of Helen Levin Goldman.*

*Top: Willy Levin, eldest son of Morris and Alice Levin. Middle: Helen Levin with her grandparents, Morris and Alice Levin. Bottom: Former Levin store, Bay Street, Beaufort, SC. Courtesy of Helen Levin Goldman. Left: Image of the Burroughs adding machine and the building that hosted the Burroughs exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, MO. Courtesy of Bernie Schein.*





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.

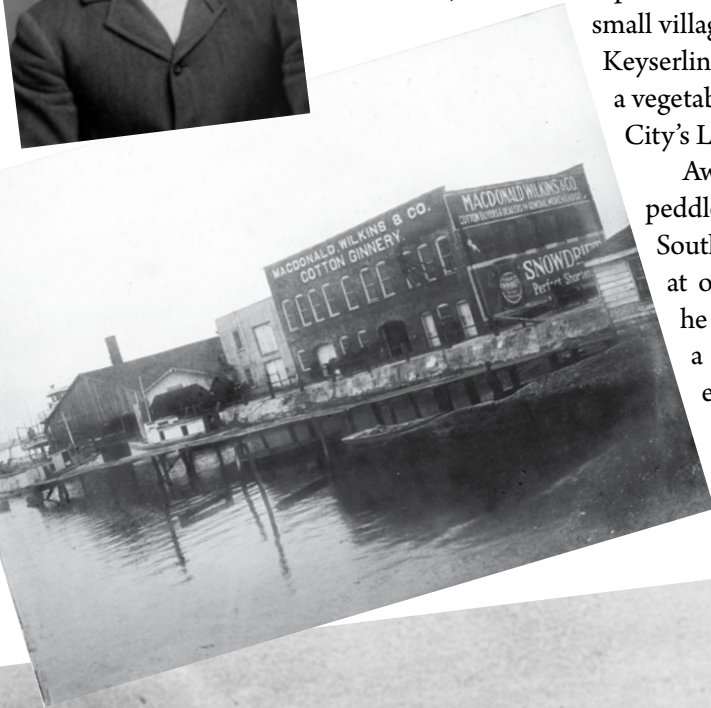
Aware that his lifelong desire to farm would not happen in the city, he peddled his way south where, in 1888, at 18 years of age, he landed in Beaufort, South Carolina. He worked odd jobs until he became a "mechanic" (foreman) at one of the MacDonald, Wilkins & Company's cotton gins. Before long he was 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.



*Top: William Keyserling.*

*Middle: MacDonald, Wilkins & Co. Cotton*

*Ginnery, corner, Bay and Carteret streets, Beaufort, SC.*

*Bottom: The Keyserling family, ca. 1918.*

## The Keyserling Brothers Leave a Mark on Beaufort

*by Billy Keyserling*

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 collaboration among so many farmers. The farmers' prosperity was temporarily restored until the Great Depression hit, which devastated most farming operations, including William's. He became a man of modest means.

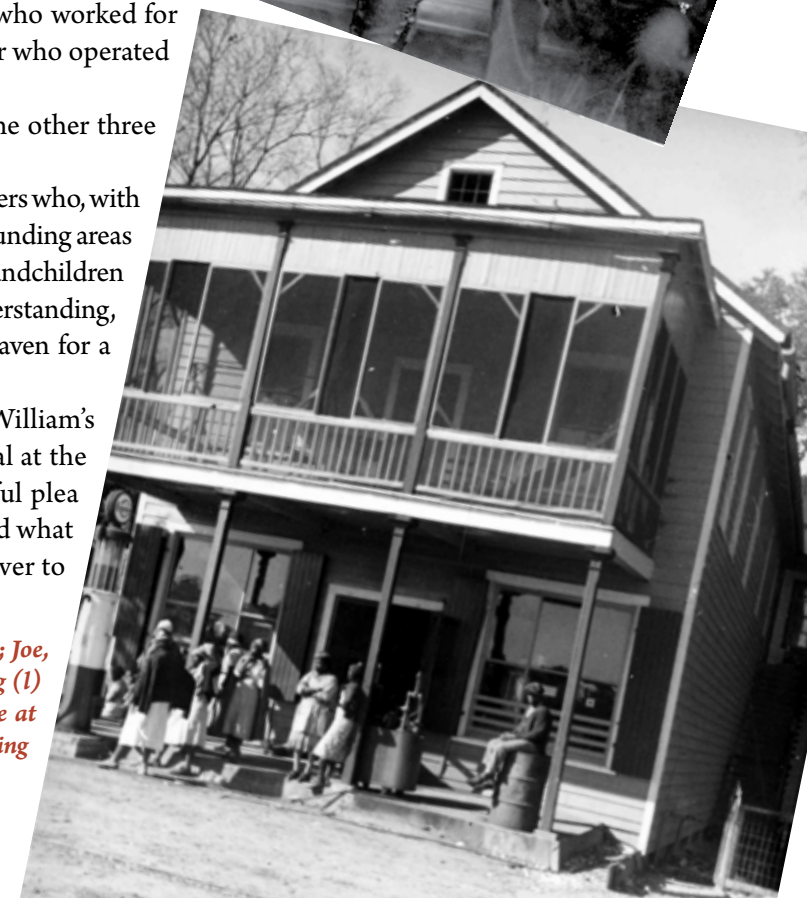
Meanwhile, Israel, Mark, and Michael were able to hold on to their stores. We assume they purchased them from MacDonald, Wilkins as the company's assets were divested during the Depression. Each remained a prominent figure within the crossroads communities of Dale and Seabrook, north of Beaufort, and Sams Point on Lady's Island. The Dale store stayed in operation when Israel's son King took over. When King's health declined, he sold the store to a man who worked for him. Meanwhile, Mark turned his store over to a young neighbor who operated it until it closed.

I regret, as do our first cousins, that little is known about the other three brothers, or Joe, who died at an early age.

Few from their era would doubt the leadership of the five brothers who, with others, cultivated goodwill and business in Beaufort and the surrounding areas through 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 (l to r): William, Mark, Israel (standing); Joe, Michael (seated), Seabrook, SC, ca. 1916. Middle: William Keyserling (l) 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

The 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 I 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 brought 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, so he traveled down the east coast looking for a good place to make a living.

"He went to Charleston, and was told there was no room for more peddlers," Schein says. "Then, he went to Savannah, where he was told the same thing. So he turned around and went back to settle in Beaufort. He started off peddling, soon opening a store out on Highway 21, across from where the [Marine Corps] Air Station is today." It was a very poor area, according to Schein, mostly populated by African Americans.

Shortly after Samuel arrived in Beaufort, he found an African American baby abandoned near the railroad tracks behind his store. He took the baby in and unofficially adopted him. The Black woman who worked for him keeping house lived behind the store and cared for the baby. When Mr. Schein's wife and daughter arrived soon after, she left and raised the child farther out in the country.

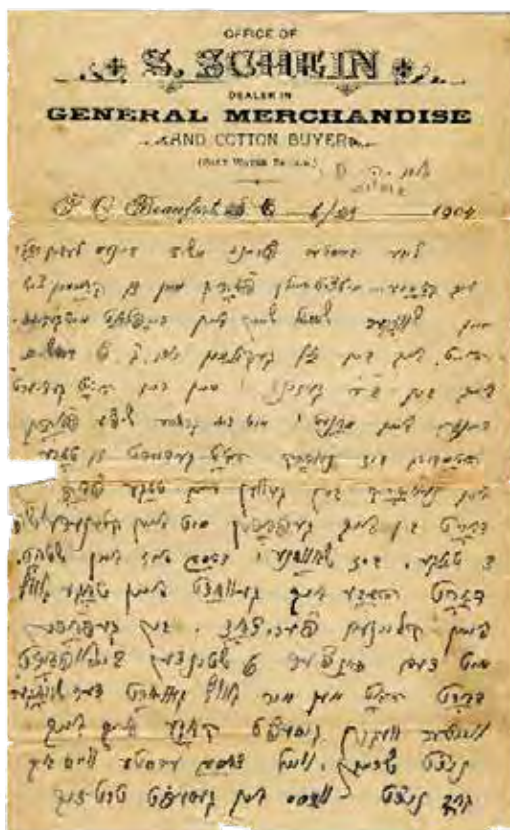
Bernie's father, Morris, was born in 1899. He grew up mostly surrounded by poor African American families. When

he was old enough to go to school, he hitched up his horse and buggy and rode into town to attend Beaufort Elementary. The school building was the same one Bernie and his two brothers would attend later. Beth Israel Congregation was formed in 1905, and the synagogue opened in 1908. Samuel and his family were early members, and Morris was among the first boys to be bar mitzvahed there.

When Morris was 18, tragedy struck. He heard a commotion, and a shot rang out in the store. He ran from the back to see his father wrestling with a Black man to get control of a gun. Morris wrested the gun from him. The man 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 Julliard in New York. Though the Great Depression ended that dream, they were invited to play all over South 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.



S. Schein letterhead, 1904, correspondence in Yiddish. From the Mark family papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston.

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 Bernie 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 people who 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 it weren't for 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. There were 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 *onegs* [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 *onegs*. 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.



Morris Schein (1) with unidentified man in Schein's Grocery, Bladen Street, Beaufort, SC. Courtesy of Bernie Schein.

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."





*Sadie Garber Schein (foreground) and Mickey Fuller playing piano at Beth Israel's 100th anniversary, Beaufort, SC, 2005. Courtesy of Beth Israel Congregation.*

# Calling Beaufort Home

## June 10–12, 2022 ~ Beaufort, SC

### Friday, June 10

**7:00 P.M.** Shabbat services, Beth Israel, 401 Scott Street  
Oneg 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

**2:00** **Family Stories**  
Moderator: Dale Rosengarten  
Panelists: Helen Goldman, Barbara Mark, Elizabeth Schein-Pearson, Philip Young

**3:30** **Store Stories**  
Moderator: Rachel Gordin Barnett  
Panelists: Robert Greenly, Tommy Keyserling, Paul Levine, Neil Lipsitz, Bernie Schein, Arnold Young

**5:00–6:00** **Reception**  
*Dinner on your own*



Reception sponsored by Nelson Mullins

### Sunday, June 12 Learning Center, corner of West and Washington streets

**9:00 A.M.** Open board meeting  
Bagels, fruit, and coffee will be served

**10:30** **Reconstruction: An Unfinished Revolution** ~ Judge Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen  
in conversation with special guests Thomas C. Holt and Lawrence S. Rowland

**12:00 P.M.** **The Making of a National Park** ~ Billy Keyserling

**1:00** **Tour of Reconstruction Era National Park sites** ~ caravan or self-guided  
Maps and box lunches will be provided

### Meeting registration

Online at: [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://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 (per person):

Full weekend \$120  
Saturday only \$75  
Sunday only \$45

#### Questions:

Enid Idelsohn  
[idelsohne@cofc.edu](mailto:idelsohne@cofc.edu)  
Phone: 843.953.3918  
Fax: 843.953.7624

**Accommodations** ~ rates are good until May (availability is limited). For details, go to: [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)



Thomas C. Holt, Professor Emeritus of American and African American History at the University of Chicago, has a longstanding interest in comparing the experiences of people in the African diaspora, particularly those in the Caribbean

and the United States. His first book, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction*, won the Southern Historical Association's Charles S. Sydnor Prize in 1978. Holt's 1992 award-winning study, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938*, analyzed Jamaica's economy, politics, and society after slavery. His most recent volume, *The Movement: The African American Struggle for Civil Rights* (2021), emphasizes the aspirations and activities of the rank and file over those of their more famous leaders.

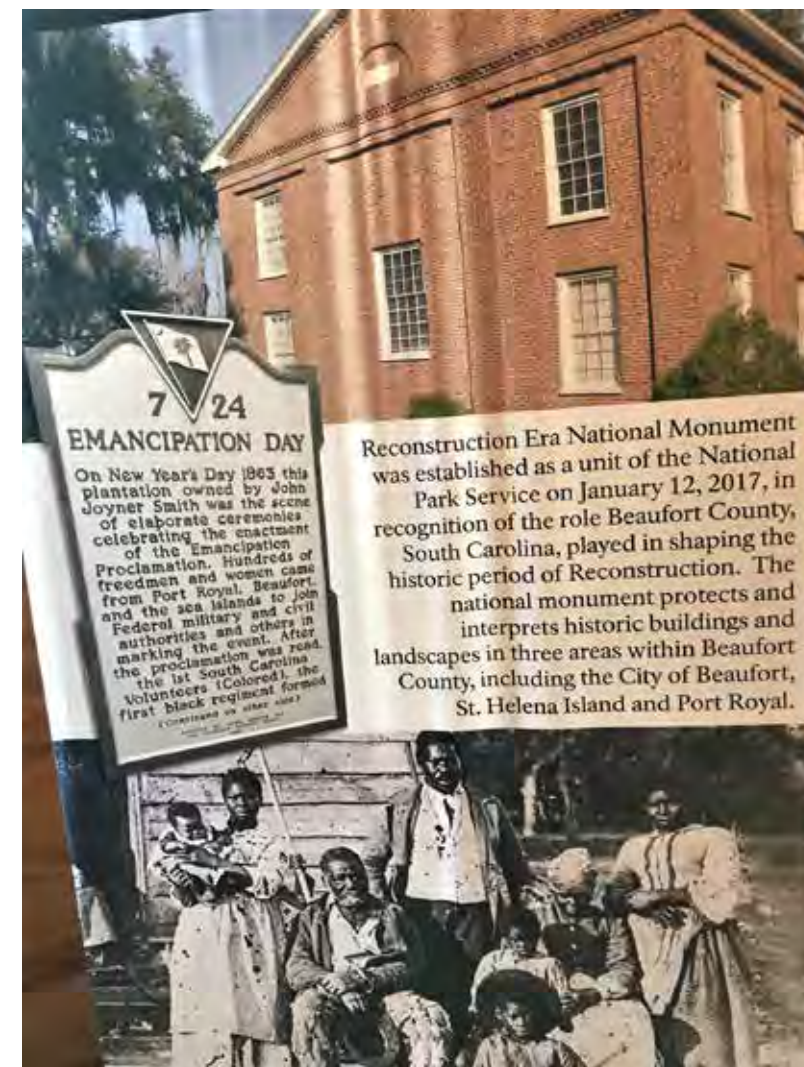


Driven by his passion for establishing common ground as an effective leadership tool, former Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling coordinated the local effort to help achieve the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park. His record of public service includes two terms in the SC House of Representatives (1992–96), where he was vice chair of the Joint Legislative Energy Committee, four years on the Beaufort City Council (2000–04), and three terms as mayor (2008–2020). His book, *Sharing Common Ground: Promises Unfulfilled but Not Forgotten*, tells his personal story and explains why he believes understanding the Reconstruction Era is critical for building a better future for all.



Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the Beaufort campus of the University of South Carolina, Lawrence S. Rowland previously served as Professor of History and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at USC-Beaufort, and as president of the South Carolina Historical Society. Among his publications on South Carolina and Sea Island history are: *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Vol. I, 1514–1861*

(with Alexander Moore and George C. Rogers, Jr.), 1996; *Window on the Atlantic: The Rise and Fall of Santa Elena, South Carolina's Spanish City*, 1990; *The Civil War in South Carolina: Selections from the South Carolina Historical Magazine* (edited with Stephen G. Hoffius), 2011; and *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Vol. II and Vol. III, 1861–1990* (with Stephen R. Wise and Gerhard Spieler), 2015.



#### 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 825 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 1908, he took Bertha Rubin (1886–1956) as his bride.

Bertha Rubin Lipsitz (Mrs. Max) and her children, Hyman (l), Joseph, and Ethel, ca. 1924.



Special Collections  
College of Charleston

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); Hyman (1913–2002), who married Helen Jacobson (1923–2000); Joseph (1920–2014), who married Lucille Bass (b. 1930).

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.

Hyman opened a dental practice in Bishopville, SC, before World War II, while Ethel and Joseph helped Max run the store. After her brothers, Hyman and Joseph, joined the U.S. Army, Ethel took over much of the management of the business.

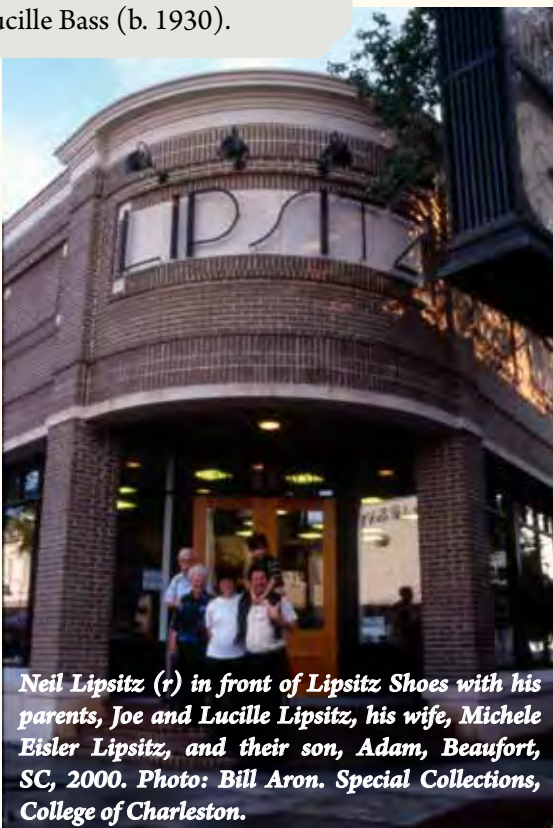
After the war ended in 1945, Hyman opened his dental practice in Beaufort, and Max decided it was time to retire, so he simply tossed the keys to Ethel and Joseph and told them the store was theirs. It truly was a family-run department store, because Ethel's husband, Henry, and, later, Joseph's wife, Lucille, joined them.



From the *Lucille Hasell Culp Collection*, courtesy of Beaufort County Library (SC).



The Lipsitz store, Bay Street (right forefront), needed new display windows after Hurricane Gracie came ashore in Beaufort, SC, in September 1959.



Neil Lipsitz (r) in front of Lipsitz Shoes with his parents, Joe and Lucille Lipsitz, his wife, Michele Eisler Lipsitz, and their son, Adam, Beaufort, SC, 2000. Photo: Bill Aron. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

## The Mark Family

by Barbara Mark and Alyssa Neely



Joseph Wolf Mark, born in 1882 in Utena, Lithuania, immigrated to New York when he was 22 years old and made his way to the Beaufort, SC, area where his sister Esther Mark Schein lived.



Rejected by his sweetheart back home, Joseph began writing to her younger sister, Lena Mae Banisch. Thus began an eight-year epistolary courtship that culminated with Lena's arrival in South Carolina, carrying Joseph's letters in a cloth bag.



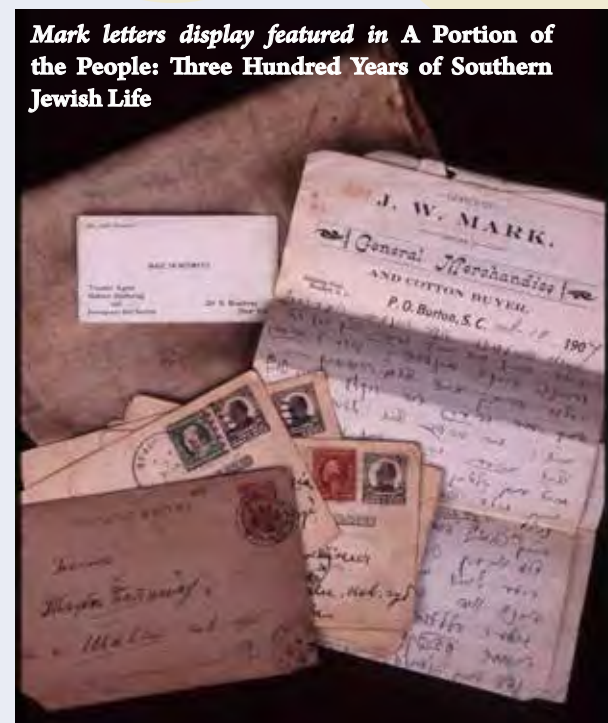
Raye, Sarah, Margie, and Ada Mark



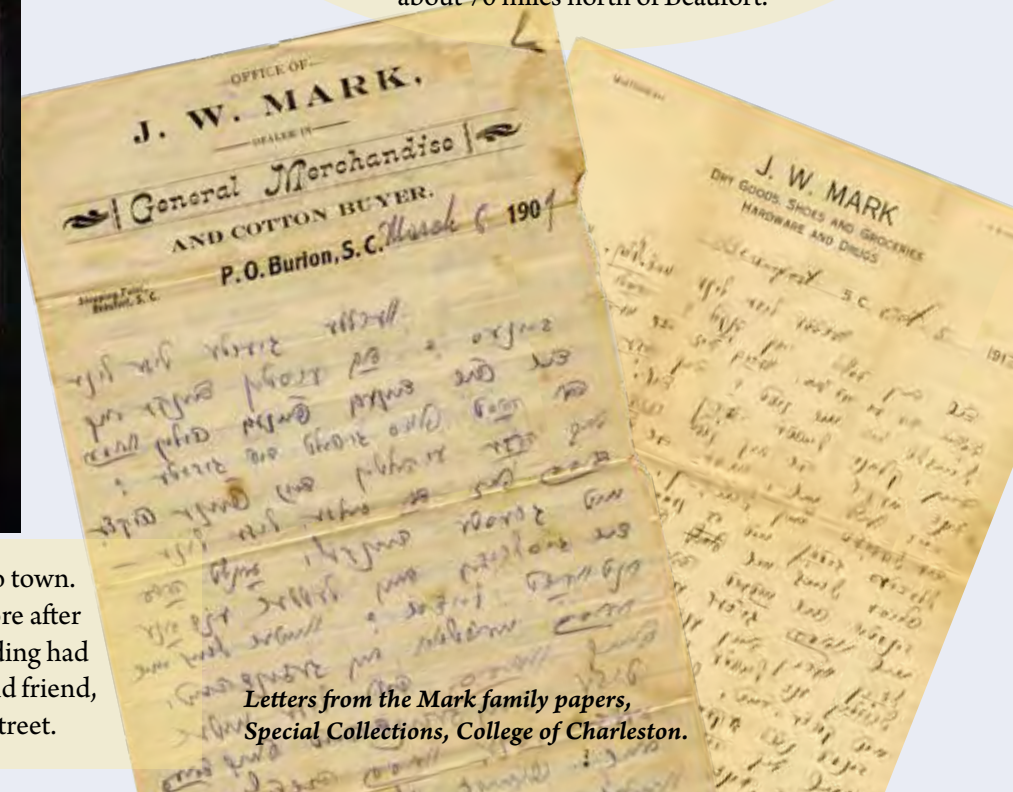
Family photos courtesy of Barbara Mark.

Joseph ran J. W. Mark, General Merchandise, in Burton, about five miles west of Beaufort. He and Lena and their four daughters and one son (pictured above) lived in a large apartment above the store. The children attended public school in Beaufort, traveling by either car or bus, and most of the time Ernest rode his horse into town. The girls graduated from Beaufort High School. Ernest graduated from Carlisle Military Academy in Bamberg, SC, about 70 miles north of Beaufort.

Mark letters display featured in A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life



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.



Letters from the Mark family papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston.



# 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 southwest 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 Sendlirski 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 always celebrated two birthdays, one when he was born and the other on the date his ship landed at 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 William Keyserling, for whom Beaufort's former mayor Billy Keryserling 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.

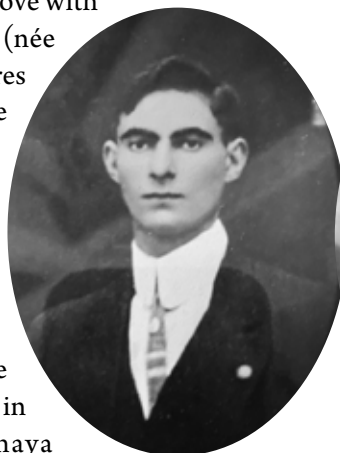
From the time he was a teen until he graduated from college, my father worked as a bellhop and waiter in the Catskills. The tips he earned were used to pay his tuition for the previous semester and for books for the new term. During his sophomore year, he decided he wanted to be a physician. He knew 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. Arnsberger Postcard Collection, courtesy of Beaufort County Library (SC).



Above: Abe Rudowitz and Fannie Papish Rudowitz. Below: Rose Lewen Neidich and Morris Neidich. Courtesy of Linda Neidich Hoffman.



Top: Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion presents Morris Neidich, as representative of Beaufort, with an award for the most money raised by a community of its size in a United Jewish Appeal campaign, 1956. Above: Sol and Evelyn Rudowitz Neidich, 1996. Courtesy of Linda Neidich Hoffman.





## 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 forebearers, 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 *baleboste* (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, and near the end the children searched for the *Afikomen* (matzo hidden for children to find for a prize) and then fell asleep before the Seder ended. Our family photographs of these happy occasions go back to the mid-1930s. Papa always hired a professional photographer, so today we are able to enjoy revisiting those treasured family gatherings.

Young Lumber Company, started about 1942 by Papa and Joe, was located first on Adventure Street, and later on Church Street. After World War II, Papa and Joe joined forces with Oscar and built a development of 30-plus houses in what was called Floyd Heights, an area west of Ribaut Road. Everyone in the family had homes there. Soon after,



Julius “Papa” Young surrounded by his grandchildren, back row (l to r): David Young, Marshall Stein; middle row: Stanley Fox, Marsha Gail Fox, H. Fred Young, Harry Young; front: Linda Young, Beaufort, SC, ca. 1944. Photos courtesy of the Young family.

they built another development on Pigeon Point, with 35 or so homes, completed about 1949. Oscar, Joe, Ben Fox, as well as Papa, built larger homes for themselves on Pigeon Point, all adjacent to one another. Mikey, Ethel, and their children lived in Hampton. Both Abe and Sayde died young, but their children were always nearby and very much part of the extended family.

In conjunction with the lumber yard operated by Joe, the construction business, conducted under the Young Lumber Company name, took on large commercial projects on Parris Island and at the Marine Corps Air Station. The Youngs, generally, were well known in the African American community.

Papa, without any formal contracts, sold materials on a “pay as you can” basis to build several churches and some homes in the Frogmore area; one church has a cornerstone honoring him. Also, there was a school, believed to be part of what is now Penn Center, where Papa and Joe provided lumber, supplies, and skills to teach building trades to young men. The Young family shared a lasting, close, and mutually respectful relationship with the African American

community. Sometime after Papa’s death in 1950, Joe incorporated the construction business as J. Young Construction, in honor of Papa.

Oscar operated Young Brothers Furniture Company on Bay Street from about 1940 until 1957, when he sold all the merchandise in an auction. He then established a mortgage lending business, Capital Improvement Company. The object was, of course, to improve capital! Oscar also continued in commercial construction and took over Young Lumber

Company after Joe and Ethel moved with their large family to Jacksonville, Florida, in 1963. There Joe reestablished J. Young Construction Company, completing projects primarily for the navy, and created Southern Steel Company, selling construction steel. His sons, by then grown and educated, joined him in the construction business.

Ben Fox owned Fox Jewelers on Bay Street until his retirement, when the business was taken over by his son-in-law, Paul Isaac, and daughter, Phyllis Ann. Ben was well known for his excellent hand engraving. Before joining the navy, Mikey worked for Ben at Fox Jewelers and learned the business. After the war, Mikey and Ethel moved to Hampton

and opened their own jewelry store. In the early 1950s, Joe became engaged in tomato and cucumber farming. Oscar later joined him and kept the substantial operation going until his death in 1982.

While each of the Young family businesses was usually owned by an individual person, things operated more like a large corporation with various divisions. Various family members worked in the various businesses at various times. Papa recognized the potential for

disagreements, especially among the wives. His edict: there was to 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



Young family Passover Seder, 1940 (note picture on wall of their 1939 Seder). Julius “Papa” Young is at the head of the table. Seated (l), front to back: Ethel Kravitz Young, Sara Young Brawer, Sanie Young, Ethel Cohen Young. Standing (l), front to back: Morris Young, Ben Fox, Josef Young, Don Young, Tillie “Mama” Rosenblatt Young, Lewis Young. Seated (r), front to back: Lillian Minkow Young, Gilda Young, David Young, Sadye Goldberg Young, Lena Young Stein. Standing (r), front to back: Oscar Young, Abe Young, Max Stein, Marshall Stein, Bernie Stein. Note: Marshall Stein donated an Oral History interview to the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston. It is online at the Lowcountry Digital Library: <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:108592>.



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



*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.*

join them. The Youngs of Beaufort, whether through blood or marriage, and no matter where they live, believe with all their heart and soul that they are Youngs, and Beaufort is home.

*About the authors: Arnold Young is the son of Oscar Young and lives in Savannah, GA. Sharon Shavin Rosenstein is the granddaughter of Abe Young and lives in Israel on the Mediterranean, north of Tel Aviv. Neil J. Young is the grandson of Josef Young and lives in San Francisco, CA.*

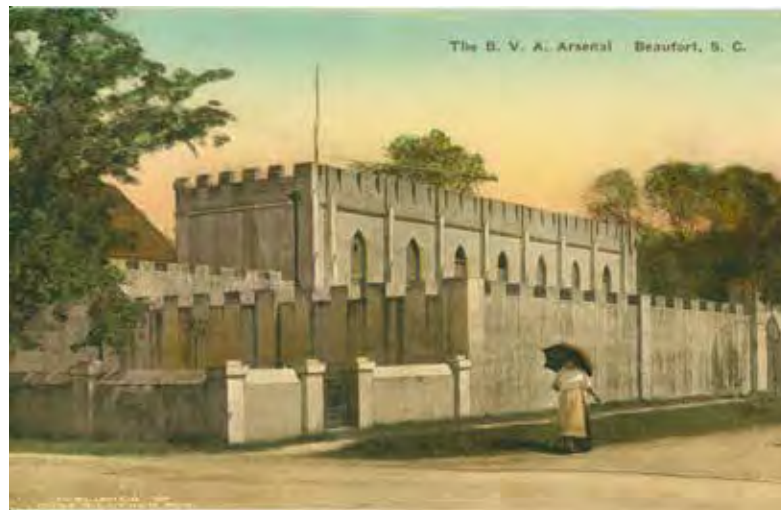
## Beth Israel: A Congregation Grows in Beaufort

*by Emilie Crossan, research assistant, Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture*

Although the Jewish community of Beaufort dates to the mid- to 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 that could “jointly buy and hold title to land.” Jewish residents of Beaufort J. B. Keyserling, Moses S. Epstein, Morris Levin, David Schein, and E. M. Lipsitz signed the document.<sup>1</sup> Over the next 50 years, the Jewish community expanded along with the general population,

peaking at 100 Jewish individuals in 1937.<sup>2</sup> The small but resilient congregation has continued to worship in the original synagogue, which today remains the focal point of Beaufort’s Jewish community.

Before constructing a synagogue, the 36 congregants met for services in the Masonic hall above Sheffer’s store on Bay Street, while social functions were held in the former Arsenal on Scott Street.<sup>3</sup> When the lot directly adjacent to the Arsenal went up for sale, the congregation saw this as the perfect opportunity to purchase the property with plans of building a



*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 Russell J. Arnsberger Postcard Collection, courtesy of Beaufort County Library (SC).*

synagogue.<sup>4</sup> In December 1905, Nora Comerford conveyed the lot, measuring 50’ x 118’, to Beth Israel Congregation for \$187.50.<sup>5</sup> According to the 1884, 1889, 1894, 1899, and 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Beaufort, the building that originally sat on the site was a single-story L-shaped structure labeled “Shanty.” The congregation was able to raise sufficient funds, and with the physical help of some members, construction began.<sup>6</sup> The *Evening Post* reported that the ladies of the congregation held a variety of fundraisers, including a bake sale with “ice cream, cake, and candy” at a storefront on Bay Street.<sup>7</sup>

Construction of Beth Israel was completed in June 1908. Rabbi George Solomon of Mickve Israel in Savannah officiated at the dedication ceremony.<sup>8</sup> The single-story Colonial Revival wood building has stood on Scott Street for more than 100 years without undergoing any major alterations. A visiting scholar noted that the synagogue’s sanctuary reminded her of a Lithuanian wooden shul, perhaps a nod towards the congregation’s founding families, such as the Keyserlings, who came from Lithuania. The structure first showed up on the 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, described as a single-story “Synagogue” with a single-story porch overhang in the front. The interior stretched 16 feet to the eaves. At the time, the building was heated with stoves and illuminated using oil. By 1924, however, the oil lighting had been replaced by electricity. Services were held in accordance with the Orthodox tradition, with sermons and prayers recited in Hebrew, and men and women sitting apart.<sup>9</sup>

The Jewish community bought land for a cemetery in July 1910. The impetus was the death in 1907 of five-year-old Melvin Levin, who was buried in Charleston, about 70 miles from home, because Beaufort had no Jewish burial ground.<sup>10</sup> Mary H. Bucknam sold the lot on Green Street for \$152.50.<sup>11</sup>

The Julia Mittle Ladies Auxiliary Society raised funds to help purchase the burial grounds and maintain the synagogue.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

Beth Israel’s constitution, adopted on May 6, 1917, covers a range of topics, from the roles and responsibilities of the president to what a member should do in the event of a death. It also included official plans for a Sunday school for children and a cheder for boys. In July 1920, the congregation purchased an “Old parsonage” for \$1,500, a property that bounded the synagogue to the north on Scott Street. Used to house the rabbi, the building was remodeled in 1946 at a cost of \$2,303.61.<sup>14</sup>

Women’s names began to appear in the minutes in the mid-1940s, suggesting the congregation had begun its drift away from Orthodoxy, allowing women to take on roles traditionally reserved for men.<sup>15</sup> Some members felt the strict Orthodoxy practiced by Eastern European immigrants was driving away younger members.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1950s, an annex was built to serve as a recreation hall.<sup>18</sup>

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



*Children’s Passover Seder, Beth Israel, Beaufort, SC, 1949. Donnie Young, father of Neil J. Young, is at the head of the table, and seated, clockwise from left forefront: 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 r): Ben Fox, Gerrie Lipson, Marsha Gail Fox, Barbara Mark. Adults seated, right rear: Sam Greenly, Lucille Greenly, Lillian Minkow Young, Ethel Rabinowitz. Identifications provided by Neil J. Young. Courtesy of the Young family.*



difficult to gather a minyan, though they still were able to afford a full-time rabbi.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

In 2022, Beth Israel remains Beaufort’s only Jewish congregation, serving 85 member families and hosting services conducted by lay leaders nearly every Friday evening.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

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*Beth Israel Congregation, Beaufort, SC, 2000. Photo: Bill Aron. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

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12. Original minute book and photocopied reproduction, 1916–1961, Box: 1, Folder: 1–2, Beth Israel Congregation (Beaufort, S.C.) records, Mss. 1076, Special Collections, College of Charleston.
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18. “JHSSC\_Beaufort\_Beth\_Israel\_History,” archive.org. 2016, accessed 1 March 2022, <https://jhssc.org/history-of-temple-beth-israel/>

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## 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 ask 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 Jewish Merchant Project, we often can 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. Farbstein 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 the Jewish Historical Society and the Jewish Heritage Collection aimed at creating a sustainable foundation for 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.

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See pages 12–13 of this publication for program information.



THE  
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*Southern Jews and the Atlantic World*

JHSSC hosts the 46<sup>th</sup> annual  
Southern Jewish Historical Society  
conference in Charleston

October 21–23, 2022



Volume XXVII Number 2 ~ Fall 2022





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*On the cover: A locket containing a miniature portrait of Charity Lushington Forrest née Forbes (ca. 1751–1832) [attributed to James Peale, ca. 1820] with a portrait of her second husband, Richard Lushington (1751–1790) [artist unknown, ca. 1780], on the reverse side of the case. Lushington, a Quaker, led a Revolutionary militia unit that came to be called “The Jews’ Company.” Gift of Elizabeth Adams to the Charleston Library Society. Photos: George H. McDaniel.*

## In this issue

**Dissent, Providentialism, and Slavery: A New Interpretation of Early Charleston Jewish Life ~ Shari Rabin** ~ Carolina’s Fundamental Constitutions offered freedom of worship to “Jews, Heathens, and other Dissenters,” prompting the author to consider if Jewish settlers, in the minds of the Proprietors, occupied “an uncertain third category between Black and indigenous ‘heathens’ and the dissenting Protestant groups.” ..... 4

**Looking for Lushington: The Lost Quaker Commander of Charleston’s Revolutionary Jewish Militia ~ George H. McDaniel** ~ What can historic preservationists do when critical locations in the urban landscape are erased? Applying site-specific research and modern technology, The Charleston Liberty Trail will bring to light the surprising story of a Revolutionary militia unit known as “The Jews’ Company.” ..... 6

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**Practicing Empire in the American South: What a Historian of North African Jews Can Learn from Studying Jews of the Colonial Atlantic World ~ Sara Jay** ~ Deemed economically vital to the survival of the colony, Jews in times and places as disparate as British Suriname and French Algeria were granted civil rights and religious freedom. The author considers how the strategy of offering citizenship to Jews in exchange for allegiance to the ruling power played out in British North America, culminating in the famous exchange of letters in 1790 between George Washington and the Hebrew Congregation of Newport. . . 13

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**A Summerton Provincial ~ Rachel Gordin Barnett** ~ JHSSC’s executive director, who grew up in Summerton, South Carolina, recalls how *The Provincials* by Eli Evans, resonated with her when she read the first edition in the 1970s. Building on Evans’s legacy, JHSSC looks forward to hosting the Southern Jewish Historical Society this fall in Charleston, where scholars will shine a bright light on a broad canvas, exploring southern Jews and their relations with the Atlantic world. .... 19

## Letter from the President

*And you better start swimmin’  
Or you’ll sink like a stone  
For the times they are a-changin’.*

“The Times They Are A-Changin’,” 1964 — Bob Dylan



You would think that Bob Dylan was writing those lyrics these past couple of years, not six decades ago. The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, inflation, supply chain issues causing shortages of goods, the increase in violence, the rise in antisemitism, all add to our everyday stress in this rapidly changing world. The pandemic has changed the way organizations function. Companies and individuals have had to adapt to employees working from home, holding meetings virtually, distributing goods and services in different ways, and in general, not doing business as usual. Many operations that were unable to change have gone out of business and disappeared.

Fortunately for us, JHSSC has found ways to adapt, survive, and even prosper. Since we were unable to meet in person until this spring, we pivoted to online programming, producing monthly Sunday Conversations led by past presidents Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen that have engaged our members and an ever-expanding viewership over the past two years.

We have partnered with other organizations, such as the American Jewish Archives and the Southern Jewish Historical Society, sharing programming with their members as well as ours. JHSSC Executive Director Rachel Gordin Barnett has done a marvelous job coordinating not only our virtual events but keeping other projects moving forward. The Society had a great spring meeting in Beaufort, June 10–12, 2022. Many

thanks to Barbara Mark and her committee at Beth Israel Congregation for hosting us and making local arrangements. Hats off to Joe Wachter and Paul Keyserling, who volunteered their professional services as photographer and videographer.

We fully expect to welcome the Southern Jewish Historical Society conference in person in Charleston the weekend of October 21st–23<sup>rd</sup>. The third try for this meeting is a charm! If you have not yet done so, please go to our website and register today.

In the second year of my presidency, it feels natural to ask, where does the JHSSC go from here? Our mission is to study, preserve, and promote awareness of the history and culture of the Jews of South Carolina. We need to keep our programming fresh and creative, to attract new and younger members, and to continue collaborating with our partners. To ensure our long-term viability we have joined with the Jewish Heritage Collection in the South Carolina Jewish History and Heritage Campaign. To learn more about this endeavor, please contact me or Rachel Barnett at [jhssc2020@gmail.com](mailto:jhssc2020@gmail.com).

L’shalom,  
Alexander Cohen, M.D.  
JHSSC President

*I cannot have a future ‘til I embrace my past.  
I promise to pursue the challenge, time is going fast.*

“And the Youth Shall See Visions,” 1981  
— Debbie Friedman



*Elizabeth Schein-Pearson participates in the “Family Stories” panel discussion, JHSSC meeting, Beth Israel, Beaufort, SC, June 11, 2022. Photo: Paul Keyserling.*



# Dissent, Providentialism, and Slavery: A New Interpretation of Early Charleston Jewish Life

by Shari Rabin, Oberlin College

The title of my talk for this year's Helen Stern lecture is inspired by *Messianism, Mysticism, and Secrecy: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life*, the masterful 2012 book by Laura Leibman, my immediate predecessor as Stern lecturer. Drawing on studies of material culture and Jewish mysticism, Leibman found a Sephardic religious culture of "quotidian messianism"—the expression, in everyday life, of the fervent hope for the ingathering of the exiles in the world to come—which was shared across "the Jewish Atlantic World." In the index, however, there are just three entries for Charleston, fewer than those for New York and Philadelphia, and a tiny number compared to the dozens of entries for Caribbean centers like Barbados, Suriname, Curaçao, and Jamaica.

To be sure, for much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Charleston had a small Jewish community, which left behind a modest documentary record and included many Jews who had come from the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> However, my close reading of this material—aided substantially by James Hagy's encyclopedic 1993 *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston*—suggests that Charleston might not fit as easily into the Jewish Atlantic World model as we might otherwise assume. Rather than messianism, mysticism, and secrecy, I would suggest dissent, providentialism, and slavery as key categories for understanding Jewish life in colonial Carolina.

"Dissent" was a category used to describe forms of Protestantism that deviated from the established church, which in the British empire was the Church of England. From 1722, Charleston's skyline was dominated by St. Philip's Church, a monumental structure asserting Anglican power over the city. At the same time, as early as 1700, Anglicans accounted for less than half of the Protestant settlers in the colony. The rest included Presbyterians, Baptists, Huguenots, Lutherans, and Quakers.<sup>2</sup>

It was unclear whether Jews should be considered ordinary "dissenters" or whether their difference belonged in another category altogether. The 1669 Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina promised freedom of worship to "Jews, Heathens, and other Dissenters," implying that Jews exist in an uncertain third category between Black and indigenous "heathens" and the dissenting Protestant groups.<sup>3</sup> When Jews did receive rights in the British empire, it often required labelling them as Protestants, and dissenters occasionally complained about Jews' inclusion in what they thought should remain a Christian community.

While Leibman argues that messianism and mysticism were the key religious influences in the Jewish Atlantic World, in Charleston there is little of the kind of evidence she relies upon. For instance, Leibman describes extravagant gravestone imagery as a sign of kabbalistic commitments. And yet the oldest gravestone in Charleston, that of Moses Cohen, who died in 1762, is relatively sparse and includes several features

that point to local influences. The religious sensibility of Charleston Jews might better be explained by providentialism, the belief that God oversees and determines all human activity.

The will of Jacob Olivera, which appears in local probate records, includes Psalm 31: "In thy hands I will enlist my spirit. Thou hast rescued me O Lord God of Truth."<sup>4</sup> His was a Jewish God who determined human destinies and whose followers might appeal to him through personal petitions and communal prayers. Olivera asked for forgiveness for his sins, "hoping His infinite mercies will extend to me." These are Jewish prayers, but Olivera invoked them in the aftermath of the Great Awakening, a dramatic Anglo-American revival insisting on a present, personal God who determined individual salvation and required experiences of conversion.

James Hagy tells us, "The first Jews [in Carolina] known by name appear together in the same record when Simon Valentine sold a slave to Samuel Mincks." A transcription of the original document accessible on ancestry.com reveals that the individual at the center of this transaction was a man named Dick.<sup>5</sup> While initially it was indigenous peoples who were enslaved in the colony, gradually Africans came to predominate, becoming the majority of the colony's population as planters—influenced by the example of Barbados—threw in their lot with the labor-intensive rice crop.<sup>6</sup>

The Fundamental Constitutions, the initial planning document for the colony, had declared that "Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever," and reiterated that religious affiliation would not affect "any man's civil estate or right." Although designed to disenfranchise enslaved people, making religion irrelevant to social status—a change similarly enacted in other English colonies—this measure also facilitated Jewish belonging. Leibman argues that the treatment of enslaved people and their offspring is the one arena in which

local variations prevailed among Jewish communities. In Charleston, those enslaved by Jews might have facilitated domestic religious practice, for instance preparing kosher meals. And yet,

following the example of their Christian neighbors, who usually resisted the entreaties of their churches' missionaries—and unlike in Suriname, where enslaved people regularly converted to Judaism—it appears Jews in South Carolina did not seek to formally incorporate people of color into the Jewish community.

Charleston Jews were undeniably part of a Jewish Atlantic

World—they moved to Carolina from Amsterdam, London, New York, and various places in the Caribbean, as well as from central and eastern Europe—and like others in its orbit they worked to establish Jewish life in violent colonial settings. And yet, as I will discuss further in my Stern lecture, imperial and local configurations of power also shaped the social status, religious worldviews, and everyday lives of Charleston Jews.

## NOTES

1. Dale Rosengarten, "Port Jews and Plantation Jews: Carolina-Caribbean Connections," in *The Jews in the Caribbean*, ed. Jane S. Gerber (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 289–307.
2. Charles S. Bolton, *Southern Anglicanism: The Church of England in Colonial South Carolina* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).
3. "The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, March 1, 1669," The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, accessed July 23, 2020, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/nc05.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/nc05.asp).
4. Georgia, *Wills and Probate Records, 1742–1992*, Wills Vol. A, 1754–1772, 246–248, accessed via ancestry.com.
5. *South Carolina, Wills and Probate Records, 1670–1980*, Vol. 54, 1694–1704, p. 323, accessed via ancestry.com. Cited in James William Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 57.
6. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1974).



Leah Moses offered a reward in the Charleston Mercury, December 16, 1833, for the return of Sally, a 14-year-old enslaved girl she had recently purchased.



An Exact Prospect of Charles Town, the Metropolis of the Province of South Carolina, June 9, 1739, painted by Bishop Roberts, engraved by William Henri Toms, engraving with watercolor. Collection of Robert N. Rosen.



## Looking for Lushington: The Lost Quaker Commander of Charleston's Revolutionary Jewish Militia

by George H. McDaniel, South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust

*"Died Last Monday, after an illness of only three days, the honorable Richard Lushington Esq. Col. of the regiment of militia for Charleston district," June 24, 1790.<sup>1</sup>*

Thus, the life of an important figure in Charleston and southern Jewish history prematurely ended at the age of 39. Today, the name Richard Lushington draws little, if any, attention among the general public's awareness of Charleston history. When carriage tours travel along King Street, his name is not among those spoken at the corner of King and Queen, now occupied by a Charleston County parking garage.

In fact, it is likely that many of the men who served under his command and lived and worked along that same stretch of King Street garner no mention—an omission the South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust (SCBPT) works hard to correct. Our goal is to reimagine preservation in a way that allows the story of "ordinary" people to be told and their world to rise from underneath the extant buildings of today.

Richard Lushington was born in Charles Town (as it was known before the Revolution) in 1751 and spent his entire life in the bustling colonial city as a merchant and a Quaker. While Quakers were among the first settlers in Charles Town, acceptance into the emerging society of colonial South Carolina dominated by Anglicans came slowly. One of the reasons for this slow acceptance involved Charleston Quakers' complicated relationship with the institution of slavery. Lushington himself enslaved 11 people at the time of his death, but evidence exists to suggest he also exhibited some anti-slavery tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

The Quaker Meeting House appears on a map of Charles Town from 1711—the only church not located within the protective city walls. As historian Benjamin Carp writes, "In South Carolina gentility was a projection of power that depended on refinement but left little room for universalism, and so the province was 'officially tolerant but culturally hostile' to Quakers."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was this cultural hostility

and a desire for acceptance that shaped Lushington and led him into military service during the Revolutionary War, commanding others who experienced similar cultural challenges: Jewish men.

The reason for this alliance is largely a matter of understanding the geography of Charles Town. During the Revolutionary War, militias mustered by district. This meant militia units generally contained members of similar occupations. As Barnett Elzas explained in his groundbreaking 1905 work, *The Jews of South Carolina*, "Richard Lushington's district extended on King Street, from Broad Street to Charles Town Neck, above the modern Calhoun Street. King Street was then, as now, a principal

business district, and most of the Jews had their stores there."<sup>4</sup> As a result, Captain Richard Lushington, a Quaker merchant, commanded a militia of fellow merchants with names such as Solomon Aarons, Moses Cohen, and Ephraim Abrams.

Lushington's militia unit became known as "The Jews' Company" or "The Company of Free Citizens," but while it did include a significant number of Jewish men, they were not a majority nor was Lushington's unit the only one with this demographic profile. James Benthams, another prominent merchant, also commanded a unit with a significant Jewish presence. The difference between Lushington and Benthams illustrates the tensions within the

social hierarchy and how those shaped the historical narrative and the challenges presented in telling the story of Lushington and his men.

Benthams was Anglican, the dominant religion of the Carolina colony, and is buried at the historic St. Philip's Cemetery on Church Street. Twice marginalized, Lushington's story provides a stark contrast. He was a member of a small minority in Charles Town, given his Quaker faith, and isolated even further within that faith by taking up arms. This double marginalization, along with many of his men being Jewish, another minority in the colony, lends this unit its unique and complex character.



*The walled city of Charles Town and the outlying Quaker Meeting House are depicted in this detail from a map by Edward Crisp, ca. 1711. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division.*

Further, links between Quakers and Jews date to the early days of Quakerism when George Fox and Margaret Fell, founders of the Religious Society of Friends, played an important role in the return of Jews to England in the 1650s.<sup>5</sup> While evidence is still needed to definitively support such a statement, it is possible Lushington felt a kinship with the Jewish men under his command. As historian Sally Bruyneel writes, "Friends embraced no creed save humility before that of God in the individual conscience. This was something all, including Jews, possessed.

Thus, for Quakers, Jews were equal as human beings subject to the same sins and the same potential for divine indwelling of the Light."<sup>6</sup> While motivations are difficult to infer, the idea of equality being a factor not only within the dynamics of this unit but also in the call to service under the Patriot cause for Lushington and Jewish men certainly resonates.

Unfortunately, the erasure of the historic landscape at the critical location where the Quaker Meeting House and cemetery stood presents its own challenges. Once situated at the corner of King and Queen streets, a tremendous fire in 1837 necessitated the razing of the meeting house, although it had long before fallen into a state of disrepair as the Quaker Meeting of Charleston greatly weakened in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the cemetery survived, it too disappeared from the landscape in 1969 when the remains were relocated behind the Charleston County Courthouse to make room for a parking garage.<sup>7</sup> Such erasure means that while the Jewish presence became entrenched in both the physical landscape and historical memory of Charleston, Lushington and other Quakers vanished.

Further complicating the quest to locate Lushington is the matter of Quaker burial rites. In his last will and testament, Richard Lushington specified, "after my Decease, in a proper time, my Executrix hereafter named, do cause me to be buried without any Ceremony."<sup>8</sup> That last instruction, "without any Ceremony," helps explain why he receded from historical memory for so long. While the location of Lushington's burial remains a mystery, circumstantial evidence suggests that he was laid to rest in the Quaker cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

SCBPT faces these challenges by seizing upon them as opportunities for creative new forms of interpretation. At the forefront of this effort is the development of The Liberty Trail. This partnership between SCBPT and the American Battlefield Trust guides visitors to a network of battlefields and important sites across the state of South Carolina. A key component of this

partnership is the development of The Charleston Liberty Trail app. Undergirded by historical research and enhanced by the latest technology—such as augmented reality—visitors will be able to see Charleston in the way Lushington and his men saw it. Research is underway to identify where the shops of these Jewish men were located and provide interpretation at those specific sites.

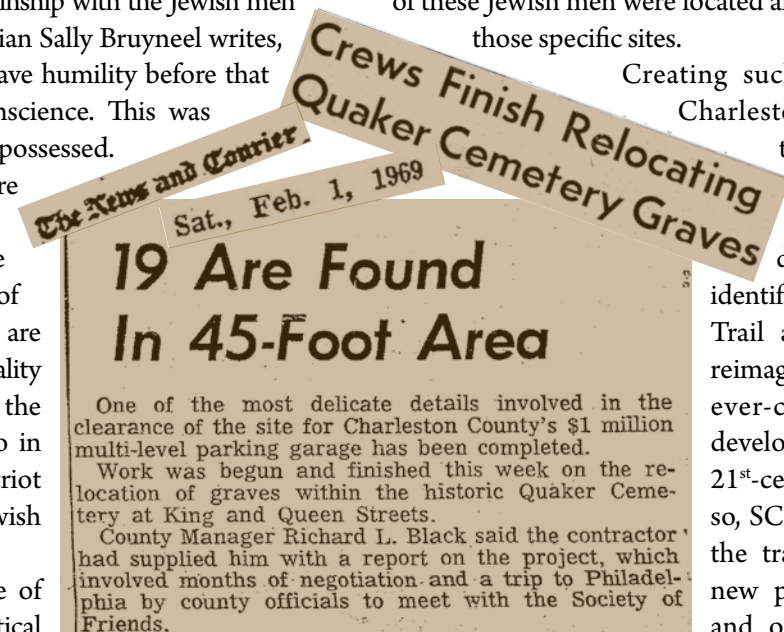
Creating such a network of sites in Charleston takes visitors beyond the battlefields and into the daily lives of these historical figures through deep research keyed to

identifiable locations. The Liberty Trail allows us to rethink and reimagine preservation in an ever-changing and constantly developing landscape, such as 21<sup>st</sup>-century Charleston. In doing so, SCBPT is stepping outside of the traditional box and forging new partnerships with retailers and others who occupy spaces

once frequented by people like Lushington and the militia men who served under his command. Site-specific interpretation enriches the historical narrative by bringing to the fore minority groups, such as Quakers and Jews, and introducing outsiders' perspectives to the mainstream point of view.

### NOTES

1. *State Gazette of South Carolina*, June 24, 1790.
2. A full discussion of Charleston Quakers and their complex views on slavery is beyond the purview of this piece. For an insightful look at these views of Quakers and Lushington, see Claire Bellerjeau and Tiffany Yecke Brooks' *Espionage and Enslavement in the Revolution* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2021).
3. Benjamin Carp, "Fix'd almost amongst Strangers': Charleston's Quaker Merchants and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (January 2017): 77–108.
4. Barnett A. Elzas, *The Jews of South Carolina: From The Earliest Times To The Present Day* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1905), 87.
5. Tony Stoller, "Frontpiece," *Friends Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (November 2015): 2.
6. Sally Bruyneel, "Early Quaker beliefs and the nation of the Jews," *Friends Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (November 2015): 25.
7. "Crews Finish Relocating Quaker Cemetery Graves," *Charleston News and Courier*, February 1, 1969.
8. Richard Lushington, "Last Will and Testament," *South Carolina Wills and Related Probate Matters, 1692–1868*, Charleston County Probate Court, Charleston, SC, 434–435.
9. The evidence consists of Lushington having spent his entire life in Charleston and the fact that his brother-in-law, Daniel Latham, who was married to Charity Lushington's sister, was buried there. Latham's tombstone is the only one preserved and currently marks the location of the remains.





## Atlantic Enigma: The Shifting Identities of Francis Salvador

by Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, Clemson University

Francis Salvador, a would-be planter, new American, Jew, and revolutionary, is one of the most memorialized Jewish figures in South Carolina history. His name appears on markers across the state from Clemson to Charleston, and his dramatic death in an early skirmish of the Revolutionary War is the subject of a diorama once displayed at B'nai B'rith headquarters in Washington DC. Most of the narratives of Salvador's life and the beliefs that led him to his death on the banks of the Seneca River lack definitive historical detail. Famous by reputation but scant in archival evidence, Salvador is in some ways the easiest of historical figures to memorialize, a pliable hero for changing eras, one who can be reframed to fit a myriad of identities and commitments.

"Atlantic Enigma" examines ways in which Salvador has been imagined and re-imagined as a reflection of shifting cultural values. Salvador lived in an Atlantic world bridging London, Lisbon, Charleston, the Upstate frontier, and the enslavement economies of Africa and the Caribbean. The many identities that he occupied across time and space combine with spotty contemporary documentation to create the ambiguity that makes Salvador such a malleable figure. Drawing upon archival records, historical newspaper accounts, and the early work of the American Jewish Historical Society, my conference paper brings to light the discrepancies and questions surrounding an oft-referenced but little-understood personality.

The narrative of Salvador's life is most detailed at its very end. On July 31, 1776, he left Ninety-Six—South Carolina's second most populous district—with Major Andrew Williamson's militia. Though he arrived in the colony only in December 1773, Salvador was already a prominent citizen, having served in both of the South Carolina Provincial Congresses.<sup>1</sup> Williamson's force was ambushed as it approached the outskirts of the Cherokee town of Essenecca, near modern-day Clemson. Salvador was shot in the initial volley.

According to Williamson, Salvador was mounted close to the commander, who dispatched a lieutenant to find the wounded man in the darkness.<sup>2</sup> Before Salvador was found, however, "the enemy unfortunately got his scalp: which, was the only one taken," Williamson recounted.<sup>3</sup> After the skirmish ended, less than an hour later, Williamson discovered his compatriot lying in the brush, with just enough life left in him to ask Williamson whether the skirmish had been won. "He said he was glad of it, and shook me by the hand—and bade me farewell—and said, he would die in a few minutes."<sup>4</sup>

In those minutes, Salvador, already the first Jew elected to public office in British North America, also became the first Jewish person killed in the American Revolution.<sup>5</sup> His death in battle would be embraced by successive generations of Jewish Americans eager to prove their co-religionists were present at America's moment of inception.<sup>6</sup>

The narrative upon which much of Salvador's hagiography is based raises a number of questions regarding its construction. Williamson's entire account of the skirmish is the story of Salvador's death; he does not report to his commander any details of the fight itself, the orders given, or even the immediate outcome of the battle. While the story seems detailed, there is no mention of Salvador's burial arrangements.

More broadly, the sole eyewitness account of Salvador's death is formulaic, epitomizing a "good death" in general and martial valor specifically. It bears striking similarity to the well-documented accounts of British Brigadier-General James Wolfe's death some 15 years earlier in Quebec.<sup>7</sup> The tale of Wolfe's death would have been well known to every Anglo-American at the time, and the obvious parallels (sans the scalping) and the lack of any additional detail regarding the battle itself raise questions about Williamson's account.<sup>8</sup>

The uncertainty surrounding Salvador's death pales in comparison to other questions about his life. Born to a wealthy Sephardic family in London, he sailed to South Carolina ostensibly to recover the family's wealth by setting up a plantation worked by enslaved laborers on the Upstate frontier. Salvador bounds into the historical record shortly



Francis Salvador commemorative memorabilia. Above: Bicentennial (1976) pin, "Killed in the Battle of Charleston." Below: 1972 Franklin Mint sterling silver coin, "History of Jews of America" series. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.



after his arrival, emerging as a passionate adherent to the Patriot cause. His surviving correspondence is businesslike, offering prescient insights into the state of the Upcountry on the brink of independence.<sup>9</sup> But much of his life, his decisions, personality, and motivations, remain at best speculative, as few of Salvador's letters survived.

The innumerable images portraying the revolutionary are products of their artists' imaginations, as there is no extant portrait or even physical description of Salvador. Instead, the very basic markers of his identity—titles like "patriot," "aristocrat," "Jewish-American," and uniquely "the Southern Paul Revere"—were quickly applied by those who wished to use his historical persona for their own purposes. From the

19<sup>th</sup> century through the 21<sup>st</sup>, Salvador was valorized in popular histories aimed at Jewish Americans, from Yiddish theater to edgy comics to antiquarian biographic sketches.<sup>10</sup>

His utility is particularly evidenced in public commemorative efforts by the Jewish communities of Charleston and Greenwood, who laid claim to Salvador as one of their own.<sup>11</sup> Salvador serves as a mirror for ensuing generations, reflecting their own desired image more than any actual portrait of Salvador himself. Francis Salvador remains an enigma—a prominent Jew who left no trace of personal religious affiliation, a revolutionary who, at the cusp of a war for independence, sought to enslave people of African descent, a martyr with no grave.

### NOTES

1. Salvador's work in the Provincial Congresses of 1776 is described in detail in *Journal of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina* (London: J. Almon, 1776), 10, 23–24, 42, 55–56, 64–65, 88–89, 106.
2. Andrew Williamson to Henry Drayton in *John Drayton, Memoirs of the American Revolution* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1821), 347.
3. Drayton, 347.
4. Drayton, 348.
5. This, too, is a matter of interpretation. Jewish-born Georgian Joseph Ottolenghi has been ascribed the title of first Jewish officeholder, but he seems to have been a practicing Christian during his time in the colony. While there is no record documenting Salvador as practicing any other religion, there is also no sign of his affiliation with Judaism or with the sizeable Jewish community in Charleston after his arrival in South Carolina. In his *History of Edgefield County* (1897), John Abney Chapney describes Salvador as "of Hebrew parents and a Hebrew in religion," but cites no sources and makes numerous factual errors in his brief sketch of Salvador's life.
6. See, for example, the Revolutionary Bicentennial-era advertisement including an image and biographical sketch of Salvador: "Maxwell House Coffee Honors Famous Jewish-American Patriots," *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, Philadelphia, PA, October 10, 1975, 55.
7. Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe: The French and Indian War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), p. 495.
8. For one example of contemporary descriptions of the event published in British North America see John Pringle's *The life of General James Wolfe, the conqueror of Canada, or, The eulogium of that renowned hero, attempted according to the rules of eloquence: with a monumental inscription, Latin and English, to perpetuate his memory*. (Boston: Fowle and Draper, 1760), <http://online.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.39385>.



9. See, for instance, the correspondence with William Henry Drayton included in Robert W. Gibbes, *Documentary history of the American revolution: consisting of letters and papers relating to the contest for liberty, chiefly in South Carolina, from originals in the possession of the editor, and other sources* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1853), [http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=darltex;view=toc;idno=31735054858679\\_24-26,28-30](http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=darltex;view=toc;idno=31735054858679_24-26,28-30).

10. Notable examples include: Leon Huhner, "Francis Salvador, A Prominent Patriot of the Revolutionary War," *Publications*

of the American Jewish Historical Society, no. 9 (1901): 107–22; "Salvador, Francis," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Cyrus Adler and L. Huhner, eds., 10 (1906), 661–662; Helen Kohn Hennig, *Francis Salvador*, (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1935); Lionel Koppman, *Francis Salvador, patriot* [script] (New York: National Jewish Welfare Board, 1952); Allan Tarshish, *Francis Salvador: A Revolutionary hero*; and Tama Levitan's Yiddish-language *Francis Salvador* (New York, 1949). His ambush was the subject of a 1970 historical diorama vandalized by terrorists while on display in B'nai B'rith's headquarters in Washington DC, re-configured for a 2002 exhibition, and now installed under plexiglass in Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim's museum in Charleston, SC. In a more modern context, his story has been featured by the Library of Congress's *In Custodia Legis* blog in honor of Jewish-American Heritage Month (2020) and on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website.

11. "Salvador Marker Unveiled," *Index-Journal*, Greenwood, SC, Saturday, July 16, 1960, 1; Jeannette Felsenthal Pearlstine, ed. *The Souvenir Book of the Bi-Centennial, 1750–1950. The Story of the Celebration of the Bicentennial of the Charleston Jewish Community*, November 19 through November 26, 1950 (Bicentennial Committee, 1951).



# Southern Jews and the Atlantic World

## JHSSC hosts the Southern Jewish Historical Society's 46<sup>th</sup> annual meeting ~ October 21–23, 2022 ~ Charleston, SC

### Friday, October 21

**8:30 A.M.** Registration, **Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, College of Charleston, 96 Wentworth Street**

**9:30** Welcome remarks: Jay Silverberg, president, SJHS, and Rachel Gordin Barnett, executive director, JHSSC

#### **10:00 Jews, Modernism, and the Cosmopolitan South**

Chair: Marian Mazzone

- Samuel D. Gruber, "The International Style Comes South"
- Leonard Rogoff, "Matisse and his 'Baltimore Ladies': The Cone Sisters Collect Modernist Art"
- Cheyenne McClain, "Dr. Abram Kanof: Collecting International Judaica and the Development of Southern Jewish Identity"

**11:15** Lunch (on your own)

#### **12:30–1:45 P.M.** Concurrent panels **Colonial Jews and the Atlantic World**

Chair: Sandy Slater

- Sara Jay, "Practicing Empire in the American South: What a Historian of North African Jews Can Learn from Studying Jews of the Colonial Atlantic World"
- José Alberto Tavim, "Aaron Lopez's Business Networks and the South"
- Rivi Feinsilber, "Jews and Anti-Jewish Prejudice: Trans-Atlantic Transfer to the New World"

#### **Performance and Memory in the American South**

Chair: Catherine Eskin

- Heather S. Nathans, "'An Esther at the South': Re-Imagining Southern Womanhood"
- Michael Hoberman, "Housebound Specters: The Mordecai House Dynasty's Fall from Grace"
- Gabrielle Berlinger, "Everyday Things, Singular Stories: Preserving and Presenting Jewish Material Culture in Greensboro, NC"

**2:00–3:15** Concurrent panels

#### **Encounters with the State**

Chair: Lance Sussman

- Seth Barrett Tillman, "New Thinking on Jacob Henry"
- Eric Eisner, "Jewish Rights on Middle Ground: Race and the Religious Test in Antebellum Maryland"
- John Williams, "The Jewish Problem: Jewish Merchants in the American South during the Civil War"

#### **Politics of Preservation**

Chair: Grant Gilmore

- George H. McDaniel, "Looking for Lushington: The Lost Quaker Commander of Charleston's Revolutionary Jewish Militia"
- Barry Stiefel, "Jews, National Identity, and Historic Preservation: Trans-Atlantic Experiences from the Mount Vernon Ladies Association and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings"
- Hannah Lebovitz, "Where Did the Shtetl Go? Investigating Jewish Self-Erasure in Dallas, Texas"

#### **3:30–4:30 SJHS board meeting**

#### **5:00 Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, 90 Hasell Street**

**Dinner and Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter Lecture:** Michael R. Cohen, "The Economics of Southern Jewish History"

Shabbat service

(Shabbat begins 6:21 P.M.)



Michael R. Cohen is the Stuart and Suzanne Grant Professor of the American Jewish Experience at Tulane University. He is chair and Sizeler Professor of the Department of Jewish Studies, and director of the Stuart and Suzanne Grant Center for the American Jewish Experience. Cohen's *Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era* (NYU Press, 2017) was a finalist for the American Jewish Historical Society's Saul Viener Book Prize. Author of *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement* (Columbia University Press, 2012), he is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of American Jewish History* (Oxford University Press). His third book-length monograph, *American Jews: An Economic History*, is under contract with NYU Press.

### Saturday, October 22

**8:00 A.M.** Shabbat service (location TBD)

#### **9:00–11:00 Walking Tours (choose one)**

- Upper King Street
- Coming Street Cemetery
- Old Slave Mart Museum

#### **11:00–12:15 P.M. Rising Stars of Southern Jewish History**

Chair: Marni Davis

- Michael Jacobs, "A New Home in the Old South: Southern Jewish Women's Role in Identity Formation, 1800–1865"
- Jacob Morrow-Spitzer, "Keep the State Far From Us: Jewish Politics and the End of Reconstruction"
- Mimi Brown Wooten, "*La Djusticia Americana*: Leo Frank in the Ladino Press"

**12:15** Box lunch

**12:30 Beeber Family Lecture sponsored by the Helen Stern Fund:** Shari Rabin, "Dissent, Providentialism, and Slavery: A New Interpretation of Early Charleston Jewish Life"

#### **2:15–3:30 Pride and Prejudice: Race and Jewish Identity in the South**

Chair: Phyllis Leffler

- Jeremy Popkin, "Benjamin Gratz and Lexington: A Southern City and Its First Jewish Resident"
- Evan Howard Ashford, "Abraham's Choice: Race Loyalty Versus Civil Rights During the 1865 Freedom Summer"
- Andrew Baker, "Max Heller's Transatlantic Connections and the Palmetto State: 1979–1996"

**3:45–5:15** Concurrent panels

#### **Agents of Change**

Chair: Josh Parshall

- Anne Blankenship, "Varied Approaches to Immigrant Care: The Jewish Women of Charleston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati"
- Anne Gessler, "Ida Weis Friend: A Model for Southern Progressive Activism in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century New Orleans"
- Amy K. Milligan, "'The Dark-Eyed Jew' of Alabama"
- Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, "Atlantic Enigma: The Shifting Identities of Francis Salvador"

#### **Roundtable on Material Culture**

Chair: Joshua Furman

- Gabrielle Berlinger, Dale Rosengarten, Hilit Surowitz-Israel, Anna Tucker

**5:30–7:00 Jewish Heritage Collection reception,** Addlestone Library: SJHS awards ~ *Synagogues of the South* exhibit on display

Dinner (on your own)

(Shabbat ends 7:16 P.M.)



Reception sponsored by  
Nelson Mullins

Shari Rabin is associate professor of Jewish studies and religion and chair of Jewish studies at Oberlin College. A scholar of modern Judaism and American religions, she is the author of *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-century America* (NYU Press, 2017), which won a National Jewish Book Award in American Jewish Studies and was a finalist for the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. She is currently at work on a history of Jews, religion, and race in the American South, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.



### Sunday, October 23

**9:00–10:00 A.M.** JHSSC and SJHS member meetings

**9:00–12:00 P.M.** Book signing ~ coffee and bagels

#### **10:30–11:45 Social Justice**

Chair: Stephen Whitfield

- Ashley Walters, "Reading the Civil War through the Russian Revolution"
- Eli Rosenblatt, "Bishop Charles L. Russell and the African-American Reception of the Talmud, 1920–1964"
- Margaret Norman and Melissa Young, "A Case Study of the Holocaust and Human Rights: Fred and Anny Kraus in Birmingham, Alabama, 1954–1970"
- Leah Cannon Burnham, "Atlanta Jews and the Pursuit of Due Process for Cuban Detainees, 1980–1987"

**11:45** Closing remarks

*Program information continues on next page*



## Meeting registration

Online at: <https://jhssc.org/events/conference/>  
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 (per person):

Full weekend ~ \$195

Friday, conference only ~ \$50

Saturday only ~ \$75

Sunday only ~ \$25

## Questions:

Enid Idelsohn

[idelsohne@cofc.edu](mailto:idelsohne@cofc.edu)

Phone: 843.953.3918

Fax: 843.953.7624

**Accommodations ~ availability is limited. For details, go to:** <https://jhssc.org/events/conference/>

## A Tribute to Eli N. Evans (1936–2022)

by Robert N. Rosen

**E**li N. Evans, of blessed memory, died on July 26, 2022, at the age of 85. Born and raised in Durham, North Carolina, he was the son of Emanuel J. (Mutt) Evans and Sarah Nachamson Evans. His paternal grandfather, Isaac Evans, was a peddler in North Carolina before opening a small store in Fayetteville. Eli's father served six terms as mayor of Durham, from 1951 until 1963. His maternal grandmother, Jennie Nachamson, founded the South's first chapter of the national women's organization Hadassah; his mother carried on the commitment as a regional and national organizer. Eli called her "Hadassah's Southern accent."

In 1958, Evans graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and, in 1963, earned a law degree at Yale University. Evans became president of the philanthropic Charles H. Revson Foundation in 1977. Although Eli never returned to live in the South, his southern roots remained central to his identity and fostered his lifelong passion: the history and culture of Jews in the South.

When Evan's first book, *The Provincials*, was published in 1973, there was no field known as Southern Jewish History. Of course, historians, lay people, and rabbis (like our own Dr. Barnett Elzas) had written local histories, but Eli expanded the field to the whole South and made it a scholarly discipline. I read *The Provincials* soon after it came out and was thrilled to see our history in print.

Eli's second big book, *Judah P. Benjamin* (1988), inspired me to borrow Eli's subtitle and write an opus of my own,

*The Jewish Confederates* (2000). The phrase had a nice ring to it! Eli had done more than publish a book. He popularized a whole field of study and interest in southern Jewish history and culture. "Eli really showed the way," Ron Hoffman, a novelist who lives in Mobile, Alabama, said in an interview. Marcie Cohen Ferris, Professor Emeritus of American Studies, UNC-CH and Evans's close friend and colleague, recalls, "I am one of those people who, when they read *The Provincials*, they felt for the first time a recognition."

Over the years, I became friendly with Eli, having had the good fortune to meet and chat with him at conferences. He was instrumental in launching the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. A prolific speaker and writer, he caused several generations of Jews to be captivated by—and take seriously—the history of southern Jews. Eli was generous with his time and his praise. He encouraged me and other historians and reached out through a wide range of media to anyone and everyone interested in the subject.

Professors Marcie Ferris and Mark Greenberg speak for all of us when they credit Eli Evans's seminal works on the southern Jewish experience in their landmark anthology, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*: "Every scholar of the Jewish South has been touched by his writing." Many of us have followed in Eli's footsteps, and we remember him today, to quote Professor Shari Rabin of Oberlin College, as "the patron saint of Southern Jewish History."



*Eli N. Evans (l) with his wife, Judith London Evans, and their son, Joshua Evans, in the family's New York City apartment, winter 2007. Photo by Jill Krementz, courtesy of Joshua Evans.*

## Practicing Empire in the American South: What a Historian of North African Jews Can Learn from Studying Jews of the Colonial Atlantic World

by Sara Jay, John Burroughs School and Washington University in St. Louis

**I**n 1870, 40 years after the French invasion of Algeria, the colonial government issued the Crémieux Decree granting citizenship to all Algerian Jews. The decree extended legal and civil rights to the nearly 140,000 Jews residing in Algeria, most of whom were Arabic speaking and had never set foot in France. Some 200 years earlier, in 1662, the British took over the Dutch colony of Suriname, home to a large Jewish community. One of their first directives was to issue a "grant of privileges," which declared that Suriname's Jews, none of them British, held full equality and religious freedom. Typical of many contradictory colonial policies, the freedoms afforded in Suriname were not extended to the Jewish population residing in the United Kingdom. It was not until parliament enacted a series of laws in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Jews residing in the UK achieved legal equality.

In both British Suriname and French Algeria, Jews were deemed economically vital to the survival of the colony. In Algeria, Jews were the gateway to lucrative resources and trade networks that spanned the Sahara and Mediterranean. In the Western Hemisphere, Jews participated in the plantation economy as slave owners, slave traders, and merchants with connections throughout the Americas from New England to Brazil.

There is a fracture in Jewish scholarship between those who study the 19<sup>th</sup> century's Age of Imperialism and those who study the 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries'

Age of Mercantilism. What would happen if we stopped treating these colonial projects as separate, and considered them one continuous, nearly 500-year experiment? The robust economic exchanges and markets created and maintained by

Jews in both hemispheres, particularly in cosmopolitan cities like Charleston, South Carolina, Paramaribo, Suriname, and Algiers, Algeria, were targeted by European colonizers as prime entry points for economic extraction and the establishment of monopolies over trade.

Once we stop considering Europe's colonization of Africa and the Middle East as separate from New World empires, we begin to understand the centrality of Jewish economic endeavors in shaping colonial policies for half a millennium. Rulers recognized that Jews could be useful in consolidating their political and economic power over these new territories. As a result, they took advantage of the Jewish community's desire for social and political acceptance without conversion to transform them into sometimes willing participants, often passive bystanders, and occasional victims of imperial policies in both the Americas and the Middle East/North African territories.

In the Americas, Jews took advantage of the racialized hierarchy that did not emphasize religious affiliation and found opportunities for upward mobility, particularly through participation in the plantation economy as slave owners and traders. The imperial powers and, later, state and local governments in



*Above: Hand-colored engraving depicting a Jewish woman and a Jewish merchant from Algiers, by Andreas Geiger, 1850. Below: Photographic postcard (1976) of the ruins of Congregation Beracha ve Shalom in Jodensavanne, Suriname. William A. Rosenthal Judaica collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*





the United States, recognized the usefulness of cultivating Jewish denizens who were mostly loyal to their imperial (and later national) goals, as opposed to Jewish aliens who would or could lead resistance. It is in this context that we can analyze Newport's Jewish community leader Moses Seixas's famous correspondence with George Washington in 1790, in which both leaders agreed that the new United States should be built on universal religious toleration.

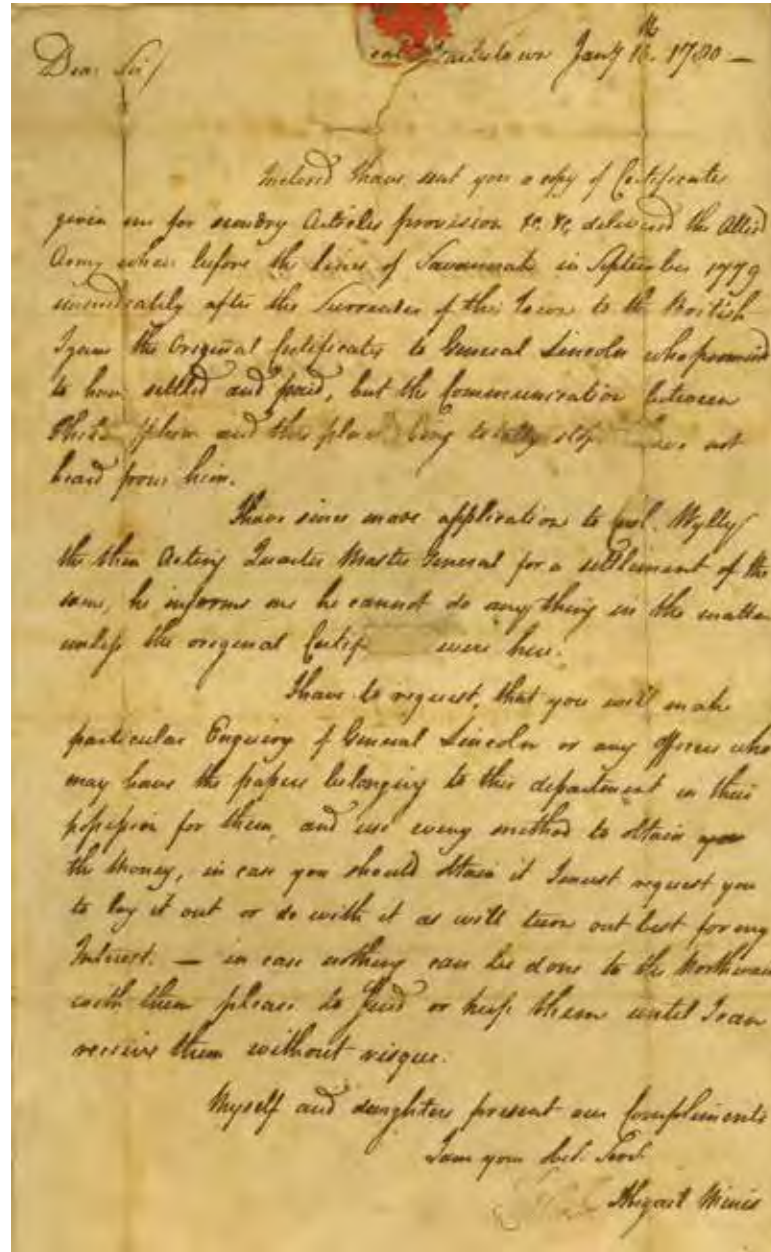
The British colonists turned American founding fathers realized the importance of guaranteeing religious freedom and, in exchange, they found in elite Jews trusted partners in building a society in which a small minority of landowners and wealthy traders controlled political power. Francis Salvador, arguably the best-known Jewish character in Charleston's colonial history, was in the process of establishing an indigo plantation in the Upcountry, worked by slave labor, when he became the first Jew in the 13 colonies elected to a government position and, shortly thereafter, died a war hero as the first Jewish casualty of the Revolution. Like the Seixas family, Salvador counted influential figures like Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Henry Laurens as friends, cementing his status in Charleston's exclusive social circles.

Abigail Minis, a Charleston-born Jew who spent much of her life in Savannah as a successful businesswoman and plantation owner, returned to Charleston after Savannah fell to the British in 1778 and remained in the city until 1783. While

in Charleston, she was harassed by British sympathizers who attempted to confiscate her property. She found allies in the revolutionaries and offered to provide financial support for their cause in gratitude for the help they gave her in protecting her assets against the loyalists. So long as affluent Jews like the Seixases, Salvadors, and Minises were accepted without the expectation of conversion, they embraced the social mores and practices of their peers and behaved accordingly by continuing their economic and political work on behalf of the colony. After the Revolution, Jewish merchants maintained their trade with co-religionists throughout the Americas, to the benefit of the new nation trying to establish its economic independence from the British.

When the French found themselves outnumbered and embattled in the colony of Algeria in 1870, it made sense that they would turn to the indigenous Arab Jewish population, offer them equal rights, and expect in return partners on the ground to build and maintain the colony. The Crémieux Decree is often deemed a peculiar policy by scholars who limit their study of Jews and empire to the 19<sup>th</sup> century because no other legislation like it was promulgated in the region. It is only when we consider the imperial

policies from the earlier age that we can see in Algeria the French employed a tried and true strategy of granting legal equality and religious freedom to secure the allegiance and partnership of Jewish traders and landowners in the colonial project.



*Letter to Mordecai Sheftall from Abigail Minis in Charlestown, dated January 14, 1780, requesting help in obtaining reimbursement for her financial support of the Continental Army during the Siege of Savannah. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society. [GHS 0568, Jacob Minis colonial papers].*

## “An Esther at the South”: Re-Imagining Southern Womanhood

by Heather S. Nathans, Tufts University

In this brief overview of my upcoming presentation for the annual Southern Jewish Historical Society conference, I juxtapose the plantation reminiscences of Lee Cohen Harby with the writings of abolitionist Angelina Grimké, contrasting their visions of antebellum Southern womanhood. (Note that this short essay incorporates quotations from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century primary source that makes derogatory references to enslaved people.)

In 1836, Charleston-born abolitionist Angelina Grimké called for an “Esther at the South” to rise up against the evils of slavery. Her *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* opens with Mordecai's exhortation to Esther to defend her people: “Think not within thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews.” Implicitly linking the fates of Black, white, Jewish, and Christian women, Grimké invokes Esther as a role model for Christian southern women, imploring, “Is there no Esther among you, who will plead for the poor devoted slave?”

While Grimké calls up the familiar Biblical figure as a political activist, other, more sensationalized representations of Esther circulated in the United States during this same era as the exotic Jewess gained popularity on American and

European stages. Indeed, stories of Esther's heroism surfaced in plays including *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*, *The Royal Jewess; Or the Death of Haman!*, and *Esther*. Dramatists, novelists, and actors began to endow the figure with both moral righteousness as well as irresistible allure, as the lavish costume and stage descriptions in the plays suggest.

The exotic stage Jewess emerged as an ethnically ambiguous figure in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century melodrama. Indeed, some scholars have argued that she prefigures the tragic mulatto heroine who would come to dominate popular culture by the 1850s, exemplified in figures such as Eliza from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Zoe in *The Octoroon*.<sup>\*</sup> By calling upon white southern Christian women to acknowledge spiritual kinship with the Jewish Esther and moral kinship with enslaved Black women, is Grimké proposing to conflate gender, racial, ethnic, and religious identities?

In contrast to Grimké's effort to create a shared sense of southern womanhood, Lee Cohen Harby,

granddaughter of the Charleston religious reformer Isaac Harby and daughter of plantation owner Marx E. Cohen, looked back on her girlhood three decades after the Civil War, casting events and relationships in a nostalgic light that positioned white southern women (herself included) at the top of the social ladder.



*Victorian-era print published by R. Lloyd's Wholesale Theatrical Print Warehouse in London, England, showcasing actors in the play King Ahasuerus. The costumes are typical of what would have been seen in the various productions featuring Esther (here, upper left). Courtesy of Pollock's Toy Museum, London, England.*

<sup>\*</sup> Among the best known of these figures was the character of Rebecca in Sir Walter Scott's popular novel *Ivanhoe*. Scott's book inspired numerous professional theatrical adaptations as well as amateur performances eagerly consumed by southern audiences—including the daughters of future Confederate General Robert E. Lee, one of whom described a tableaux vivant presented at the Virginia Female Institute in Staunton in 1856. It featured her cousin May Carter in the role of Rebecca, and Miss Lee noted that, “She made a fine Jewess with her black hair and handsome Jewish face.” (Letter dated November 28, 1856, held in the Lee Archives, Washington & Lee University).



Harby framed her gentility and refinement as explicitly enabled by the slave system. In a series of essays published in the *Jewish Messenger* in the 1880s, she described the joys of plantation life and characterized it as a “notable school for wives and mothers,” that is, for white southern women. Even as she observed, “Slavery is dead and not one of us would resurrect the corpse if we could,” she sighed for, “the style of life that passed away with the institution.”

Yet while her writings draw a sharp distinction between plantation mistresses and the Black women they enslave, Harby equivocates on the subjects of religion and social power. Although in other writings she speaks movingly on the need to place Jewish working girls in good Jewish homes, here she envelops herself in Christian ritual and Confederate mythology to signal her allegiance to the southern power structures of the past.

In a postwar essay for the *Weekly Magazine*, for example, Harby portrays the lavish preparations of her fellow plantation dwellers for the 1859–1860 Christmas holidays. She chronicles an era of plenty for white planters on the eve of the Civil War, applauding the intricate decorations crafted by “deft white hands” and the gloriously bedecked tables groaning with “ham and sausages.” She recalls that her own family festivities of 1859 took place under the benign eye of a marble bust of John C. Calhoun, whose head was “crowned with a fresh wreath of laurel—a crown as fresh and green as his memory will ever be in the loving hearts of his countrymen.”

Harby prided herself on her Jewish heritage, so what should contemporary scholars make of her effusive recollections of this last Christmas of plenty? How did her self-awareness as a Jewish woman coexist with this embrace of the birth of Jesus Christ? The complex mixture of symbols in her essay—the Christmas decorations combined with the “shrine” to the bust of John C. Calhoun—suggest the ways she signaled her inclusion in the white Christian Confederate social hierarchy.

She further established her status as a white southern woman by describing performances staged by enslaved people for “massa’s” entertainment, when white holiday visitors would be invited to the “servants’ quarters” to “be lookers-on at their dancing.” In these recollections she refers to herself as the “young miss” and suggests that the visits were returned in kind, that the “servants” enjoyed watching their owners enjoy themselves: “They listened to the laughter and merry voices of their owners, taking an inexpressible delight in the scene.”

Harby’s essays conjure the racist clichés that would become the hallmark of post-Civil War southern nostalgia in melodramas, minstrel shows, and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century films such as “Birth of a Nation,” as well as various silent-film versions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Other essays in her *Jewish Messenger* series also highlight the nobility of plantation mistresses, who “ruled well and graciously” over the “large dependent class [of] negroes relying upon their owners for everything.”

The writings I describe here present an obvious irony: a Christian woman invoking the Jewish Esther as a champion of racial justice versus a Jewish woman claiming Christmas as a signifier of her whiteness. As I look towards the Southern Jewish Historical Society conference,

I will continue to explore how scholars of American Jewish history might use works like Grimké’s and Harby’s to examine how race “performs” in American Jewish history, and how texts of racial performance might help untangle what scholar Robin Bernstein calls “historically located meanings.” How do Grimké’s and Harby’s starkly different writings—those of a passionate abolitionist and those of a southern apologist—illuminate ways in which 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern women staged these complicated struggles for authority?

#### SOURCES

- Lee Cohen Harby papers, Mss. 1019, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.
- Angelina Emily Grimké, *Appeal to Christian Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836).



*Lee Cohen Harby, age 45 (left rear), with her daughter, Lily Lee Harby Isaacs (r), and Lily's sons, Arthur Sydney Isaacs and Cyril A. Isaacs, 1895. Pasted in is Lee's mother, Armida Harby Cohen, wife of Marx E. Cohen and daughter of Isaac Harby. Armida had died, at the age of 75, some months before this photograph was taken. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

## Max Heller's Transatlantic Connections and the Palmetto State: 1979–1996

by Andrew Baker, *Clemson University*

When Max Moses Heller, a Vienna-born Jew, arrived in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1938, fewer than 5,000 South Carolinians were foreign-born. According to the 1940 census, that was the least of any American state.<sup>1</sup> In an area with a limited number of immigrants and a relatively small Jewish community, Heller's Austrian birth and his religion stood out far more than in a major northeastern or midwestern city.

During Heller's lifetime, however, European corporations became a prominent part of the Palmetto State's economy, and migration into South Carolina from other parts of the country and world made its populace more cosmopolitan. Heller helped lead first the city of Greenville—a city built on a narrative of openness to new people that growth-minded locals wished to promote—and then the state as a whole into the realm of international business.

His European background and track record as a successful manufacturer and civic leader in South Carolina made Max Heller uniquely suited for the task of recruiting European companies to the Upstate and South Carolina. He brought Europe to South Carolina in more ways than one. Serving on city council and then as mayor of Greenville from 1971 through 1979, his redevelopment of the downtown drew on his Viennese background and love of the arts through flourishes such as plazas for outdoor dining and tree-lined boulevards. In short, Heller's European identity is at the heart of his story in South Carolina, not only in his efforts to

remake Greenville's downtown in a European image, but later, in his work with Governor Richard Riley's administration on international economic development.

Max Heller was born in 1919 and raised in a devout Jewish household with his parents and sister, Paula. Growing up, Max was a talented wrestler and an admirer of American culture, particularly films. His interest also lay in business instead of medicine, which his parents wanted him to pursue. Max worked as an apprentice following his high school graduation and attended business school after work.

In 1937, Heller met his future wife, Trude Schöenthal, while their families stayed at the same resort. When Max accompanied his father back to Vienna during the trip, he happened to encounter a group of girls from Greenville, South Carolina, on a European tour. He danced and conversed with one of them, a young woman named Mary Mills; wanting to write to someone in America, he asked for her address.

Heller wrote Mills following the Anschluss, Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, in hopes of finding a way to emigrate. An employment guarantee from Shephard Saltzman, a Jewish apparel manufacturer in Greenville, facilitated Max and Paula Heller's escape. Trude and her family followed later. Max's strong work ethic, business experience, and intelligence helped him to quickly ascend the ranks of Saltzman's Piedmont Shirt Co. before leaving to form his own firm, Maxon Shirts.

Business success allowed Heller to retire at a relatively early age and focus on serving the Greenville community. His talents drew the attention of civic leaders



*Above: Max Heller (wearing hat) and his wife, Trude (behind him, on steps): "Leaving for the Orient on the Daniel [International Corp.] Jet Plane, Chicago – November 1979." Below: Trude and Max Heller visit the Great Wall of China. Photos courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Furman University.*





interested in improving the efficiency of local government, making Greenville a more attractive place to live, and recruiting new companies and residents. Outside publications often noted Heller's status as a Jewish immigrant serving as mayor in a city known for its large number of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. In an August 1974 profile, *Money Magazine* advised readers who could be transferred to Greenville that "religious life leans toward the fervid" because of its location in the Bible Belt, but added residents displayed "no overt prejudice towards Catholics or others who belong to a religious minority. . . . [I]n fact, Greenville's mayor, Max Heller is an Austrian-born Jew."

Following his defeat in a controversial 1978 congressional race, Heller was immediately appointed chairman of the State Development Board by incoming governor Dick Riley. Reflecting the importance of economic development to South Carolina, Riley later described the role as "probably the most important appointment that I had," noting Heller's reputation for working well with the business community, and his fair-mindedness and personality. Heller and Riley traveled throughout Europe and Asia to cultivate business prospects.<sup>2</sup>

Heller's business acumen and his international background made him particularly adept at attracting foreign investment at a critical moment when an aging textile industry was poised to give way to automotive manufacturing. While mayor, for example, Heller played a role in Michelin's decision to locate facilities in Upstate South Carolina. Trade missions took Max—and Trude Heller, who always accompanied him—to western Europe and Asia, including China, which at the time had only recently welcomed western investment.



**Above: Max (r) and Trude Heller with J. Raoul Schoumaker, Belgian Ambassador to the United States, 1981. Written on the photo is "1981 COLA FN," most likely a reference to the FN firearms manufacturing plant in Columbia, SC, a subsidiary of FN Herstal of Herstal, Belgium. Below: Trude and Max Heller in Kyoto, Japan. Photos courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Furman University.**



Although development board chairmen had customarily kept part-time hours, Heller rented an apartment in Columbia and treated the position as a full-time job. As chairman, he helped to attract eight billion dollars in investment to South Carolina and create over 65,000 jobs, while also laying the groundwork for investments in the state by companies such as BMW, Hitachi, and Fuji.<sup>3</sup> As Riley recalled, "we had enormous success in economic development with Max Heller's leadership. That was statewide."<sup>4</sup>

Heller stepped down from his position as chairman in July 1983 and returned to Greenville, where he continued to be involved in civic causes and economic development.

Following the lead of larger southern cities, Greenville boosters began to promote the city as "international" as the number of foreign-owned firms operating in the area grew. The selection of Heller as the final torchbearer during the Olympic torch's passage through the city in 1996 testified to his importance to its revitalization and his status as a symbol of its global credentials. As the *Greenville News* opined on the occasion, "Heller helped Greenville become an international business community."<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1998), 513.
2. Author interview with Richard W. Riley, January 25, 2019.
3. Diane Vecchio, "Max Moses Heller: Patron Saint of Greenville's Renaissance," in *Doing Business in America: A Jewish History*, ed. Hasia R. Diner (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018), 201–203.
4. Author interview with Richard W. Riley.
5. Ron Barnett, "Torch Sparks Celebration in State," *Greenville News*, June 26, 1996.

## A Summerton Provincial

by Rachel Gordin Barnett,  
JHSSC Executive Director

I was saddened to hear about the passing of Eli Evans. Much has been written and said about his important contributions to southern Jewish history. But, to a kid who grew up in a small town in South Carolina in the '60s and '70s, the words he published in 1973 in *The Provincials* spoke to me. My siblings and I were the only Jewish kids in town; my father was the town's pharmacist and a merchant.

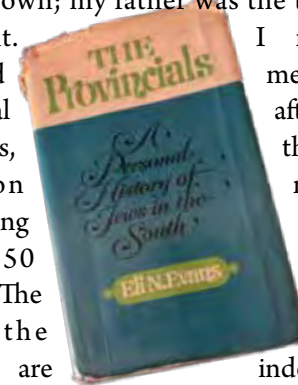
story—it told weren't unusual in today's terms, "representation

I am rereading now, almost 50 it the first time. The history of the experience. We are

not only for blazing a trail into southern Jewish history as an academic area, but also for providing southern Jews like myself the opportunity to understand ourselves.

JHSSC is looking forward to welcoming members of the Southern Jewish Historical Society in Charleston on October 21–23, 2022. Kudos to Ashley Walters, Dale Rosengarten, and the planning committee for a program that will be both enlightening and enjoyable. Walking tours, Shabbat dinner at KKBE, and a reception celebrating the Jewish Heritage Collection will round out the weekend.

Please join us in October in Charleston!



I related to Eli's me my experiences after all. I suppose that's why we say, matters."

*The Provincials* years after I read work is a terrific southern Jewish

indebted to Eli Evans

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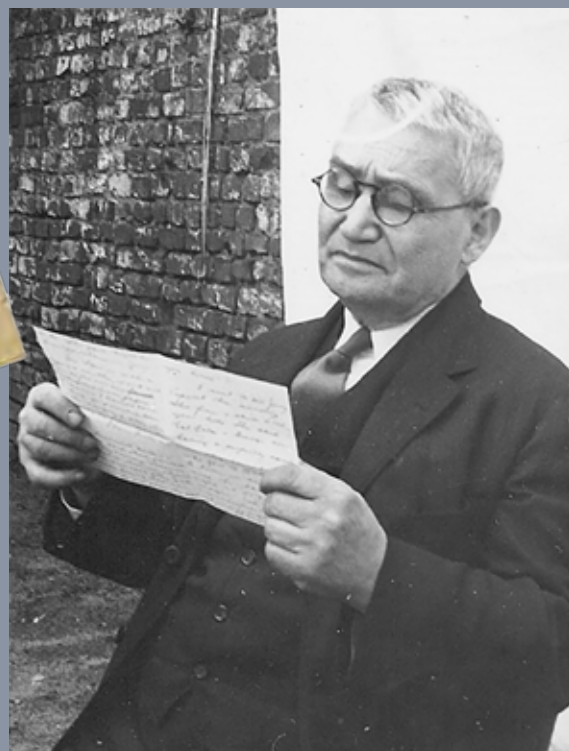
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"Paper Bridges":  
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**On the cover:**  
*Gershon (George) Mazo of Charleston, SC, reads a letter from family in the Old Country, ca. 1939; image courtesy of Joseph Mazo Butwin. Envelopes addressed to Helen Stern Lipton in Beaufort, SC (top), and Mrs. Bernard Harry (Minnie Tewel) Baum of Camden, SC (middle), from family in Poland and Germany. Evidence of Nazi postal censorship appears on the envelope at the bottom. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

## In this issue

**Remembering Martin Perlmutter** ~ Rachel Barnett, David Cohen, Richard Gergel, Dale Rosengarten, and Jeffrey Rosenblum reflect on the legacy of Dr. Martin “Marty” Perlmutter, o.b.m., JHSSC’s founding executive director and former director of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program at the College of Charleston. .... 4

**News from Home, Pleas for Help, and Lost Connections: The Helen Stern Lipton Papers and Holocaust Era Jewish Family Correspondence** ~ **Chad S. A. Gibbs** ~ The College of Charleston’s Holocaust Studies director delves into a collection of letters held in the archives in Addlestone Library, noting worrisome changes in substance and tone between 1932 and 1939. He introduces three other essays in this issue that also focus on correspondence from Europe, pointing to the rich resources available for research and instruction in the Jewish Heritage Collection’s Holocaust Archives. .... 7

**Joe Engel’s Legacy: Never Forget, Never Again** ~ **Samantha Krantz** ~ Joe Engel, o.b.m., passed away on November 26, 2022. The native of Zakroczym, Poland, and survivor of Auschwitz made Charleston, South Carolina, his home in 1949. In later years, he devoted much of his time to telling his story—especially to young people. The author, who met Joe while she was a freshman at the College of Charleston, describes the impact he had on her life. .... 9

**“Paper Bridges”: Letters of Hope and Despair, 1933-1945** ~ **JHSSC meets in Charleston, SC ~ April 29–30, 2023.** .... 11

**Returned, Redacted, and Refused: Postal Censorship in Nazi Germany** ~ **Grace Shaffer** ~ The arrival of letters from family in wartime Europe may have eased apprehensions stateside, but what could recipients make of an empty envelope? Or one that had been opened, resealed, and stamped with the Nazi swastika? .... 12

**Crying Out for Help: Letters from the Minnie Tewel Baum Papers, 1938–1941** ~ **Leah Davenport** ~ From a collection of letters preserved in the Holocaust Archives at the College of Charleston, a reader can glean the story of Malie and Chaim Landsmann and their two daughters. Malie appealed to her cousin Minnie Tewel Baum of Camden, South Carolina, for help in getting out of Germany. As Malie’s entreaties grew more desperate, Minnie came up against one bureaucratic roadblock after another. .... 14

**Teaching the Holocaust with Letters: An Interview with Dr. Amos Bitzan** ~ **Chad S. A. Gibbs** ~ History Professor Amos Bitzan at the University of Wisconsin-Madison tells how he used primary documents with a local connection to help his students achieve a deeper, more personal understanding of the Holocaust. .... 16

**History Loves Company: A Tribute to Dale Rosengarten** ~ **Harlan Greene** ~ The founding curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection retired February 15, 2023, leaving behind a body of work distinctive for its broad scope and exceptional caliber. A native New Yorker, she became the principal collector of South Carolina Jewish artifacts, photographs, and stories, and a leading advocate of sharing her discoveries through public education. Thoroughly immersed in her subjects, she has become part of the story. .... 18

**Help Us Secure the Future of Your Past** ~ **Rachel Gordin Barnett** ~ JHSSC has lined up a tremendous public program—“Paper Bridges”: Letters of Hope and Despair, 1933–1945—for the Society’s spring meeting, where presenters will discuss materials from the Jewish Heritage Collection’s Holocaust Archives. To continue the work of preserving South Carolina Jewish history, JHSSC and JHC seek your support in their joint endowment campaign, The Future of the Past. .... 19

## Letter from the President



This past October the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina hosted an amazing conference. Our joint meeting with the Southern Jewish Historical Society had over 125 participants from 22 states and 3 countries come together in Charleston for a weekend of presentations and panel discussions. Prior to Shabbat services at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, the KKBE Sisterhood hosted a dinner, and Professor Michael Cohen from Tulane University delivered the Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter Lecture on “The Economics of Southern Jewish History.” Three walking tours of different historic sites were held on Saturday morning followed by the Beeber Family Lecture presented by Dr. Shari Rabin of Oberlin College titled, “Dissent, Providentialism, and Slavery: A New Interpretation of Early Charleston Jewish Life.” The highlight of the weekend was a reception at the College of Charleston’s Addlestone Library honoring Dale Rosengarten, founding curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection, who retired in February. Many thanks go to Jay Silverberg, Ashley Walters, Dale Rosengarten, Barry Stiefel, Hilit Surowitz-Israel, and Anna Tucker for organizing the program and to Enid Idelsohn, Anita Rosenberg, Alyssa Neely, Yaron Ayalon, and Rachel Barnett for making all of our local arrangements. Please make plans to join us in Charleston for another engrossing weekend, April 29–30, for “Paper Bridges’: Letters of Hope and Despair,” 1933-1945, featuring New York Times op-ed page editor Sarah Wildman, who will discuss her 2014 book, *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*.

As our friend Dr. Dale Rosengarten retires from her position at the College of Charleston, let’s look back at the many things she has done over the years that have benefited our Society. In 1995, Dale founded the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston and has served as its curator for 28 years, amassing a vast collection of family papers, photographs, memoirs, objects, and congregational and organizational records pertaining to Jewish life in South Carolina. She has worked with volunteers to record over 600 oral histories from individuals in towns and cities across South Carolina. Collaborating with McKissick Museum, Dale developed the exhibition and co-authored the book *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*. After the grand opening in Columbia at McKissick in 2002, the exhibit traveled for two years, spending time in Charleston; Charlotte, North Carolina; and New York City. For over twenty years, she has been the editor of our biannual magazine. Dale and her husband, Dr. Theodore Rosengarten, led College of Charleston undergraduate and graduate students on numerous study abroad trips to Holocaust and Jewish cultural sites in Central and Eastern Europe. She was instrumental in the development of *Mapping Jewish Charleston, Life of the Synagogue*, and *Synagogues of the South*, three pioneering digital public history exhibits. In 2019, Dale was awarded the Order of the Jewish Palmetto, the highest honor conferred by the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. We are indeed indebted to Dale for her many contributions to preserving the history of South Carolina Jewry. Thank you Dale for everything you have done and continue to do.

L’shalom,  
Alexander Cohen, M.D.  
JHSSC President



*Dale Rosengarten (r), in honor of her upcoming retirement, was feted at a reception held at Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, the weekend JHSSC hosted SJHS’s 2022 meeting. Charleston Mayor John J. Tecklenburg (l) delivered an official proclamation, declaring October 22, 2022, Dale Rosengarten Day. To the Mayor’s left: Harlan Greene and Ted Rosengarten. Photo: Vincent Fraley, College of Charleston.*



## Remembering Martin Perlmutter

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina lost a giant in January. Marty Perlmutter, the founding director, created and led our organization for 24 years. Because of his leadership and tenacity, the Society exists today.

Marty had a knack with people. Everyone who knew him, I am sure, has a story to tell. I became involved with the Society in 2009 when President Ed Poliakoff asked me to assist in planning a meeting at Hobcaw Barony. I didn't know Marty but soon discovered his talent for quietly and effectively steering you to the correct (his) outcome. I also discovered he would back you up and support any initiative if it was within the scope of mission and would promote South Carolina's Jewish history. So, in 2016, when I suggested we tackle documenting South Carolina's Jewish merchants, he readily agreed and threw his support behind the project. As of 2023, we have documented more than 600 merchants across 90 cities and towns and there's more to be done.

Marty would often say to me, "you know I'm not from here." I beg to differ. He may not have been born here, but arriving in 1979, he and Jeri sunk roots, raised their family, and made a big difference. He very much has his place in South Carolina's Jewish history.

Even upon retirement, Marty stayed involved. We spoke often about Society business. He was a key player with the Future of the Past

Endowment Campaign, joining every call. He cared deeply about securing the future of the Society and the campaign was the vehicle to bring that to fruition.

Marty was a great friend, mentor, and boss, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from him—his philosophy guides me now as executive director.

May his memory be a blessing.

— Rachel Barnett



*Above: standing (l to r), Saul Viener, Isadore Lourie, Klyde Robinson, Jeffrey Rosenblum, Martin Perlmutter, Sol Breitbart, and Richard Gergel; seated: Leah Chase, Belinda Gergel, and Janice Kahn, JHSSC meeting, College of Charleston, 1998. Photo courtesy of JHSSC.*

*Below: Marty Perlmutter, seated, with Elizabeth Moses, (l) and Dale Rosengarten in the Jewish Studies Center, under construction, 2002. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*



When Marty became director of Jewish Studies at the College of Charleston in the early '90s, the program was quite modest: a couple of courses taught each year. But he saw the possibilities and began to build community relationships through public programming—Three Rabbi Panels, Sunday morning talks with copious eats, and so on. Soon Marty found himself at the heart of Jewish life in South Carolina. Or as Jeff Rosenblum said, "He was the chief rabbi for all 10,000 or so Jewish Carolinians.

But this was only the beginning. He wanted more Jewish students to come to the College. Thirty years ago, there were approximately three dozen; now there are more than 600. He wanted a building, but no one in any position of authority at the College supported the idea. He persisted because he knew a home, a place for friends, was the key to an enduring academic and social environment. He and Mr. Yaschik bought an old dry cleaners, built the Jewish Studies

Center, and ultimately transferred the facility to the College of Charleston. Even that was not enough, and now we have a kosher dining facility open to the public, as Marty insisted, because friends break bread together. So he built not out of vanity, but because he believed in the humanity of the Jewish people and felt obligated to see that others, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, shared that sense of humanity.

Marty had a special gift for giving renewed meaning to those who experienced the sadness, the loss of a loved one. When many of us shy away, not knowing what to say or do in these situations, Marty moved closer, to the Arnolds, to Beatrice Stieglitz, to the Zuckers, to Stanley Farbstein, and to so many others. He knew what to say and how to comfort. That's friendship of the most extraordinary sort.

— David Cohen



*Above: Marty Perlmutter with Jerry and Anita Zucker, JHSSC reception, October 2004. Below: Marty with Susan Lourie, widow of JHSSC's founding president, Isadore Lourie, JHSSC's Bluffton meeting, 2010. Photos courtesy of JHSSC.*

I recall meeting Marty for the first time nearly 30 years ago when I attended a meeting on a beautiful spring day, held on the porch of a historic building on Glebe Street where the College of Charleston's Department of Philosophy was located. In attendance at this first meeting were Senator Isadore Lourie, who was seeking to organize the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina; David Cohen, the College's Dean of Libraries; my wife, Belinda, and myself. Marty initially appeared to fit the stereotype of a brainy but slightly befuddled academic. As we began discussing Marty's vision for the, then, mostly nonexistent Jewish Studies Program he had recently taken over and Senator Lourie's plans for a statewide Jewish organization devoted to preserving the history of our state's Jewish community, I realized I was in the presence of two great strategic thinkers. Within months, Senator Lourie persuaded the College of Charleston's president and his lifelong friend, Alex Sanders, to embrace Marty's vision of a robust Jewish Studies program on campus. Within a few short years, Dale

Rosengarten was hired to work with David Cohen to develop the Jewish Heritage Collection, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina was conducting well attended meetings across South Carolina with talks by highly respected scholars and panels made up of community residents sharing their special local stories, and a beautiful Jewish Studies building was constructed on the corner of Glebe and Wentworth. The remarkable partnership that exists today between the College of Charleston's Jewish Studies Program, the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College's Addlestone Library, and the Jewish Historical Society is a living legacy of two truly visionary Jewish leaders, Marty Perlmutter and Isadore Lourie. May their memory be a blessing.

— Richard Gergel



Marty lived his life intent on leaving the world a better place than he found it. He has left a monumental legacy at the College of Charleston where he built the Jewish Studies Program from scratch. He also launched the Jewish Historical Society and directed it for a quarter century. He engineered (meaning envisioned, funded, and implemented) a building for Jewish

Studies students and faculty, three endowed academic centers, a kosher/vegetarian dining hall, and wall-to-wall public programming, from Sunday brunch lectures to three-rabbi panels to the World of Jewish Culture at Piccolo Spoleto.

I am eternally grateful for the doors Marty opened for us. In the early 1990s, he asked Ted to stand in for the irreplaceable Beatrice Stieglitz, who was teaching a course on East European fiction permeated by the Holocaust. From that beginning, a Holocaust Studies program grew at the College, attracting hundreds of students every year and offering advanced courses and extra-curricular opportunities. Generous funding from the Zucker/Goldberg family assures Jewish Studies faculty will be



teaching courses and leading study abroad programs for many years to come.

Marty didn't exactly recruit me, but I am certain I would not have become a southern Jewish historian and curator if not for him. He championed JHC and JHSSC at every turn, and at the time of his death, was actively working on a History and Heritage fundraising campaign to secure the future of both agencies.

Hard to imagine where Jewish Studies and Charleston's Jewish community will go without Marty's guiding light, but as a dear friend of his said to me at the funeral, "Marty's not gone. Look around you. He's everywhere."

— Dale Rosengarten

Dr. Martin Perlmutter, o.b.m., came to the College of Charleston to introduce students to the great philosophers and their teachings after lecturing at the Universities of Texas and Tennessee. This followed his rabbinical studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City and receiving his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Illinois. A deeply religious, spiritual, and philosophical man, Marty quickly became the leading voice in the newly formed Jewish Studies Program, with an academic curriculum rather than a religious program. As its head, he developed a diversified department recognized throughout the country for its excellence.

Marty was a builder in the full sense of the word: of programs, facilities, and relationships. His successes grew from his ability to bring people of differing points of view around to his perspective, usually without them realizing it. His quiet demeanor and light hand, never sanctimonious, were unusually powerful in terms of persuasion. In addition to building up Jewish Studies, he collaborated with other Jewish community members (with the support of College of Charleston President Alex Sanders) to found the Jewish Historical Society of

South Carolina. While serving as the Society's executive director for more than 20 years, he led the way in creating a strong and vibrant organization. He raised, almost singlehandedly, the endowments for the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture and the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies at the College. He worked with my mother-in-law, Frederica Weinberg Kronsberg, to create the Kronsberg Lecture Series, deftly giving her comfort and friendship that lasted the rest of her life, while simultaneously gifting knowledge to the community-at-large. This multifaceted benevolence was Marty's gift.

Marty also built facilities to bring people closer together: the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center and the kosher dining facility, Marty's Place. The latter, built in the face of a state moratorium on construction, arose through Marty's sheer will, perseverance, and ability to fundraise. Working with Marty on the new Jewish Studies Center, I witnessed his remarkable knowledge of student and faculty needs. I also enjoyed the depth of Marty's knowledge in his other interests, including architecture, Charleston's architectural and historical character, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and movies—how much fun it was to listen to Marty's analysis of a little-known

movie. Without Marty I would never know how terrible a cauliflower crust pizza tastes.

Marty's sincere and warm approach during my tenure on the Jewish Studies Board encouraged me to expand my mindset and to think outside the box. His empathy knew no bounds. I am a better person due to my association with Marty Perlmutter. He was a compassionate and loving father, grandfather, and friend, loved by all he met, including my wife, Mickey, and me. We will miss him, as will his wife, Jeri, their family, and beloved students and faculty.

— Jeffrey Rosenblum



*Marty and Jeri Perlmutter (seated) with their children and grandchildren, 2021. Photo courtesy of the Perlmutter family.*

## News from Home, Pleas for Help, and Lost Connections: The Helen Stern Lipton Papers and Holocaust Era Jewish Family Correspondence

*by Chad S. A. Gibbs, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, Director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, College of Charleston*

In a presentation looking back over his life at the 1998 annual meeting of this Society, Beaufort native Joseph Lipton poignantly recalled listening to his mother read aloud the family mail. Sometimes it was just the Yiddish daily *Forverts* or another newspaper, but

On other occasions letters would arrive from the parents of my father or my mother. While I listened, she would read these precious letters over and over. We both wept. I never knowing exactly why I was tearful. Through this exchange of mail, I became an extension of the European family and the cities of Lodz, Kielce, Warsaw, Basogala, Vilna, and Riga became as familiar to me as Charleston, Savannah, and Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Joseph Lipton became familiar with these age-old Jewish communities in the dusk of their existence. He went on to note that his mother last visited Poland and saw family—with him and one younger brother in tow—in 1930. She, and indeed he, would never see most of them again.<sup>2</sup>

Like it did so many others, the Holocaust struck Joseph's family hard. Only a few of the people he heard his mother voice as she read the mail ever made it out. One family member, Israel Moishe Albirt, survived the Nazis only to be murdered by Polish neighbors in the 1946 Kielce Pogrom when he tried to return home.

These and other equally difficult stories characterize much of the Lipton collection. This is especially true reading the letters today with a clear sense of what is coming next.

The earliest of the Lipton letters is a note sent from Dovid Albirt to his aunt Helen Lipton on May 25, 1932. Even at this early date, likely having less to do with Germany, Dovid Albirt asserts his wish to come to the United States to live with his family in Beaufort, South Carolina.<sup>3</sup> It is with some mystery that a later letter from Rivke Mechale Sterernzys—Gabriel Stern and Helen Lipton's mother—indicates a ship

ticket purchased for Dovid Albirt did at one point exist. The original translator of these letters, Rabbi Philip Silverstein of Columbia, South Carolina, notes that the ticket is unexplained in the existing letters or the recollections of (then) living relatives. Rabbi Silverstein colorfully ends his explanation: "With the principals now residing in eternity, definite answers will forever remain out of reach."<sup>4</sup> Regardless of whether any new information emerges to change that conclusion, a chance to get one family member out of Europe before the war came and went for reasons unknown.

With only one side of the conversation in these and most other Holocaust-era collections, such problems are rife. The missing half of these interactions often leaves the reader wondering what is being discussed, why one person is inactive, or, as is often the complaint given by Gabriel Stern's correspondents—why didn't he write more often? The European side of this transatlantic relationship, however, reveals a great deal even by itself.

Reading the collection in its entirety, the letters fall into a more mundane pattern for some time after Rabbi Silverstein's compelling notes about the ship ticket. As we might expect for a family divided by an ocean, there is a good deal of conversation about emigration and the lives of Helen or others on American shores. Though, as time wears on and the outbreak of war looms, the pleas from Helen's family grow louder and more worried

in their tone. In a note dated November 22, 1938, Rivke Mechale Sterenzys admonishes that she has now sent three letters asking after the emigration papers her son Gabriel in Lexington, South Carolina, was to send, but nothing has arrived. Rivke's words are paired on this date with a letter from Helen's nephew Dovid on the backside asking her to have Gabriel speed up his work with the papers.<sup>5</sup> By late 1938, the content of the letters has changed. Conversations about the weather become less frequent and the pressing work to reunite the family in America takes over.



*Helen Stern Lipton, ca. 1940. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*



Some hopeful, undated, news arrived later at Helen's home with word from both her mother, Rivke, and nephew Dovid that the ship ticket for him from Gabriel had at long last arrived. Dovid wrote also that he had filled out necessary paperwork for the Polish government and submitted the papers for the US Consulate.<sup>6</sup> A look through the letters for a next note from Dovid results not in a message saying he is set to sail, but instead a letter to Helen in April of 1939 stating that he has heard from Gabriel and "he writes that he received my letter and he answered me that he can't do any more about my coming. He did everything that he could do within his power."<sup>7</sup> That illusive ship ticket did arrive, but other problems did not allow Dovid Albirt to set sail. Several letters thereafter attest to the same swirl of paperwork needed and dreams dashed one small refusal at a time.

This is where the collection itself leaves the reader. The letters can neither confirm nor disprove the fates of Helen and Gabriel's family members in Europe. Like Anne Frank's diary, the letters stop before conditions are at their worst. Some family members certainly made it through the war as letters come from far off places like Samarkand, USSR (now Uzbekistan), during and after the war, as well as one from Tel Aviv, Israel, in the 1960s. Everything from Joseph Lipton's presentation to the JHSSC to the earliest saved Lipton letter from 1932 is held by Special Collections in the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library. In all, the [Helen Stern Lipton Papers](#) span 173 pages of original correspondence, translations, and much else. This irreplaceable group of documents is far from alone at Addlestone, where the [Holocaust Archives consists of more than 50 collections](#) donated by survivors and liberators with ties to South Carolina.

Leah Davenport's article in this issue highlights the equally frustrating and, ultimately, heartbreaking [Minnie Tewel Baum Papers](#). South Carolina Jewish communities saved and donated a vital collection of letters documenting the concerns, preoccupations, and pleas of relatives and friends in Europe. As Leah will show, the Baum papers further demonstrate the many attempts local Jews made to get people out of German-occupied territory. Letters in both the Lipton and Baum files shout the

increasing desperation of those facing the advance of Hitler's armies. These sources are so often raw and frank about living conditions under the Third Reich that you start to wonder whether there was much censorship of the post in the occupied areas or even in Germany itself. This is where Grace Shaffer's article comes in, informing us how censorship worked (or didn't) and how it shows up in the Lipton archive. Grace provides an important understanding of those barriers and some stunning images of the marks left behind by Nazi censors.

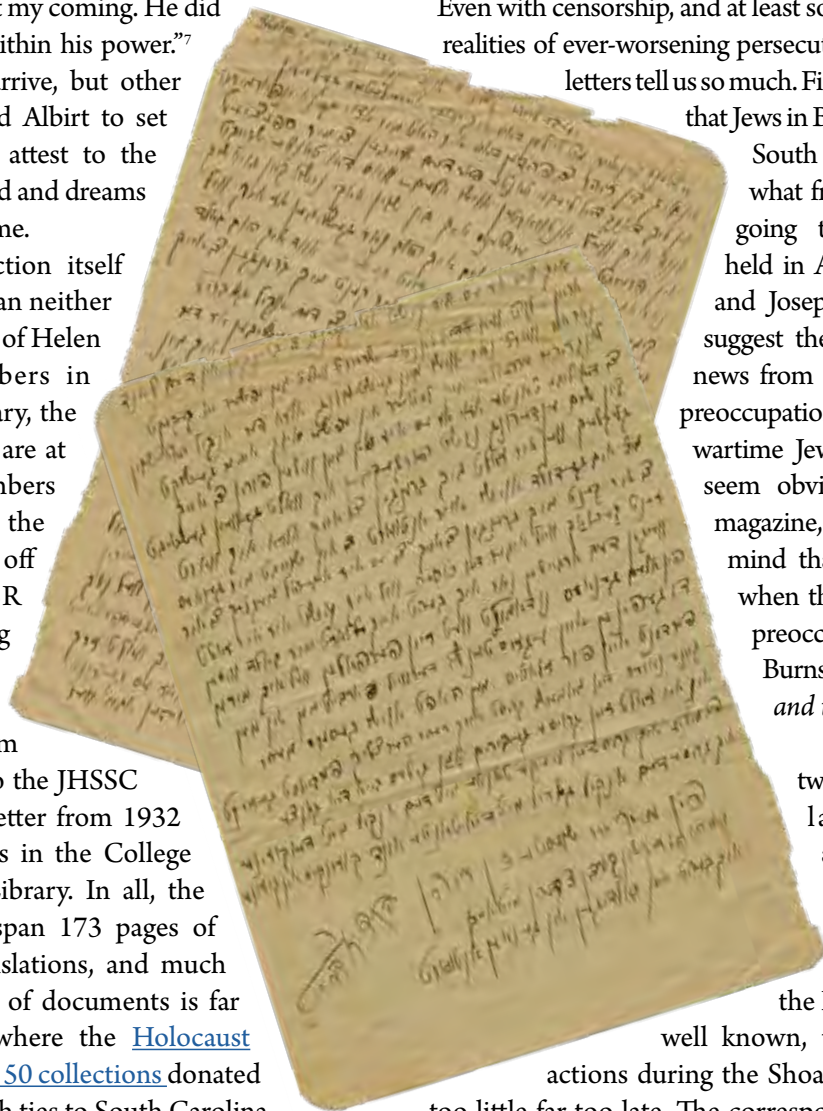
Even with censorship, and at least some desire to conceal the realities of ever-worsening persecution from relatives, these

letters tell us so much. First and foremost, they tell that Jews in Beaufort and elsewhere in

South Carolina knew exactly what friends and relatives were going through. If the letters held in Addlestone are any clue, and Joseph Lipton's recollections suggest they are, then the terrible news from the Old Country was a preoccupation of many prewar and wartime Jewish homes. This might seem obvious to readers of this magazine, but we should keep in mind that what they knew and when they knew it was a major preoccupation of last year's Ken Burns documentary *The US and the Holocaust*.

In three monumental two-hour episodes, Burns labors to show his audience what the United States did in the years leading up to, during, and after the Holocaust. As is already well known, the story of America's actions during the Shoah is often one of doing too little far too late. The correspondence in our archives attests to that reality and to American knowledge of what was going on. To spark discussions of what Americans knew and to personalize, or humanize the immensity of Holocaust history, Professor Amos Bitzan, used a collection of letters sent to Racine, Wisconsin, to teach about Jewish experiences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My interview with Amos in later pages here highlights the many successes of that teaching method in ways that I plan to replicate at the College of Charleston.

*Letter written in Yiddish from Dovid Albirt in Kielce, Poland, to his aunt Helen Stern Lipton in Beaufort, SC, May 25, 1932. Translated by Rabbi Philip Silverstein, Columbia, SC. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*



At the same individual level that Amos sought to bring understandings of the Holocaust to his classes, the Lipton letters make it clear why Joseph's mother was in tears. He may not have understood as a boy, though he did later, and we certainly can today. Readers of Sarah Wildman's book *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind* will also register the pain, separation, worry, and helplessness of Wildman's grandfather as he received letters crying for help from his endangered first love. Wildman will be JHSSC's keynote speaker at the spring meeting (see program, page 11), where she will discuss the generational trauma experienced by the descendants of survivors. Those deep connections and family ties to the history of the Holocaust

as well as to letters from endangered loved ones are, I suspect, something not at all unfamiliar to readers of this magazine.

#### NOTES

1. Joseph Lipton, "Joseph Lipton Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina Presentation" (Annual Meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, Beaufort, SC, October 24, 1998), 3.
2. Lipton, JHSSC Presentation, 4.
3. "Helen Stern Lipton Papers, 1932-2008," Mss 1065-012, College of Charleston Addlestone Library Special Collections, Envelope 3.
4. Lipton Papers, Envelope 8, see translator's notes.
5. Lipton Papers, Envelope 15.
6. Lipton Papers, Envelope 9.
7. Lipton Papers, Envelope 24, PDF pg. 114.

## Joe Engel's Legacy: Never Forget, Never Again

by Samantha Krantz, REMEMBER Program Associate, Charleston Jewish Federation

Joe Engel, o.b.m., opened a window to a painful past every time he spoke of his life before, during, and after the Holocaust. In light of his recent passing (d. Charleston, SC, November 26, 2022), we reflect on how sharing his story was a way for Joe to express his love and dedication to South Carolinians.

Joe was born on October 9, 1927, in the town of Zakroczym, Poland, to a working-class family of eight brothers and sisters. Living in Poland before the Holocaust, he experienced antisemitism as a child. Growing up, Joe spoke multiple languages including Yiddish, German, Polish, and Hungarian. As an adult, he continued to speak Yiddish, even teaching others phrases with a grin on his face.

On September 1, 1939, the German army destroyed Zakroczym. The family moved to Warsaw, and then to Plonsk, which eventually became a Jewish ghetto. Joe and a few members of his family managed to remain in the ghetto until the final selection. They were subsequently transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on a cramped and disease-filled cattle car. At Auschwitz, Joe became a bricklayer and survived on little-to-nothing to eat. In January 1945, the

Germans liquidated the camp and Joe considered a life-altering decision—whether he should jump from the transport train and try to make his escape. Once it was dark, he made that fateful leap and successfully evaded the German soldiers who searched for him. Afterward, Joe hid in the forest, digging a hole in which to live with his bare, frozen hands. He later joined a resistance group. In March 1945, the Red Army liberated Joe and his companions.

After liberation, Joe returned to Poland to see if any of his family survived. He stayed for six months, until learning he was being drafted into the Polish army. Once again, Joe knew he needed to escape, only this time it was to Germany. Upon his arrival, he learned that a sister and two brothers had survived.

The aftermath of the Holocaust was both an individual and a collective trauma. Many survivors made efforts to create a new family and life to replace what they had lost. In 1949, Joe made his way to Charleston, South Carolina, which marked the beginning of a new life for him. Years later, he liked to share stories about the "old Charleston" where he got his start as a peddler. Over time, Joe built a business, working—as he



Joe Engel, holding a sign that says "Always remember, never forget," with College of Charleston Hillel students at a Holocaust survivor brunch. Photo: Hillel staff.



loved to joke—as a CPA, meaning in “Cleaning, Pressing and Alterations” at his King Street laundry for over 36 years.

Like many other survivors, both locally and around the world, Joe spent many years building his new life with a new family before turning to the work of telling his story.

I met Joe in 2015, when I was a freshman at the College of Charleston, taking a Representations of the Holocaust course. The first time I heard his story tears filled my eyes and I felt an instant connection with him. I left his talk with a drive instilled in me to make sure that everyone had the opportunity to hear his story. The words that he said kept replaying in my mind: “This should not happen to anybody, to any humans, what they done to us.”

From the day I first met him, I made sure to see Joe every month. As a student and later as a professional working for the Charleston Jewish Federation’s REMEMBER Program, I had the honor of bringing Joe to schools to speak to thousands of students and community members across South Carolina.



Joe Engel speaks to students at Porter-Gaud, a private school in Charleston, SC, 2020. Photo: Samantha Krantz.

In each talk, Joe emphasized that he wanted everyone to love and be kind to one another. When Joe spoke, you could hear a pin drop, but when he finished sharing his story, he was met with handshakes and hugs. It was his selflessness that made Joe so special. The REMEMBER Program brought Joe and other local survivors, as well as their descendants, to schools to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten. Joe’s legacy is the thousands he educated and the thousands more who will continue to hear and tell his story—from generation to generation.

Joe once said, “don’t you ever forget me, as long as you gon’ live. You tell this story for us, because we will not be here to tell this story forever.” We promise to honor that wish.

The Joe Engel papers, housed in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, have been digitized and can be viewed on the Lowcountry Digital Library: <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/content/joe-engel-papers-1938-2006/>

She was your grandfather’s true love, was the only answer given when Sarah Wildman presented her grandmother with a dozen photographs of a dark-haired, smiling young woman she had stumbled upon in her grandfather’s old office. “True love”? It was stated as fact, and with no further information. Who was this woman? And what was her relationship to her grandfather? When pressed, her grandfather’s sister offered a bit more: “She was brilliant! And so in love with your grandfather.” It was tantalizing, but agonizingly open-ended.

Years after her grandparents had both passed away, Wildman found a cache of letters written to her grandfather in a file labeled “Correspondence: Patients A–G.”



What she found inside weren’t dry medical histories; what was written instead opened a path into the destroyed world that was her family’s prewar Vienna. One woman’s letters stood out: these were mailed from the woman in the photo. Her name was Valerie Scheftel—Valy. She was Karl’s lover, who had remained in Europe when he boarded a ship bound for the United States in Hamburg in September 1938. But why had she not left with Karl? And more important, what had happened to her? With the help of the letters Valy had written her grandfather, Wildman started to piece together her story. The letters revealed a woman desperate to escape and still clinging to the memory of a love that defined her years of freedom.

Riverhead Penguin October 30, 2014

# “Paper Bridges”: Letters of Hope and Despair, 1933–1945

April 29–30, 2023 ~ Charleston, SC

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina dedicates this meeting in memory of Marty Perlmutter, o.b.m., our beloved founding executive director, whose steadfast support and adept leadership knew no bounds.

## Saturday, April 29

Unless otherwise noted, all events will be held in Arnold Hall in the Sylvia Vlosky Yashchik Jewish Studies Center, 96 Wentworth Street.

11:00 A.M. Registration

11:30–12:15 P.M. Lunch

12:15 Opening remarks

12:45 “Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind” ~ Sarah Wildman

2:00 Break

2:15 News from Home, Pleas for Help, Lost Connections: Holocaust Era Jewish Family Correspondence ~ Chad S. A. Gibbs, Director, Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies and Assistant Professor, Jewish Studies, College of Charleston

3:00 Break

3:15 Helen Stern Lipton Letters: Family Discussion

Moderator: Chad S. A. Gibbs

Panelists: Marcie Stern Baker, Lilly Stern Filler, Ellen Lipton Yampolsky

5:00–6:30 Reception, Stern Student Center Garden, 71 George Street (in case of rain: Arnold Hall)

Dinner (on your own)

## Sunday, April 30

9:30–10:30 A.M. JHSSC board meeting

10:45–12:15 Torn Pages: The Hopes and Hard Realities of Wartime Letters ~ Chad S. A. Gibbs in conversation with College of Charleston students Leah Davenport and Grace Shaffer



Sarah Wildman is the author of *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*. She is currently an editor and writer at the *New*

*York Times* in Opinion. She was previously an editor at *Foreign Policy Magazine*, for which she hosted and co-produced the podcast *First Person*. Sarah has also been on staff at NBC News online, Vox, and *The New Republic*, and has long contributed to a number of other publications. Sarah has received numerous fellowships and awards in support of her work, including a German Marshall Fund Peter R. Weitz Prize for excellence and originality in coverage of Europe, a Milena Jesenska Fellowship in Vienna, and an Arthur F. Burns Fellowship in Germany as well as Pulitzer Center grants for covering issues shaping Jerusalem and Paris.

## Meeting registration

Fee (per person): \$75

Online at: <https://jhssc.org/events/upcoming/> with Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express

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# Returned, Redacted, and Refused: Postal Censorship in Nazi Germany

by Grace Shaffer, Research Assistant, Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies

Letters have always been a way to connect long-separated family members and this connection becomes even more essential in times of upheaval. Censorship, no matter how tightly administered, could take away that most important function of mail from loved ones. During the Holocaust, Jewish families fought to maintain connection with one another in the face of increasing violence. This does not mean, however, that their letters detail these worsening conditions. Initially, there is a desperate sense of keeping connection and shared life with a focus on building a mental picture for the recipient.<sup>1</sup> Even if they could not share much or only empty envelopes arrived, letters were still proof of life and hope on paper so long as they kept coming.

When the war began in September 1939, the focus of letter-writing shifted away from the usual fare towards messages of love and longing.<sup>2</sup> On April 9, 1940, the Nazi regime issued postal regulations and formal guidelines for letter censorship. Under these regulations, any letter written in Hebrew or Yiddish was marked for censorship.<sup>3</sup> It's also evident that people practiced an emotional self-censorship in letters between family members before their correspondence got anywhere near a Nazi censor.<sup>4</sup> In a great deal of wartime letters, readers today are able to feel a sense of not wanting to burden the recipients with the indignity and horrors the senders were facing.<sup>5</sup> When a letter becomes a proof of life, the mere fact that it was sent becomes more important than the content it contains.

Of the four censored pieces of mail in the [Helen Stern Lipton Papers](#) in Special Collections, College of Charleston, number 26, an envelope with an accompanying letter, and 34B, a heavily-marked, albeit empty, envelope, are the most striking. Based on their postmarks, both were written in 1940, shortly after Nazi authorities passed down new censorship guidelines. The black circular stamp with an eagle and swastika in the center of the envelopes tells us that they were both intercepted and censored in Berlin, where all outgoing foreign mail was examined.<sup>6</sup> Because they are in Yiddish, all of the letters from Dovid "Dutchie" Albirt to his aunt Helen Lipton of Beaufort, South Carolina, should have been returned to sender or entirely redacted. However, it appears that only the empty envelope 34B was actually censored—likely delivered with a slip of paper explaining the redaction.<sup>7</sup> The German authorities could not read the letters themselves, instead relying on Jewish forced labor to carry out the process of reading and censoring mail written in Yiddish.<sup>8</sup> Is there a chance that one of these individuals marked this letter as censored, but then sent it on its way, delivered as if nothing had happened?

Letter 26 and its envelope. Notice the "1374" censor's mark, bottom left on the letter and on the envelope, underneath the resealing tape in the illuminated enlargement (1). "Geöffnet" means "opened" in German.

Letter 26 has several official markings on the exterior of the envelope; the most striking of which is the large Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, or German Army High Command, censorship stamp. Among various international postage marks, there is a small purple rectangle containing the numbers "1374"—is this meant to identify an individual censor in Berlin? The censors in the Berlin office typically used pencil marks, not stamped numbers, to identify themselves, as seen on the lower left of Letter 34B's envelope.<sup>9</sup> However, underneath the resealing tape on letter 26, there is a second 1374 mark. This mark would have had to be stamped on the envelope before it was resealed and sent off to Beaufort.

Letter 26 itself, written in Yiddish, is short compared with others in the collection—barely over a page in length. As the words are generally evenly spaced and relatively large, it doesn't seem as though Dutchie was rushed in his composition. Despite the number of official markings on the exterior, the content of Letter 26 is extremely mundane, simply expressing love and longing for family members in America and assuring them that everything is fine in Kielce. Dutchie tells his aunt they have recently received letters from other family members, providing some long sought-after proof of life for family outside Kielce. He signs off with a request: that the family pass on love to relatives in Columbia. This letter fits neatly into the established pattern; the sender doesn't want to burden the recipient with anything negative and instead centers his message around feelings of love.

What was it about Letter 34B that Nazi censors deemed too dangerous to let slide? Because there is no insert for the letter, we can only speculate why the content was deemed unfit for delivery. The envelope is postmarked August 24, 1940. By that time, the Berlin censor office may have begun to operate with greater efficacy. Perhaps Dutchie wrote to tell his aunt about worsening conditions in Kielce Ghetto or an incident of mass violence against the Jewish population—something no censor would allow.

After August 1940, there is a gap in dateable correspondence until September of 1944. This speaks to the increasing pressure

of both the violence and the censorship faced by Lipton family members who remained in Europe. When the letters resume, there is again a focus on sentiments of love, as well as yearning for more frequent contact—postage was the only way recipients would get news about their loved ones. Despite attempts to censor correspondence, families like the Liptons were able to maintain contact. Sometimes, the sender was lucky, and their letter was delivered opened but unaltered. On the other hand, delivery of an empty, censored envelope let the recipient know that the sender was alive and thinking of them. When letters are the only vehicle for contact with loved ones, the longing to see the next missive arrive remains strong, no matter the potential obstacles.

Empty Envelope, Letter 34B. Note the censor's pencil marks, front, bottom corners. Images this page and previous courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

## Notes

1. Debórah Dwork, "Holding on Through Letters: Jewish Families During the Holocaust" Lecture presentation, (Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship, November 13, 2022).

2. Ibid.

3. Justin Gordon, *Holocaust Postal History: Harrowing Journeys Revealed through the Letters and Cards of the Victims* (Chicago: Six Point Watermark, 2016), 7.

4. Dwork, "Holding On Through Letters."

5. Ibid.

6. Gordon, *Holocaust Postal History*, 8.

7. Ibid, 7.

8. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg [German Federal Archive, Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, Bild [Photograph] 101I-134-0793-30.

9. Rudi Anders, "Censorship of Civilian Mail in Germany during WWII," <https://lcps-stamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-06-24-Anders-Rudi-CensorshipCivilMailGermanyWWIIREV-F.pdf>.



## Crying Out for Help: Letters from the Minnie Tewel Baum Papers, 1938–1941

by Leah Davenport, Research Assistant, Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, and College of Charleston sophomore, majoring in Jewish Studies and Women's and Gender Studies

Residing in a vault in Special Collections at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library is a binder containing 15 or so letters between two people who never met. The [Minnie Tewel Baum Papers](#) are comprised of the correspondence between Malie Landsmann and Minnie Baum, two cousins, one living in Germany, the other in Camden, South Carolina. While the conversational nature of the letters indicates that Minnie wrote back, only Malie's responses remain in the archives. In addition to personal messages, are letters between Minnie and various government agencies, societies, and aid organizations, all written with the intent of helping the Landsmanns flee Europe. The Baum letters demonstrate just how difficult it was for everyday Americans to help relatives escape Europe. Minnie had never heard of Malie before receiving the first letter, but over the next several months, she would become increasingly invested in getting Malie Landsmann and her family out of Hitler's grasp.

Malie Landsmann first wrote to Minnie Baum in March 1938, pleading for a way out of Nazi Germany. Malie had a family and was willing to do anything she could to save them. Her letter to Minnie explained how they were related, saying Minnie was her "dear cousin, the daughter of my father's sister." Briefly explaining her family's situation in Germany, Malie wrote, "Unfortunately, it is the wish of the higher authorities

that we as Jews should migrate." While it is clear that she knew her position was dire, Malie of course had no way to know just how bad it would become. Chaim, her husband, was a tailor, who, prior to 1938, had a decent job that allowed them to live

comfortably in Berlin. Malie's letters introduced her daughters, Ida, age twelve, and Peppi, who was one, and profusely thanked her cousin Minnie in advance for any help she could give.

The Baum letters offer a first-hand account of the escalation in Nazi attacks on Jews. Malie wrote to Minnie over a dozen times between 1938 and 1941. When she first reached out, life was difficult, though the family was still together in Germany, and at least getting by.

Shortly after receiving the first few letters from Malie in 1938, Minnie began looking for ways to help. By December, the South Carolina cousin was caught up in a flurry of activity. Minnie first contacted the United States Lines Company to receive a quote on how expensive it would be to buy four steamer tickets from Germany to New York. The company informed Minnie of the price—something well beyond her means—and told her that the Landsmanns would need visas, affidavits, and a multitude of other documents before embarking.

Adding to her difficulties, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) stated that they were "in no position to send for immigrants." Minnie's papers show that she nevertheless kept trying, next writing to the American Consul in Berlin and, yet again, receiving a negative response. According to the Consul, Chaim and Malie hadn't submitted an application for immigration. Minnie even secured

the help of South Carolina Senator E. D. Smith in the form of a letter to the American Consul and the Acting Secretary of State, attempting to deliver the required affidavits to Germany as soon as possible.



*Malie and Chaim Landsmann and their daughters, Ida and Peppi. Malie, first cousin to Minnie Tewel Baum of Camden, SC, appealed to Minnie for help getting her family out of Germany.*

Unfortunately, by November 1938, the Nazis had forcibly deported 17,000 Polish-born Jews living in Germany, including Malie's husband, Chaim. Though Nazi authorities brazenly stripped thousands of naturalized Jewish Germans of their citizenship and forced them over the border into Poland, a country that also did not want them, this was just light foreshadowing of what was to come. In a letter sent around this time, and only days prior to Kristallnacht, Malie wrote that her "situation ha[d] changed badly, indescribably" and that she hoped her letter would reach Minnie "before we are completely destroyed."

Eleven months after receiving the first letter, Minnie realized that the American Consul in Berlin would be of no help and HIAS couldn't do anything until the Landsmanns arrived in the United States. Minnie wrote to the American Consul in Cuba and then to the Cuban Consul in Savannah, Georgia. Again, the arrangements would have been wildly expensive and much too difficult

to complete. Malie and Chaim would have had to deposit \$5,000 each in the Bank of Cuba, Malie would have needed a notarized document proving she and Minnie were blood relatives, and all four Landsmanns would have needed visas. By 1940, Malie and her daughters were also expelled from Germany, reuniting them with Chaim in a new shared destitution.

Minnie did not bear the burden of her attempts to help Malie alone. She wrote of what she was trying to do in letters to other relatives. Fanny Adelstein, Minnie's cousin living in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, wrote in April 1938 that helping the Landsmanns "is a wonderful cause, a good deed for humanity[s] sake." A few months later, Minnie's sister Rose wrote that she was working to get more affidavits for Minnie to send to the American Consul showing that the Landsmanns wouldn't be a burden. One relative wrote in April 1941 that for one person to get out of Poland, "The fare total would be about \$1,220. The passport fees alone [are] \$720."

Malie, Chaim, and their two daughters never made it out of Poland, though not for a lack of trying. The bureaucratic hoops and emigration obstacles were much too high for one person to jump through, much less four. Malie's story is that of someone reaching out, perhaps uncertain whether any help was possible, but taking the desperate risk all the same. Her situation also illustrates multiple points in which governments had the opportunity to intervene, the chance to change fates, and either failed to do so, chose inaction, or both. The Nazis murdered Malie and Chaim at Auschwitz in 1942. Sadder still, no known records have yet clarified what happened to Ida and Peppi.

*Letters to Minnie Baum: from Rabbi Samuel Shillman (Temple Sinai, Sumter), chairman of the Coordinating Refugee Committee of SC, 1938, advising her of a letter of support from Senator E. D. Smith; from Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of America, 1938, declaring HIAS was in "no position to send for immigrants;" from her sister Rose promising help. Images this page and previous courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries. See cover for images from the same collection.*





## Teaching the Holocaust with Letters: An Interview with Dr. Amos Bitzan

by Chad S. A. Gibbs, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, Director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, College of Charleston

All Holocaust educators worry about how to make the terrible enormity of Nazi genocide understandable and more personal for their students. As he struggled with this conundrum, my early advisor Dr. Waitman Beorn asked students not to think of the Shoah as six million murders, but to instead imagine one person murdered six million times.

Beorn was trying to put a face on the almost unfathomable scale of Nazi mass murder. Readers may remember the Kentucky students who attempted to comprehend the scale alone by collecting six million paperclips. Demonstrating the size of that number, what one class tried to achieve ended up taking their school over a decade.

As a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I had the opportunity to learn another way of personalizing these events from my mentor, Dr. Amos Bitzan. Amos used a small collection of letters sent from Nazi-occupied Poland to Racine, Wisconsin, to show how persecution and degradation weighed on real people. For students in Madison, the local destination of the Stern letters also helped connect these events to a place many actually knew. I thought Dr. Bitzan would be best suited to tell us about his work with letters. My interview with him follows.

**How did you receive the Stern postcards and how did you decide to use them in your class?**

I received the postcards from Michael Stern, a Wisconsin alumnus and engaged supporter of the Mosse/Weinstein Center of Jewish Studies at the university.

He sent me a scan of one of the postcards in a set of 13 that he discovered in his late mother's belongings. Initially, he simply wanted some help from a faculty member in understanding the significance of the postcard and in translating the contents. After seeing the sender's address, in Nazi-occupied Poland, the stamp and date of 1941, and then translating its content from German, we realized that this was correspondence that Stern's late grandmother, Sara Spira, had written to her daughter (his mother), Mary Stern, and son-in-law (Michael's father), George Stern, during the

war years. Michael's parents had been able to flee Nazi Germany and come to the U.S. in late 1938. The postcard revealed the voice of a woman in the most difficult circumstances who, despite facing hunger and near-constant threat of death, was overwhelmingly concerned with the wellbeing of her children. With some trepidation, I asked Michael Stern if he would be willing to send me the entire set of postcards and to allow me to build a History of the Holocaust course around them that I would be teaching the following semester. He agreed.

**What were your goals for this part of your Holocaust class? Do you think you got there?**

I had several goals. One, I wanted my students to understand the process of historical research through actual practice with primary sources. Two, I wanted them to build deep and lasting knowledge of the Holocaust. Three, I wanted them

to form a personal connection to a real person who was taken from the world by the Nazi genocide in order to counteract the inevitable tendency for abstracting human life into numbers, when we are presented with figures such as "six million victims." Four, I wanted my students to learn from and assist Michael Stern—a member of the broader community—with their historical research. I think that I succeeded in these goals.

**Working as your teaching assistant, I remember the destination of the letters had a real effect on students even before we discussed their content. What do you think of the recent drive to localize history? Do you think that's particularly important to Holocaust history in anyway?**

Yes, I think that the fact that these letters were sent by Sara Spira to Racine, Wisconsin, a city not far from the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and also close to the homes of many of our undergraduates, allowed them to connect the history of the Holocaust, set primarily in Europe, to their own lives and experiences. Learning about the Racine childhood of Michael Stern, the grandson of Sara Spira, also built this connection. I do think that this localization is important, not only as a pedagogical device for deepening engagement but also to understand the ways in which historical events transpiring, in this case, in Nazi-occupied Poland, also had implications for people living in the midwestern United States.

**What advice would you give a teacher thinking of adding letters to their classes?**

I think that the postcards worked best when we didn't force connections to every single aspect of the course. My

History of the Holocaust course covered events from 1933 to 1945 and the extant letters were only from 1940–1941. It was not possible to synchronize them. The first time I taught the course, I simply planned for working with one postcard every week, in chronological order, and I provided the background to allow my students to understand roughly what was happening, but then gave them the task of reading the letter closely and helping us unpack it. I was greatly assisted in the use of the postcards by my teaching assistant at the time, Rebekka Grossmann, now a scholar in her own right, who expertly translated the remainder of the cards and also planned many of the research sessions on individual letters. In addition to the postcards, the learning of my students was also greatly enhanced by access to a large collection of family photographs, passports, and other personal documents provided by Michael Stern. In turn, my students conducted research in the digital archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum that unearthed Sara Spira's identification card complete with a photograph of her from wartime Krakow. A different student discovered that, unbeknownst to Michael Stern, a relative of the family had survived the Holocaust in very dramatic circumstances, though, sadly, his wife and young son were murdered in Auschwitz.

Images, courtesy of the author, are from the Sara Spira Collection (unaccessioned recent donation), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



The fall 2016 cover of the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies newsletter features three of the primary documents from the Sara Spira collection used by Amos Bitzan to help teach his History of the Holocaust course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Courtesy of the author.





## History Loves Company: A Tribute to Dale Rosengarten

by Harlan Greene

The future, no doubt, will revere Dale Rosengarten. Historians will sing her praises, scholars reference her works, and users of her hundreds of oral histories will gratefully discover ancestors they never knew. There are already two official resolutions honoring her: one from the Charleston, South Carolina, mayor's office and another from the South Carolina House of Representatives, citing her superior accomplishments, all officially signed and sealed.

Over time, more honors will accrue, as she'll inevitably be included in the lineup of luminaries of South Carolina Jews who not only made names for themselves in their respective fields (for Dale, it'll be at least two), but who also added luster to and made their marks on Jewish history. Think Isaac Harby, Penina Moise, Solomon Nunes Carvalho, and Thomas Jefferson Tobias. Rabbis Barnett Elzas and Jacob Raisin will welcome Dale, another Ashkenazi, into the circle of Sephardim.

But she won't just be judged by the company she keeps; she'll be remembered for being among the ones who helped pin those names into the annals of southern and American Jewish history. Yes, they were there before Dale launched the Jewish Heritage Collection, but through her collecting, consciousness-raising, and kibbitzing, she helped assure their elevation into the academy and, literally, into textbooks of American Jewish history.

After Dale joined forces with McKissick Museum and the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina to mount the landmark exhibit *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*, no one dreamed the project would evolve into more than two decades of presentations, websites, books, and seminars, all documenting the life of Jewish southerners and southern Jews. (How do you identify yourself, is a classic Dale question in her interviews.) What started with "a call for candlesticks" morphed into a cascade of photographs, letters, ledgers, legends, and oral histories. Deliberately and devotedly, passionately and patiently, she listened with care, knowing each story rescued was important. Whether ordinary or extraordinary, the narratives add up to something Talmudic. She who saves a single life saves a world, it is said. Dale has saved a solar system of a particular people and a particular way of life.

But "a curator's rule of thumb is, the fewer words the better," she has said. So, to borrow a metaphor from the other field Dale has mastered—the history and heritage of coiled grass baskets of the Lowcountry—she has woven us into her heart and her being, becoming one of us in so doing. Dale, the future is yours, but for saving our past, we, the portion of a people you helped gather, will always be grateful to you.

*Top: Dale Rosengarten (r) and Mindelle Seltzer interview Raymond Stern in his store in Andrews, SC, 1995. Courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries. Middle: Dale (left, front) on the steps of K. K. Beth Elohim, Hasell Street, Charleston, SC, with College of Charleston students taking her course Charleston's Ethnic Neighborhoods, 2007. Courtesy of Dale Rosengarten. Bottom: Dale (r) and Harlan Greene attended the dedication of the Little Jerusalem/Lincoln Theatre historic marker, 595 King Street, Charleston, SC, 2021. Courtesy of Brittany Lavelle Tulla.*



## Help Us Secure the Future of Your Past

by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

Letters give us an inside view of families and relationships and provide evidence of lives lived in a particular place and time. When the place is Europe, the time is 1933 to 1945, and the writer is Jewish, the letters become urgent: desperate pleas for help getting visas, poignant instructions from parents sending children away—the stories are heart wrenching.

JHSSC's spring meeting, "Paper Bridges": Letters of Hope and Despair, 1933–1945, will showcase correspondence from the Jewish Heritage Collection's Holocaust Archives. Working with Ashley Walters of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture (CSJC) and Chad S. A. Gibbs, director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, we have planned a weekend program that focuses on the lives of Jewish letter writers during the Holocaust.

The spring meeting is a great example of how our organizations work together: JHSSC designs public programming, the Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC) provides research and archival resources, and CSJC creates the curricular component of our collaborative endeavors.

In 2022, JHSSC and JHC embarked on a joint campaign—The Future of the Past—to establish a sustainable financial framework so that the two organizations can pursue their mission for years to come. With support from South Carolina's Jewish community, the College of Charleston, and individual and institutional donors, we have built an internationally recognized archive and a historical society that "punches above its weight."

But the work never ends. There are more manuscript collections to process, oral histories to record, and public programs to produce. I thank those who have contributed to the campaign and encourage others to consider a gift.

Marty Perlmutter used the following analogy to describe our enterprise: if you visualize a three-legged stool, the legs are JHSSC, JHC, and CSJC. A three-legged stool stands only if all three legs are secure. With the Pearlstine/Lipov Center fully endowed, our goal now is to safeguard the future of South Carolina's Jewish history and heritage. Please join us in Charleston in April for a most compelling meeting.

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Register now for the **April 29–30 meeting at [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming).**  
See page 11 of this publication for program information.



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On the cover: the Sura Wolff and Sam Wengrow family sits down to Thanksgiving dinner, Columbia, SC, ca. 1951. Clockwise from left: Sura; daughter, Reberta Wengrow Karesh; Sam; and sons, Henry Ray and Arnold. Courtesy of Arnold Wengrow.

This page: Faye Goldberg Miller's grandmother, Toba Goldberg Gelbart, carrying two ducks ("kushkie" in Yiddish). Chaim and Toba Gelbart, raised chicken and geese in Mogielnica, Poland. Courtesy of Faye Goldberg Miller.

## In this issue

**Kugels & Collards: A Duo's Planning and Perseverance Shines Through ~ Katharine Allen ~** Historic Columbia's Director of Outreach & Engagement relates the story of how *Kugels & Collards* grew from the seedling of an idea into a thriving food blog with a focus on Jewish families in the Columbia region and, now, a book that examines kitchen-to-table traditions in Jewish households across South Carolina. .... 4

**The Making of Kugels & Collards ~ Rachel Gordin Barnett and Lyssa Kligman Harvey ~** Years ago, two Columbia, South Carolina, women approached Historic Columbia with the idea of sharing local Jewish history by exploring foodways. The resulting blog, *Kugels & Collards*, was launched in 2017 and holds a treasure chest of traditions, both Jewish and southern. Now, these two visionary (and hardworking!) women have produced a book by the same name, and they describe the journey that brought them from blog to book. .... 6

**Kugels & Collards: Stories of Food, Family, and Tradition in South Carolina ~ JHSSC meets in Columbia, SC ~ October 6–8, 2023.** .... 9

**From Kugels & Collards, University of South Carolina Press, 2023 ~** Reprinted from the book with permission, read an excerpt from Marcie Cohen Ferris's foreword, followed by selected personal foodways stories.

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**The Next Chapter ~ Rachel Gordin Barnett ~** In 2024, the Society will celebrate the anniversary of its founding—thirty years, the full span of a generation, a length of time that brings big changes. The JHSSC is well positioned to greet those changes with vigor, and is poised to continue its mission with a robust agenda. .... 22

## Letter from the President



As my tenure as president nears its conclusion, I would like to reflect on the noteworthy moments and achievements we experienced over the past two years. In March 2022, we celebrated the centennial of Congregation Adath Yeshurun in Aiken, South Carolina. We saw the opening of the exhibit *A Source of Light* at the Aiken County Historical Museum, and witnessed the unveiling of a historic marker on Laurens Street in Aiken, celebrating the contributions of Aiken's Jewish merchants.

In June 2022, we were able to hold our first in-person meeting since the start of the COVID pandemic. Hosted by Beth Israel Congregation in Beaufort, South Carolina, our program included topics about the Jewish settlers and merchants of Beaufort, and many family stories. It was topped off by a conversation on Reconstruction by Drs. Thomas Holt and Lawrence Rowland, moderated by Judge Richard Gergel.

We hosted the Southern Jewish Historical Society meeting in Charleston in October 2022. More than 125 participants from 22 states came together for a weekend of great presentations and panel discussions, including Dr. Michael Cohen from Tulane University and Dr. Shari Rabin of Oberlin College. A highlight of the weekend was the reception at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library honoring Dr. Dale Rosengarten, curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection, on her upcoming retirement.

Dr. Belinda Gergel presented an online program in November 2022 with author and Rock Hill native Judy Kurtz Goldman, discussing her newest book, *Child: a Memoir*.

A week after her retirement in February 2023, Dr. Dale Rosengarten was honored by the South Carolina House of Representatives for her contributions to South Carolina Jewish history and the history of sweetgrass basketmaking. Representative Beth Bernstein of Richland County read the resolution passed by the House, and Representative Leonidas Stavrinakis of Charleston presented Dale with a framed copy. Following the presentation, her accomplishments were celebrated at a luncheon co-sponsored by the JHSSC and Historic Columbia.

This past April our spring meeting theme was "Paper Bridges": Letters of Hope and Despair, 1933–1945, featuring Rebecca Wildman, author of the book *Paper Love*. We held discussions on letters written by European Jews to friends and relatives living in the United States during World War II, including correspondence saved by South Carolinians and archived in the Jewish Heritage Collection.

I would like to thank Judge Richard Gergel and Attorney Robert Rosen for all their hard work in presenting our online Sunday Conversations programs that began in July 2020 and continued monthly until June 2022, providing us a safe way to meet during the pandemic. These excellent programs that were streamed on Zoom really kept our members engaged and promoted our Society to a nationwide audience.

On a somber note, we lost one of our founding members and the first executive director of the JHSSC, Dr. Martin Perlmutter, on January 16, 2023. Known as Marty, he did more than anyone to raise awareness of the contributions made by Jewish citizens to the history and culture of South Carolina. The JHSSC collaborated with the College of Charleston and McKissick Museum to arrange for the creation of the exhibit that would become known as *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*. Marty developed the robust Jewish Studies Program at the College of Charleston, raising it to national prominence, and was the force behind Jewish Studies multi-faceted community programming. On behalf of

the JHSSC we extend our condolences to his wife Jeri, their four children, Jake, Aaron, Daniel, Estee, their eleven grandchildren and sister, Ruth Warren. Z"l.

As we look toward the future, we are in a transition period. Marty is no longer with us and Dale has retired. However, we have a wonderful executive director, Rachel Barnett, who stays on top of the issues, and Dr. Lilly Filler and her nominating committee have presented us a great slate of officers. With their leadership, we will be well-positioned to tackle new challenges and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead to ensure the JHSSC remains sustainable, dynamic, and forward-thinking.

L'shalom,  
Alexander Cohen, M.D.  
JHSSC President

### Slate of Officers for 2024–25

*President*  
Steve Savitz, Columbia

*VP Membership*  
Mickey Rosenblum, Charleston

*VP Programs and Publications*  
Anita Rosenberg, Charleston

*VP Historic Markers*  
Joe Wachter, Myrtle Beach

*Treasurer*  
Barry Draisen, Anderson

*Secretary*  
Laura Moses, Charleston

*Archivist*  
Marcie Stern Baker, Columbia



# Kugels & Collards: A Duo's Planning and Perseverance Shines Through

by Katharine Allen, Director of Outreach & Engagement, Historic Columbia

By the end of 2016, Historic Columbia's (HC) Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative (CJHI) had completed several major projects: the installation of two historical markers, the publication of a walking tour in both print and web formats, and the transfer of nearly 50 new oral histories to the College of Charleston's Jewish Heritage Collection. The steering committee could have concluded its work with these achievements—the initiative had surpassed its initial goals and received several major accolades, including one for heritage tourism awarded by South Carolina's state preservation office.

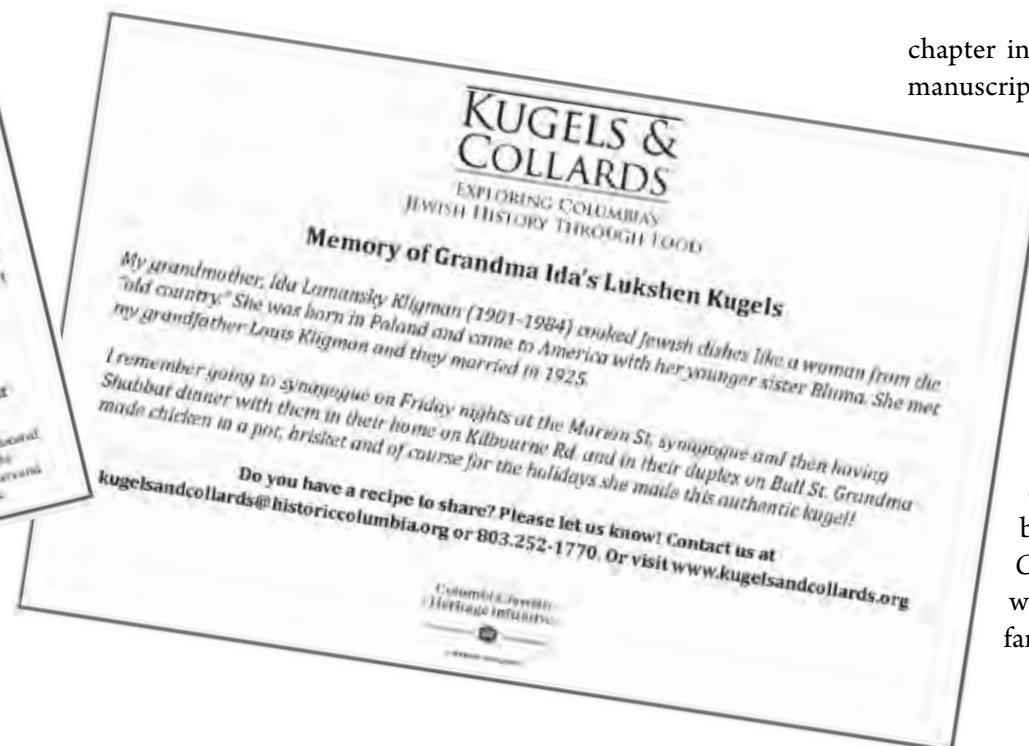
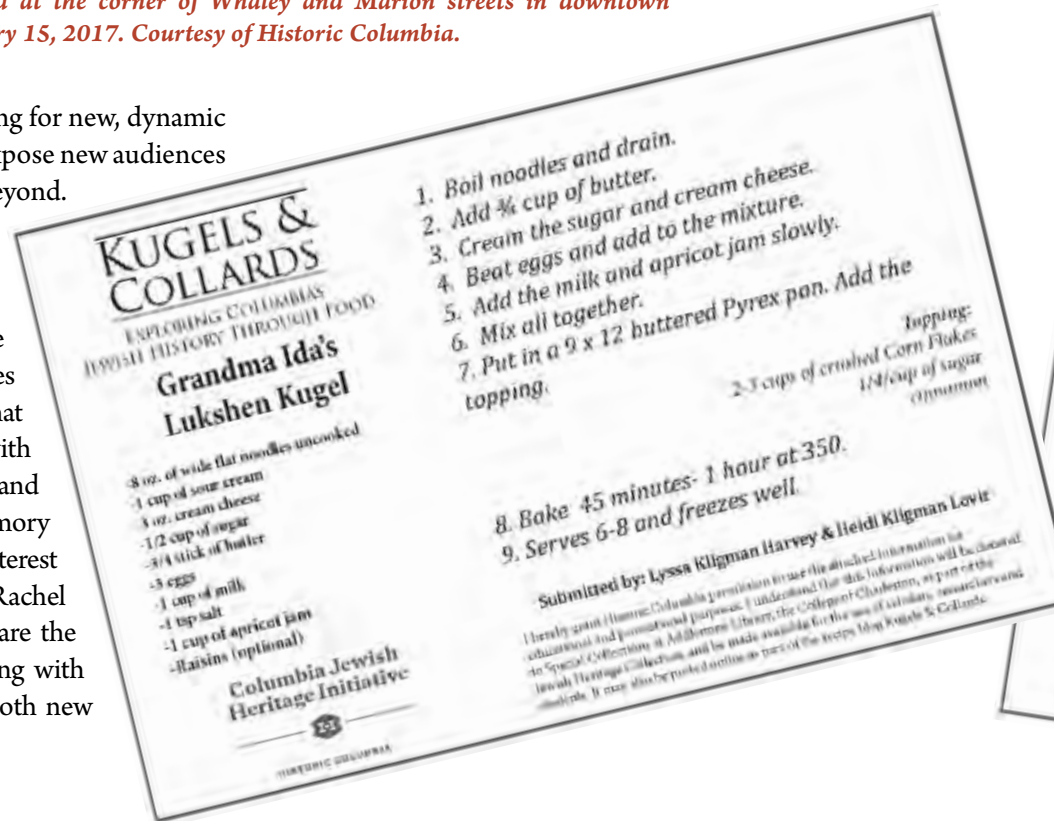
Instead, committee members began looking for new, dynamic ways to share Jewish history, and in turn expose new audiences to Jewish family stories in Columbia and beyond.

A potential path forward emerged in January 2017, when Rachel Barnett and Lyssa Harvey approached Historic Columbia staff with an intriguing idea: use food as a lens through which to share stories of the past. Rachel and Lyssa reasoned that many family stories, although replete with details about businesses, achievements, and relationships, are often deemed by their memory keepers as “not historic,” or perhaps not of interest to the general public. Perhaps, contended Rachel and Lyssa, by asking that an individual share the story behind a beloved family recipe (along with the recipe, of course), CJHI would gain both new participants and a new audience.

But first, the project needed a name and a platform. What started as *Knishes, Kugels & Collards* was quickly shortened to just *Kugels & Collards*, a nod to the easy co-existence of these two foods on the southern Jewish table, itself “symbolic of the intertwining of our food cultures.” The planned format, a food blog, would allow for quick posting and access to a broad, internet-based community of foodies on various social media. HC's Marketing Coordinator Brian Harmon secured the domain and created a WordPress site, and the broader committee,



*South Carolina Historical Marker unveiling at Beth Shalom (House of Peace) Cemetery, located at the corner of Whaley and Marion streets in downtown Columbia, January 15, 2017. Courtesy of Historic Columbia.*



consisting of HC Executive Director Robin Waites, Rachel, Lyssa, and I, began planning the first year of content.

Over the next several months, as we collectively worked through all the necessities that comprise a blog (“About,” Section Headers, search functionality, just to name a few), Brian Harmon and our director of marketing, Anna Kate Twitty, focused on additional marketing efforts. The *Kugels & Collards* planned launch was at The Big Nosh, a Jewish food festival held in May at the Tree of Life Synagogue. By the time HC staff set up our table, we had in hand a variety of recipes cards branded with the *Kugels & Collards* logo to give away and a newly launched blog.

The goal from the beginning was to reach out to Jewish families living in, or with ties to, Columbia and Richland County. Our first year, readers learned about “B’nai B’rith Women & the South Carolina State Fair” from Jerry Emanuel, and the roles of Max and Selma Dickman, and especially Florida Boyd, who according to author Jackie Dickman,



*Lyssa Harvey photographs the Kugels & Collards team. From left, David Turner, Emily Brown, Eric Friendly, co-author Rachel Barnett, John Sherrer, Kat Allen, and Robin Waites. Courtesy of Lyssa Harvey.*

chapter introductions, and plan the book's launch. As the manuscript took shape, they brought in HC's Director of

Cultural Resources John Sherrer to serve as editor. And here we are, with the book now in publication. Rachel and Lyssa have generously offered any royalties to further the Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative's goal. But for me, in my role as HC's lead historian, I'm most excited and thankful for the physical legacy that *Kugels & Collards: Stories of Food, Family, and Tradition in Jewish South Carolina* will leave to future generations who seek ways to connect with our complex shared history. As a non-cook, recipe blogs have never interested me. But the *Kugels & Collards* stories have a way of speaking to everyone who wants to learn something—about food, about family, and about our community.



## The Making of *Kugels & Collards*

by Rachel Gordin Barnett and Lyssa Kligman Harvey

What began in 2014 as the Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative (CJHI) to document the Columbia Jewish community's history, led to outcomes none of us could envision. *Kugels & Collards* began as a Columbia-focused blog in May 2017 with our first posts about Grandma Ida's lokshen kugel and Ethel's collards. [Lyssa's grandmother Ida Lomansky Kligman of Columbia and Ethel Mae Glover, who worked for the Gordin family of Summerton for more than four decades.] Since that time, there have been six years of stories and recipes. Unexpectedly, but happily, we have created an archive of family stories and recipes that add to the documentation of the history of Columbia's Jewish community.

Our first conversation with University of South Carolina Press editor Aurora Bell was in November 2019 to discuss the potential of *Kugels & Collards* going statewide with a book of Jewish South Carolina food stories and recipes. Dale Rosengarten and Marcie Cohen Ferris, our mentors throughout the entire process, gave us great advice and direction as we set out to write a proposal for the Press. What we didn't envision in November 2019 was a worldwide pandemic that would keep us all at home and curtail our proposed in-person interviews. Zoom, phone calls, and email quickly took the place of face-to-face meetings. Undaunted, we forged ahead, contacting family members, friends, and JHSSC members, in search of people interested in contributing their story to the book.

In July 2022, our final manuscript was submitted to the Press. Now, a year later (and four years after the

first conversation), we have published a book that is a snapshot of Jewish South Carolina through the lens of food and memory. We know there are many more stories to be told and we encourage those who have an interest to contact us. *Kugels & Collards* belongs to Historic Columbia and the JHSSC. We are the stewards of the project—volunteers who want the stories collected and preserved.

What strikes us when we review the book in its entirety is that the memories, the stories, and the food are universal, whether you are from Eutawville or Charleston. We've come to realize that food is a significant unifier in the southern Jewish experience.

We are Jewish women whose immigrant grandparents made their way to South Carolina. But our families' stories reflect the journeys that generations of Jewish immigrants made to America. As women pulled by the force of both our region and our religion, we recognize the expressive power of food.

Our inspiration to create *Kugels & Collards* came from our mothers and grandmothers, descendants of Eastern European immigrants, as well as the African American women who worked in our homes as housekeepers and cooks and shared their culinary knowledge. We are not the experts of their respective experiences. But we gratefully gather their memories and meals in their honor.

We are very thankful to those who contributed their families' stories to *Kugels & Collards*, and to those who believed in the project and gave invaluable counsel and encouragement along the way.



Above: A holiday table from "Around the Jewish Table" in *Kugels & Collards*. Photo: Forrest Clonts. Below: Lyssa Kligman Harvey (l) and Rachel Gordin Barnett at Clayton Rawl Farms, Lexington, SC, January 2021. Courtesy of Rachel Barnett.

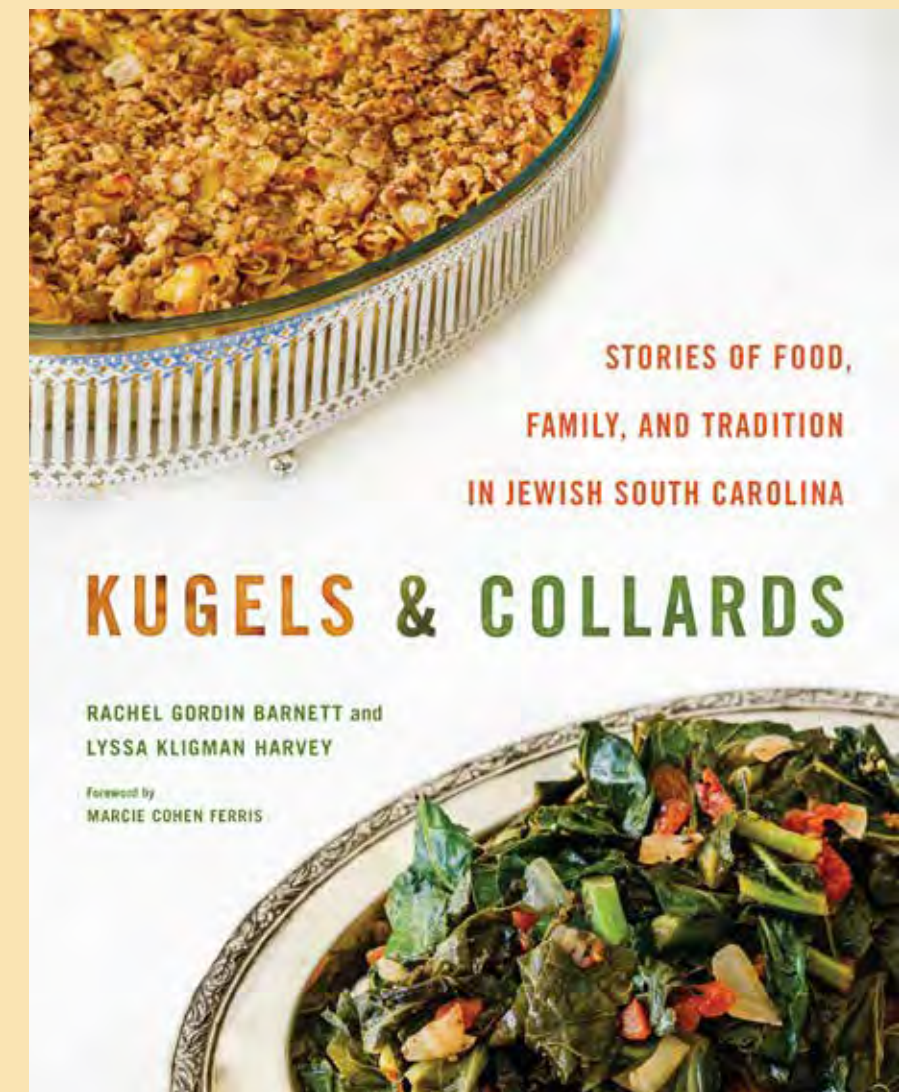


## *Kugels & Collards*

Book on sale now!

University of South Carolina Press, \$36.99

Ebook also available



[kugelsandcollards.org](http://kugelsandcollards.org)



You are invited to the *Kugels & Collards®*

# BOOK LAUNCH PARTY

**FRIDAY  
OCTOBER 6  
6:00-8:00 PM**

**Seibels House & Gardens**  
1601 Richland Street | Columbia, SC

Tickets at [historiccolumbia.org/kugelsandcollards](https://historiccolumbia.org/kugelsandcollards)

Recipe Tasting Book Signing Meet & Greet

All proceeds from event tickets & book sales will benefit the Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative, a project of Historic Columbia and the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.



## Keynote Speakers



**M**arcie Cohen Ferris is a writer and educator whose work explores the American South through its foodways and the southern Jewish experience. She is an emeritus professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the author of *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South*, and co-editor of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*. In 2018, Ferris received the Craig Claiborne Lifetime Achievement Award from the Southern Foodways Alliance. Her recent book, *Edible North Carolina: A Journey Across a State of Flavor*, explores the vibrant contemporary food movement in the Tar Heel State.



**A**nne Byrn is a *New York Times* bestselling food writer and cookbook author based in Nashville, Tennessee. For 15 years she was the food editor of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and she attended La Varenne École de Cuisine in Paris, receiving an advanced certificate. While raising three children and cooking for a busy family she embraced some shortcuts and wrote the bestseller *The Cake Mix Doctor*, one of *Southern Living* magazine's top 100 cookbooks of all time. She is also the author of *American Cake* and *Skillet Love*. When not baking or gardening, Anne writes a weekly newsletter on Substack called *Between the Layers*.

# Kugels & Collards: Stories of Food, Family, and Tradition in Jewish South Carolina

October 6–8, 2023 ~ Columbia, SC

## Friday, October 6

**6:00–8:00 P.M. An Evening of Kugels & Collards** ~ Book launch party  
Separate ticket ~ see previous page for details

All events, unless otherwise specified, will be held in the Campus Room, Capstone House, 898 Barnwell Street, Columbia, SC

Many thanks to our meeting co-sponsors:



## Saturday, October 7

**11:30 A.M.** Registration and lunch

**12:15 P.M.** Welcome ~ Joel H. Samuels, dean, College of Arts & Sciences, University of South Carolina ~ Alex Cohen, president, JHSSC ~ Saskia Coenen Snyder, professor of history and director of the Jewish Studies Program, University of South Carolina

**12:30 The Language and Legacy of Jewish Foodways** ~ Marcie Cohen Ferris

**1:45** Break

**2:00 Around the Table** ~ John Sherrer, moderator

Panelists: Terri Wolff Kaufman, Kim Cliett Long, Rhettta Aronson Mendelsohn, Bruce Miller, Faye Goldberg Miller, Anita Moïse Rosefield Rosenberg

**3:15** Break featuring homemade baked goods provided by local bakers!

**3:30–4:45 Jewish Life and Cake** ~ Anne Byrn and Arnold Wengrow

**5:00–6:30** Reception, Spigner House

Dinner on your own

Reception sponsored by  
**NELSON MULLINS**

## Sunday, October 8

**9:00–10:00 A.M.** JHSSC board meeting. Board elections will be held.

**10:00–11:00 Bagel brunch and overview of tours** ~ Doyle Stevick and Eric Friendly

**11:15–1:15 P.M. TOURS**

**Anne Frank House**  
1731 College Street  
(each group accommodates 17)  
11:00–12:00 (tour 1)  
OR  
12:30–1:30 (tour 2)

**Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery**  
720 Blanding Street  
(each group accommodates 20;  
sign up for this tour by Sept. 1st)  
11:15–12:15 (tour 1)  
OR  
12:30–1:30 (tour 2)

For registration and hotel information, see page 22 or visit [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](https://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)



# The Language and Legacy of Southern Jewish Foodways

by Marcie Cohen Ferris, excerpted from her foreword to *Kugels & Collards*, USC Press.

“Food is an archive, a keeper of secrets.” Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene*<sup>1</sup>

South Carolina Jewish history is fundamental to our understanding of the Jewish South, a fact convincingly illustrated in the groundbreaking exhibition *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (2002) and the accompanying publication of the same title, edited by Dale and Theodore Rosengarten.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the exhibit and book I marveled at the food-related material culture of Jewish South Carolina in vintage advertisements and photographs of Jewish-owned groceries and general stores, and artifacts such as a printed menu and wedding invitation from 1918, a shohet’s knife and drainboard for kosher butchering, a noodle dough cutter, a food hamper, a satin Passover matzo cover, a Russian samovar (an urn used to boil water for tea), and precious silver items from an English sugar bowl to a family’s cake knife, kiddush cup, and rice serving spoon.



Lazarus family (Charleston, SC) silver kiddush cup, rice spoon, and cake knife. Courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

The circa 1830 silver spoon, owned by the Lazarus family of Charleston and held by Black women who served rice to well-to-do family members and their guests, references the prosperous economy of which the Lazaruses were a part. By the 1780s, Carolina Gold rice produced great wealth for Lowcountry planters and Jewish merchants. For enslaved laborers who worked the crop, many skilled in wetland rice farming in their homelands in west Africa, the pearly white grain represented indescribable toil and suffering.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the era of slavery and continuing after the Civil War and well into the twentieth century, people of African descent worked as cooks, housekeepers, and caterers in Jewish homes and in synagogues. The dynamics of this labor system and its racial interactions were complex, both intimate and exploitative. Beginning with the post-World War I out-migration of thousands of largely rural Black southerners during the Great Migration and continuing at various rates

through the Civil Rights Movement into the 1970s, Black South Carolinians voted with their feet. Many chose to leave the region and its systemic racism to pursue education and work elsewhere in America.

Consider another object—a young woman’s commonplace book—that like the rice spoon, the shohet’s knife, and the samovar, reveals a space where region, food, and religion converged in the Jewish South. The booklet’s front cover is inscribed, “The property of Miriam G. Moses, 1828.” Now preserved in the archives of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the book belonged to Miriam Gratz Moses (1808–1891).<sup>4</sup> After the death of her mother, Rachel Gratz Moses and her infant sister, Gertrude, during the High Holiday season of 1823, teenager Miriam and her

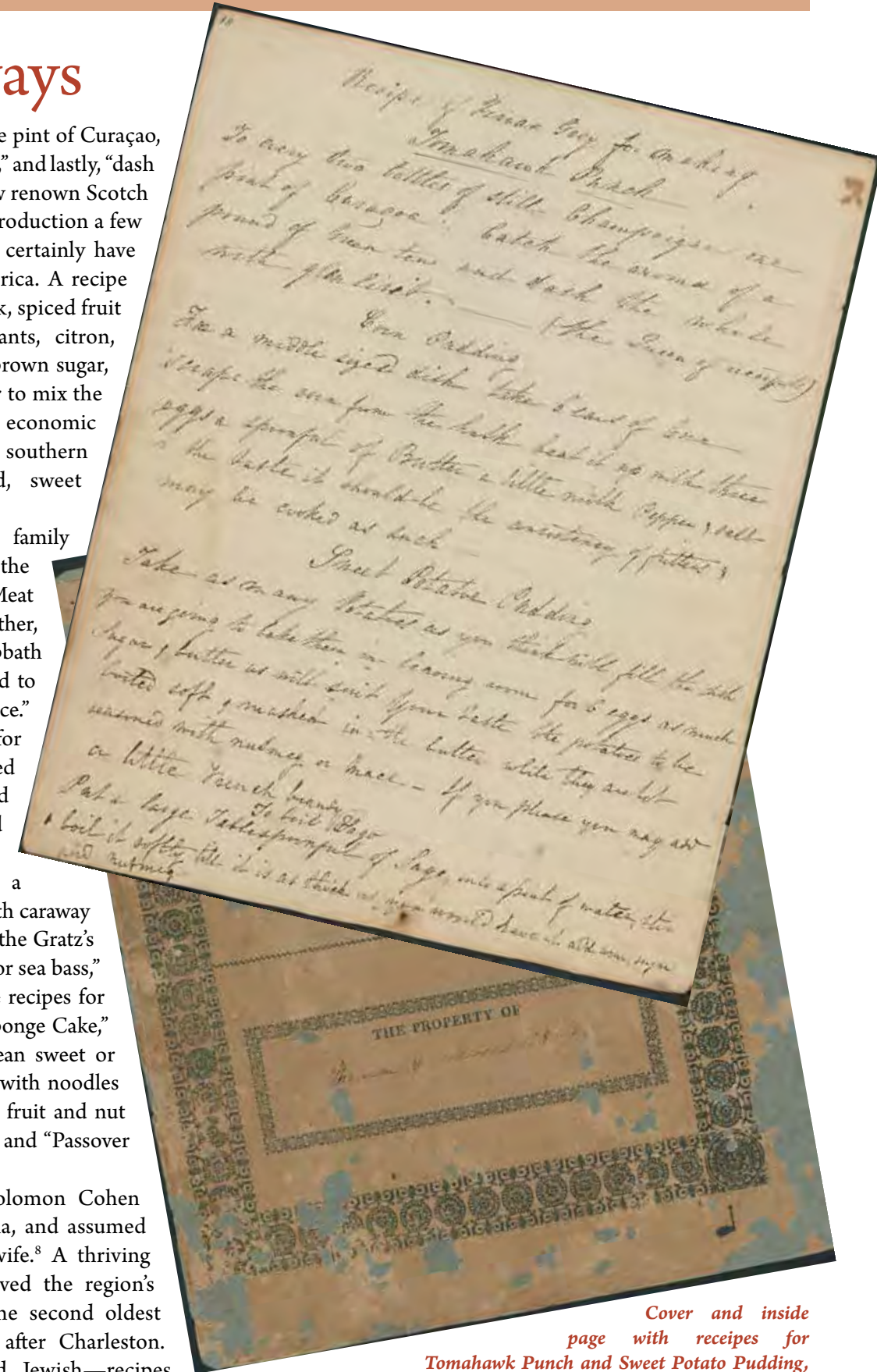
five siblings were raised in Philadelphia by her aunt, the well known Jewish educator and philanthropist Rebecca Gratz.<sup>5</sup> Miriam’s commonplace book was typical of the era, with its mix of recipes, recent books read, foreign language exercises, extracts of published verse and prose, and highlighted lists of historical happenings. More distinctive, though, was the particular mix of the recipes she chose to include.

In her commonplace book, Miriam wrote out, in measured and elegant script, recipes that speak of her racial and class privilege, her observant Judaism, a young woman on the precipice of marriage, and the possibility of that match taking her to the American South. Most of the recipes are canonical dishes of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century middle-class America from tomato ketchup to rice pudding, flannel cakes (pancakes), and gingerbread, while others are evidence of a monied Atlantic world family who enjoyed chocolate, brandy, tropical fruits, roasted meats, poultry, and fresh fish. Miriam’s list of ingredients for “Tomahawk Punch” includes

two bottles of still champagne, one pint of Curaçao, the “aroma of a pound of Green tea,” and lastly, “dash the whole with Glenlivet,” the now renown Scotch whiskey, which had only started production a few years before in 1824, and would certainly have been a prized possession in America. A recipe for “N.Y. Black Cake,” a dense, dark, spiced fruit cake composed of raisins, currants, citron, rose water, ten eggs, a pound of brown sugar, a gill of brandy, and “enough flour to mix the fruit with,” connotes the Gratz’s economic ties to the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> There are southern standards: biscuits, corn bread, sweet potato pudding, and pound cake.

The recipes reflect Miriam’s family observance of kashrut, including the absence of pork and shellfish.<sup>7</sup> Meat and dairy are not cooked together, and for dishes eaten on the Sabbath such as beef fricassee, she specified to “separate the meat from the sauce.” She includes kosher-style recipes for veal cutlets, mutton stew, “kimmeled meat or fresh tongue,” (beef stewed with root vegetables, spices, and port wine to which caraway seed and vinegar is added; kümmel, a German herbal liqueur flavored with caraway seeds and cumin connects back to the Gratz’s Prussian origins), “fried black fish or sea bass,” and how “to render fat.” There are recipes for Jewish holidays such as “Pesach Sponge Cake,” “koogel,” (kugel, a central European sweet or savory egg pudding usually made with noodles or potatoes), “Haroseth,” (a sweet fruit and nut paste eaten at the Passover seder), and “Passover soup dumplings” (matzo balls).

In 1836, Miriam married Solomon Cohen Jr. of Georgetown, South Carolina, and assumed the role of a wealthy planter’s wife.<sup>8</sup> A thriving mercantile city, Georgetown served the region’s rice plantations, and was also the second oldest Jewish community in the state after Charleston. The presence of southern—and Jewish—recipes in her commonplace book suggest the influence of the South’s much-touted cuisine in this era, as well as a young woman preparing for her responsibilities



Cover and inside page with recipes for Tomahawk Punch and Sweet Potato Pudding, from the commonplace and recipe book of Miriam Gratz Moses in the Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers, #2369, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



as a Jewish wife and mother in South Carolina. It is not improbable that Miriam would have encountered southern-style dishes prepared by a skilled Black cook.

In *Kugel & Collards*, authors Rachel Barnett and Lyssa Harvey bring dozens of recipes and stories together in a volume that celebrates the food history and narratives of generations of Jewish South Carolinians. Woven throughout this work are the fundamentals of South Carolina Jewish foodways: the power of family and transregional kinship and religious connections, the historical influence of skilled African American cooks and food entrepreneurs, and the culinary flavors and ingredients of the changing global South.

#### Notes

1. Michael W. Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 70.
2. Dale and Theodore Rosengarten, eds., *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).
3. William Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

4. Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Commonplace and Recipe Book, 1828, in the Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

5. Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 112; Dianne Ashton, "Shifting Veils: Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women," in *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2001), 93; Laura Arnold Leibman, *Once We Were Slaves: The Extraordinary Journey of a Multiracial Jewish Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 135.

6. Julia Moskin, "A Fruitcake Soaked in Tropical Sun," *New York Times*, December 19, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/19/dining/19cake.html>.

7. Miriam Gratz Moses Cookbook and Commonplace Book, 1828; Manuscript Cookbooks Survey, 2022, <https://www.manuscriptcookbookssurvey.org/>.

8. Pamela S. Nadell, *America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today* (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 41; "Georgetown, S.C.: Historical Overview," Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, Institute of Southern Jewish Life, Jackson, MS, <https://www.isjl.org/south-carolina-georgetown-encyclopedia.html>.

## Family Pride: Recipes from a Sephardic Family

by Anita Moïse Rosefield Rosenberg, from *Kugels & Collards*, USC Press

Looking back, there's no doubt family stories told and retold have been embellished, but at the root of each one is a well of family pride in those who came before us and those who came together in celebration. This is how I heard it.

The historical family names included: Moïse, Moses, Lazarus, Lopez, Harbie, Harby, Rodrigues, Solomon, Solomons, Benjamin, and de Torres—and the history behind those names takes us back centuries. On August 3, 1492, a day after Spain issued its Edict of Expulsion ordering the exodus of the country's Jews, Luis de Torres sailed

on the *Niña* to the New World as Christopher Columbus's cartographer and translator. The Harbie family, along with other Sephardic refugees, escaped to Fez, Morocco, where

the family lived for several generations. There, Isaac Harbie served the King of Morocco as secretary and lapidary. His son Solomon Harby (the spelling of the family name changed) arrived in Charleston in 1781 and married Rebecca Moses, daughter of Myer Moses, in 1787. Their son, Isaac Harby, Jewish reformer and intellectual, was born in Charleston in 1788.



Moïse family gathering, Sumter, SC, 1974. Photo: Wilber Jeffcoat, courtesy of © Sandlapper Society, Inc. For more information, contact the South Carolina State Library, [statelibrary.sc.gov](http://statelibrary.sc.gov).

During the Spanish Inquisition, other family members went north to London, Amsterdam, and Alsace-Lorraine on the border of France and Germany, and eventually to the Caribbean. It is known that Abraham Moïse was a prosperous landowner and tradesman living in Saint-Domingue with his wife, Sarah, and four sons before they fled to Charleston in 1791, leaving behind everything they owned. Abraham and Sarah had five more children in Charleston. The family was active in Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. Their daughter Penina was a prolific poet, writer, and teacher, who wrote the lyrics

for the congregation's hymnal—the first collection of Jewish hymns published in America.

Today, as descendants of these pioneers, we work, enjoy leisure and family time, worship, and cook using Sephardic recipes long-modified and surely influenced by Lowcountry and Gullah-Geechee traditions adapted to our Carolina surroundings. Any occasion demands a family gathering. Toasts, great food, and storytelling dominate the hours. We come from near and far across the United States to celebrate each other. A family reunion demands our attendance.

In 1975, Ethel McCutchen Moïse wrote an article about the family cookbook for *Sandlapper Magazine* that was published from 1968 until 1983. Here is an excerpt:

*Family get-togethers are not unusual, and neither is recipe swapping, but recently I became involved in what turned out to be a unique recipe swapping situation. It all began when several of our Moïse clan in Sumter were having dinner together. One of the topics Moïse always seem to enjoy talking about is food and this was no exception—except that talk turned to fond remembrances of some of the great cooks we have had in the family, some of whom had gone to their reward, taking many of their treasured and unrecorded recipes with them. One suggested we put together a cookbook for the family; another said, "Ethel, you do it;" the next thing I knew, I was sending letters to all the far-flung members of the Moïse clan. Response was prompt and overwhelming with favorite family recipes coming from Pennsylvania, Indiana, Florida, Texas, California, Arizona, Hawaii, and all points in between—but all with roots in South Carolina.*

## We Ate Like Our Southern Neighbors

by Rhetta Aronson Mendelsohn and Carol Aronson Kelly, from *Kugels & Collards*, USC Press

Growing up in Orangeburg in the 1950s and '60s, we were southern and Jewish and totally a part of the community. After World War II, our parents, Rose Louise Rich Aronson and Harold M. Aronson, worked very hard to establish a successful business—Aronson Awning Company. We lived in a small house before moving to a more affluent neighborhood in 1960. Our grandparents lived close by.

Our grandmother, Henrietta Block Rich, spent her life as a homemaker, sharing her special matzo balls with friends and neighbors. She visited all the local farmers markets and spent her time sitting on the front porch shelling butterbeans and peas while our grandfather, Lipman Philip Rich, cracked

the pecans. Granny, as we called her, took us to her friends' homes to pick figs that she made into wonderful preserves, cucumbers that she turned into dill pickles, and chestnuts that

she put into the Thanksgiving turkey. Every Saturday morning, Papa, as we called him, appeared at our door with boiled peanuts and a Coke for us. Until she passed away in 1984, Granny never failed to send us home with something wonderful from her kitchen, most notably, her smothered chicken that everyone loved. We still use her tattered copy of *The Settlement Cook Book* and her recipes written in pencil on scraps of paper and the backs of checks.

Following in her mother's footsteps, our mother became



Rose Louise Rich Aronson. Courtesy of Rhetta Aronson Mendelsohn.



known as the best cook in Orangeburg. In addition to working every morning at Aronson Awning Company, she cooked three meals a day. We mostly ate at home, only sometimes going to the country club or a local restaurant, Berry's on the Hill. Dinner was in the middle of the day when she and Daddy came home to eat. Daddy went back to work but Mother stayed home. On Saturdays, we had fried chicken and macaroni and cheese, prepared with the expert help of Jessie Mae Palm. Jessie Mae lived in her home near an enclave of relatives with her husband and daughter, Terri. She taught me how to iron and clean windows, a job we always did together.

On Sundays we had rib roast or steak prepared on the grill by Daddy's hands. We enjoyed the bounties of the southern seasons—corn, butter beans, white acre field peas, peaches, figs, pecan deserts. Also, we all enjoyed barbeque from the locally famous Dukes establishments. We ate bacon and ham along with chicken and fish that Papa caught in the nearby lakes and the Edisto River. We ate grits, canned salmon, and Vienna sausages.

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 top of the stove. They always used Fleischmann'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. Mother could put on a lovely dinner party at a moment's notice and prepare fabulous bite-size hors d'oeuvres and sweets for cocktail parties. Her recipes reflect a slower pace of life—with time to put love and labor into her cooking. Our Jewish heritage is still very much a part of how we cook today. Although we cook fewer casseroles and sweets, we fall back on Granny and Mother's recipes as delicious and dependable for family meals as well as for company.

In the 1950s, Granny and Mother sold cookies to raise money to build Orangeburg's Temple Sinai. It was no secret that we were one of about twenty Jewish families in Orangeburg. We personally never experienced antisemitism in our small South Carolina community.

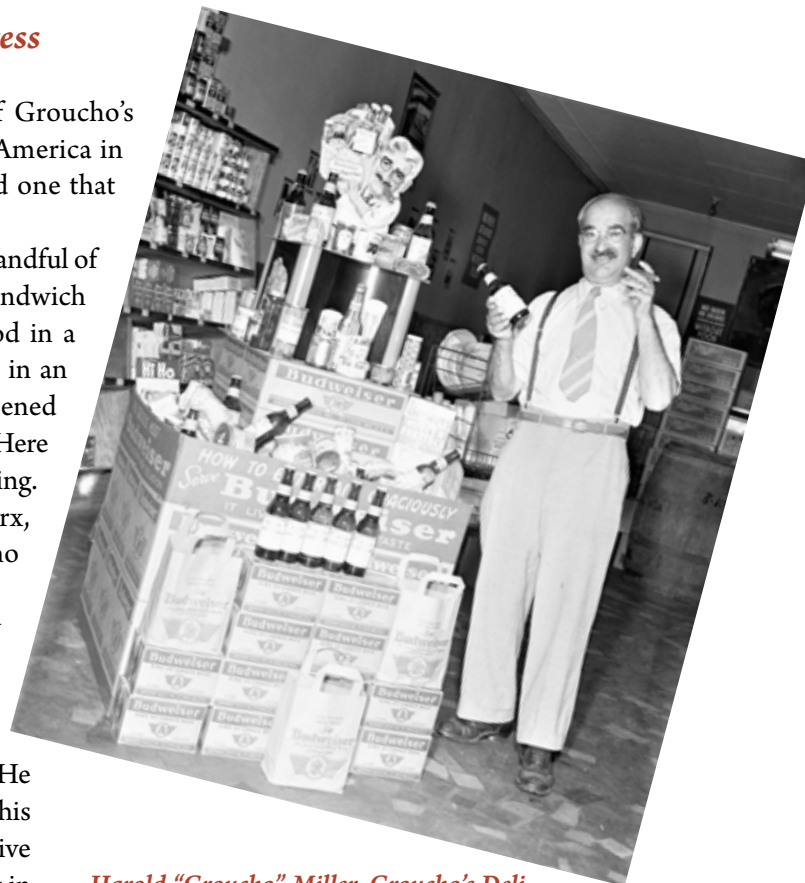
## Groucho Miller's Russian Blintzes

by Bruce Miller, from *Kugels & Collards, USC Press*

Harold "Groucho" Miller, my grandfather and founder of Groucho's Deli, was the son of Russian immigrants who arrived in America in 1899. The history of Groucho's name is a story unto itself, and one that can only be told as follows.

Harold "Groucho" Miller came to Columbia in 1940 with a handful of original recipes for potato salad, coleslaw, and various salad and sandwich dressings, most of which were thought up during his childhood in a Philadelphia orphanage. Groucho's son, Ivan Miller, recollected in an interview with the *Columbia Record* in 1986, "When Pop first opened this store, Columbia was a small town, and everything had a label. Here he [Harold Miller] was this really crazy kind of guy. Always joking. Always had a big cigar. A mustache. He looked like Groucho Marx, he talked like Groucho Marx, and to Columbia, he was Groucho Marx. So that is how the name came about."

Throughout the generations, Groucho's Deli has used only the highest quality products and ingredients, which has, in turn, led Groucho's to legendary status. One recipe that never made it to Groucho's Deli menu was learned by Groucho Miller during a stint as a Vaudeville emcee in Philadelphia in the 1920s. He befriended a Russian Jewish comedian who taught him one of his favorite recipes—blintzes—a time-consuming and labor-intensive dish. They were available for sale at Miller's Deli on opening day in 1940. A year later the name was changed to Groucho's Deli.



Harold "Groucho" Miller, Groucho's Deli, Columbia, SC, 1940s. Courtesy of Bruce Miller.

## Ezella's Kosher Collards

by Kim Cliett Long, from *Kugels & Collards, USC Press*

This is a story about a great-grandmother, a grandmother, a mother, and her legacy. People often leave their property to their children as an inheritance and in remembrance of them and other ancestors. We also see artifacts reminiscent of the days gone by and other vintage elements that remind us of ancestors in the most vivid ways possible. Such are mesmerizing remnants of the past. This story speaks of such beautiful remnants of family memory, history, and culture, except in this story, they are honored, remembered, and passed on through the sense of taste rather than property or artifacts. It has been said that foodways can take you back in time, helping you remember your past and your roots. I believe this wholeheartedly and soulfully.

The roots of my ancestry lie in the plantation fields of 18<sup>th</sup> through mid-19<sup>th</sup> century South Carolina. The story of my maternal great-great-grandmother and that of her enslavement began on one of the state's vast rice plantations. Our family knew only a few snippets of information about her. Her name was Peggy. After gaining her freedom, she boarded with and served as a housekeeper for an unmarried Jewish schoolteacher, Jewel Jacobs of Aiken. In a time of little to no health services for enslaved or newly emancipated women, Peggy died giving birth to a daughter, Ezella, whom Jewel took under her wing and raised. During Ezella's early childhood, Jewel met a young Jewish storekeeper, Saul Goldstein, of Americus, Georgia. Saul and Jewel later married, and Jewel moved to Americus as they established their new home and life together. Ezella relocated with the Goldsteins and Jewel taught Ezella how to keep a home.

Although Ezella was quite skilled in sewing, her greatest gift was cooking. She was well known as a great cook throughout Sumter County, Georgia, for which Americus was the county seat at that time. Ezella was always in demand and was called on to cater many special occasions. She was an exceptional baker and excelled in baking and decorating wedding cakes. Tea cakes and fancy wedding and holiday cookies were her favorites to bake. Ezella created a family tradition with her wedding cookies.

Unable to read and write, Ezella did not use recipes; she later

taught her own daughters to cook by sight, smell, and taste. She decided that only the oldest girl of each generation should be taught to make the famous wedding and holiday cookies. Because there was no recipe, the methodology required strictly knowing the correct consistency for the dough and taste. Many hours ensured that her oldest daughter, Ida Mae, perfected the cookies and retained the commitment to teach the next generation's oldest daughter: her daughter, Willie Mae. Willie Mae passed on the recipe to me, her eldest daughter.

When Ezella was of marrying age, she was courted by the widowed father of one of her best friends, a man named Ruben Hollomon. Ruben had four children with his first wife. They all coexisted well. Ruben and Ezella went on to have twelve more children; seven of the children reached adulthood. Ruben was a natural businessman, who worked hard, saved his money, acquired hundreds of acres of land, beginning as a sharecropper and later becoming a landowner. Ruben died leaving Ezella well provided for as a young, widowed mother with seven children. Once the children reached adulthood, the family moved to Macon, Georgia. This story now has come full circle when Ezella's great-granddaughter came to live in Charleston.

Because Ezella never knew her mother, she poured all her love and affection into her children. She was a nurturing, doting mother

who worked and taught her five daughters her gift of cooking and baking. She was also an exceptional seamstress, another skill she passed on to her daughters. After growing up in a Jewish household, there were many dietary customs that Ezella devoutly observed. She did not keep a strictly kosher kitchen, but she did not serve pork or shellfish in her home. She always referred to her cooking as "kosher." While she was in the Goldstein household, she cooked many southern specialties, attributed to West Africa, but without the typical pork used to season. These dishes included black-eyed peas, all types of greens, collards, mustards, turnips, green beans and cabbage, and other vegetables. It was an honor to enjoy her meals. Everyone marveled at Ezella's ability to make such delectable well-seasoned dishes without pork. Her recipe for healthy collard greens has been passed down.



Ezella Cliett with her first two great-grandchildren, Kim Ydette Cliett and Kerry DeJuan Butts. Courtesy of Kim Cliett Long.



## Jewish Life and Cake

by Arnold Wengrow, from *Kugels & Collards, USC Press*

When I was going to Schneider Elementary School in Columbia in the early 1950s, my mother, Sura Wolff Wengrow, instructed me how to identify her when I was asked my parents' occupations. My father, Sam Wengrow, was a dry goods merchant. He owned Wengrow's Department Store in Allendale, where my mother, born in 1908, had grown up. She was to be called a homemaker, never a housewife. "I'm not married to the house," she said.



*Sura Wolff Wengrow and some of her elaborately decorated cakes, this page and next. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

Daughters of Israel, and she ran the shul's gift shop from the time it consisted of a single tall glass cabinet in the downstairs social hall on Marion Street to the spacious built-to-her-specifications emporium in the education wing at Beth Shalom Synagogue on Trenholm Road.

My mother was an efficient, if not an ardent, cook. She kept a thick loose-leaf notebook stuffed with handwritten recipes gleaned from many sources. In it are year-by-year lists she called her Passover order—how many boxes of matzo were used and what kosher meats

Indeed, she was never a stay-at-home mom. My mother always was on the go as a volunteer. We moved to Columbia from Allendale in 1950 so my brother could prepare for his bar mitzvah. But just as

importantly, my mother wanted to plunge deeply into the life of the Beth Shalom Congregation, then known as the House of Peace Synagogue. With only four Jewish families in Allendale, my mother had missed being part of a Jewish community for twenty years, and she was determined to make up for lost time. She was president at least twice of the women's auxiliary known as the

were to be shipped by Greyhound Bus from Charlotte and picked up at the depot on Blanding Street.

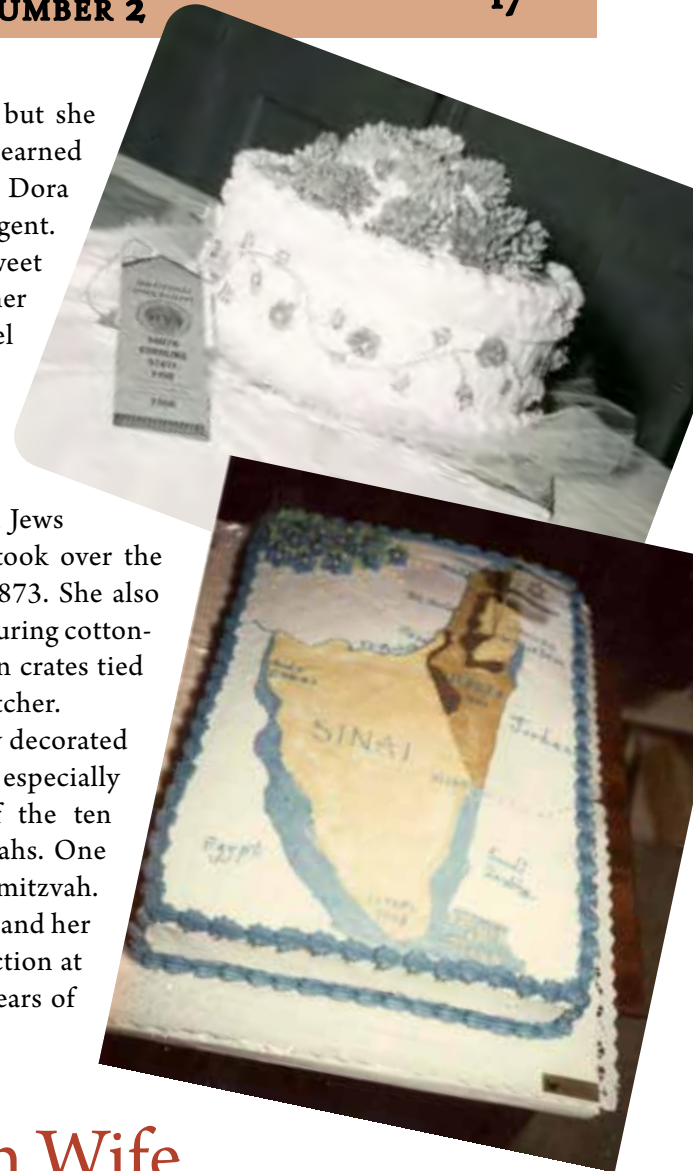
My mother's rule about cooking was that she only prepared one meal a day. That was what she called dinner, a hot meal served in the middle of the day—whether there was anyone at home to eat it or not. In Allendale, my father always came home at noon for this family meal, and there was a strict rotation of what was served each day. Thursday was meatloaf day, and Friday was salmon croquettes, mixed from Double "Q" canned salmon and matzo meal, formed into beautiful little pyramids, coated with matzo meal, and fried until brown and crispy.

When we moved to Columbia, she made dinner every morning, although my father was there only on Thursdays and Sundays. She left a plate for me warming under a big white soup bowl over a simmering pot of water to eat on my own when I came home from school. She was probably off to the shul gift shop. My sister, fourteen years older, was already married in Camden, and my brother, seven years older, was off doing whatever it is big brothers do at Dreher High School. My mother didn't like getting up early in the morning. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I realized that instead of worrying her that I was going to be late for school, I could make breakfast for myself. For supper, there were always plenty of leftovers in the refrigerator for sandwiches. My mother's greatest kitchen legacy was letting me learn to cook for myself, something I enjoy to this day.

Everyday cooking wasn't enough of a challenge for my mother, but she loved the precision and creativity of baking and home canning. She learned to grow tomatoes in Allendale in a girls' Tomato Club organized by Dora D. "Mother" Walker, the state's first county home demonstration agent. Sometime in the 1940s, my mother came across a recipe for a sweet tomato jam spiced with cinnamon and cloves, and it became one of her specialties. She made mandelbread from a recipe given to her by Ethel Young, the wife of Joe Young, another Allendale Jewish merchant. And she was especially fond of a dense and fragrant blueberry cake with a thick streusel topping from a recipe used by her mother, Rachel Pearlstine Wolff.

Mrs. Wolff 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 salesmen who needed to stay during cotton- and watermelon-buying seasons. 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.

My mother's crowning culinary achievements were her elaborately decorated cakes. They were part of many birthdays and weddings, but she especially enjoyed designing Jewish-themed cakes—Torah scrolls, tablets of the ten commandments, open prayer books—for bris and bar and bat mitzvahs. One mother froze a portion of her son's bris cake and served it at his bar mitzvah. My mother became a go-to baker-decorator for the Jewish community, and her photograph album of her creations, now in the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston, is a history in cake of some fifteen or so years of Columbia Jewish life.



## A Good Jewish Wife

by Terri Wolff Kaufman, from *the Kugels & Collards blog*

When my mother, Elsie Wolff (o.b.m.), married in 1952, she worked hard at being a good Jewish wife. We four kids didn't understand how diligently she worked until we found the evidence after her passing. Tucked away in our family home were a Hebrew workbook, circa 1950, a how-to-win at bridge book, and some old cookbooks, all with intense study notes in Mom's handwriting. As I examined them, I thought about what they might mean viewed through my mother's whole life.

Elsie Benenson visited her sister and brother-in-law in Columbia, South Carolina, in August 1952. Jeannie and Bob Rosichan fixed her up on a blind date with an architect "with good prospects" from their Tree of Life temple congregation. The two hit it off, and Louis Wolff and Elsie married that December. After honeymooning in Havana, they settled into an apartment downtown in Cornell Arms. As a newlywed,

Elsie formed a community of social touchpoints and closest friends through the Tree of Life and the women in Sisterhood.

I imagine moving to Columbia was quite a sea change for my mom. She had lived and worked in New York City for seven years and loved big-city fashion, food, and culture. According to her, she and her roommates worked all day and went out most nights dining, dancing, and/or dating. I don't imagine cooking was a big thing (or eating, as evidenced by her figure in those days). Before New York, she graduated from LSU with a business degree. And before that, she grew up in small-town Alabama – the youngest of six children in the only Jewish family in town, with an immigrant father and first-generation American mother. While she strongly identified as Jewish (she spent time with her mother's extended family in Augusta, Georgia, and belonged to a Jewish sorority in college), there must have been gaps in her formal Jewish education.



Mom became very active in Sisterhood and remained so for most of her life. In the 1960s and 1970s, I vividly remember her involvement with the annual Holland bulb sales and other fund-raising activities for the temple. At the Heyward Street building, Sisterhood provided flowers for the bima at Friday night services and members took turns baking for every *oneg Shabbat*. Sisterhood also planned and executed holiday events there, such as Yom Kippur break-the-fast and, as I recall, contributed to the annual religious school Purim carnival. (Some of you will relate to this: each of Mom's platters had a strip of masking tape on the bottom with "Wolff" written on it, so she could claim them after an event was over. There must have been a lot of food brought to those activities!)

The women of Sisterhood were also Mom's friends. She went to lunch with them, played bridge and/or tennis with them. They and their husbands hosted cocktail or dinner parties and, in turn, attended my parents' parties. One or more ladies were at our home every week, it seemed: Tobae, Midge, Marian, Evelyn, Evie, Sylvia, Roz, and many others over the years, both in the apartment and after we moved to our permanent home on Westshore Road in 1963.

Dad loved to eat, and Mom loved to cook; it was a creative outlet for her (which I inherited—in later years after I had my own family, she often called me her balabusta). Mom was a "super-taster"—she followed a recipe to a certain point and

then added touches to her taste, which in my opinion made the food delicious. Her cooking was southern, bent toward sweet. Other than the occasional Swanson pot pies my siblings and I got when Mom and Dad went out, all of our meals were homemade.

While every night's dinner was something to look forward to, Mom outdid herself for parties, family birthdays, and holiday meals. The latter usually included a random Jewish student from USC or soldier from Fort Jackson at the table—Mom couldn't stand the idea of anyone being alone

on Thanksgiving or Passover. Over the years, Mom contributed recipes to local cookbooks such as *The Stuffed Bagel* (Hadassah) and *Columbia Cooks with Fun and Flavor*, published by Heathwood Hall Episcopal School.

Mom loved to bake for other people. She made divinity candy (her favorite) and spiced pecans for bridge club, baked jelly cookies for friends' children and grandchildren at Christmas and Hanukkah, and brought pound cakes to every event from *oneg Shabbats* to funeral repasts. There was always a pound cake in the freezer for a quick turn-around in case someone Jewish died.

Looking back, I don't know if the areas of expectation that constituted a "good Jewish wife" of my parents' generation were Dad-driven or Mom's decision—they were both smart, hard-working, and very exacting of themselves and others. But I can tell you that my mother succeeded.



*Above: Elsie Benenson Wolff and Louis Wolff at their wedding reception, 1952.*

*Below: Elsie's portrait and a pound cake made following her recipe, posted on the Kugels & Collards blog.*



## Legacy

*by Laurie Goldman Smithwick, from Kugels & Collards, USC Press*

I would love to say that I grew up cooking at my grandmother's knee. That I spent endless hours of my childhood in a steamy, bubbly kitchen dusted with powdery-flecked-shafts-of-light, perched on a stool watching her every move, waiting for those moments when an oversized spoon was touched to my lips for me to learn taste. Well, no. Not quite. I do love to cook, but that story is not my story. All my grandparents died before I was twelve years old. In their place, I had Mattie.

Mattie Culp was born in 1918 in Chester, South Carolina. She had a daughter, three granddaughters, and six great-grandchildren. And she was known to the entire congregation of her African Methodist Episcopal Zion church as "Mother Culp."

Mattie Culp was also the Black woman who worked for my grandparents in Rock Hill, South Carolina. She lived in their house, cleaned, cooked, took care of my mother as a child. She also looked after my cousins, my brother, and me, flawlessly filling for us the role of beloved grandmother.

Mattie taught me the kind of cooking that doesn't have a recipe—although, she didn't actually teach me. Mostly, she cooked while I watched and asked questions like, "How much flour did you just add to those pan drippings to make gravy?" And her answers sounded like this: "What do you mean how much flour? You look at how much drippings you have and you add enough flour. If it tastes right, you added enough." She wasn't being mean or rigid, just sensible, as if to say, "Don't worry about measurements — just cook." Like I needed to concentrate and just do it right.

So, I watched, and ate, and watched, and ate. The best fried chicken I have ever put in my mouth. The flakiest, fluffiest biscuits. Sweet potatoes that tasted more like pudding. The most comforting chicken pot pies. And sometime after college I started trying some of her recipes on my own. This usually

involved a long phone conversation with Mattie where I took extensive notes that didn't make sense as I wrote them: "Then you add your baking powder. Taste it. If it don't taste right, add some more." Some recipes required two phone calls.

I bumbled through and kept trying to serve people dishes that I called "Mattie's (insert food here)." Now, after years of practice, I can make consistently good buttermilk biscuits having never had a recipe in front of me. I can make fried chicken that mostly comes out right. Sometimes I have good gravy to add to the meal, sometimes not.

In doing this, I have come to understand a life lesson

that applies to more than just cooking: if it doesn't taste right before it's cooked, it certainly won't taste right after it's cooked. For me, "right" means that mysterious blend of inexact amounts of salt and spices and secret ingredients that makes it taste exactly like Mattie's.

When Mattie became too ill to cook, it took seven of us to replicate her Thanksgiving meal. Seven people. To put

together a dinner usually prepared by one person. Of course, she was there, coaching us every step of the way. But it felt good to cook for Mattie, and it tasted pretty much just like hers. And we were all very proud of ourselves.

Since 2007, we've had to celebrate Thanksgiving without Mattie. Everyone has a job. I make Mattie's cornbread dressing and Mattie's turkey gravy; my mom makes Mattie's sweet potatoes; my brother makes Mattie's turkey. Everything is delicious, everyone is happy, and I'm grateful to have had so many years with Mattie humming her way around my grandmother's and my aunt's and my mom's kitchens.

But I also feel sad. Sad that Mattie's cooking is no longer an activity but a subject. That her gospel purring is no longer something to listen to but to talk about. That her place at our table is no longer a presence but a legacy.



*Laurie Goldman Smithwick and Mattie Culp, Charlotte, NC, 2001. Courtesy of Laurie Smithwick.*



Rosenblum family seder, Anderson, SC, 1941  
Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries



## Around the Table

*"For the Brody family of South Carolina and North Carolina, a family grounded in retailing, Thanksgiving is a special holiday. It provides a chance for extended families separated by distance to reconnect to their youth and for the younger cousins to learn from their uncles and aunts."*

—Harold J. Brody and Sheila Brody Cooke in *"The Art of Southern Jewish Entertaining,"* Kugels & Collards, USC Press, 2023

by Alyssa Neely

*"The most palpable memories revolve around food (what else?)—a mix of traditional South Carolina fare like fried chicken, rice and gravy, okra and tomatoes, and dishes passed down from Eastern Europe."*

—Ernie Marcus and Ellen Marcus Smith in *"Eutawville Food Memories,"* Kugels & Collards, USC Press, 2023

*"My parents started a family tradition that all of us were to have the Shabbos meal together on Fridays. Mamma cooked a big meal with dessert, and of course we'd have the Shabbos blessings. When we got married and had our own children, we all still came to our parents' house for Shabbos dinner."*

—Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum in *"Mamma Learnerd to Cook,"* Kugels & Collards, USC Press, 2023

The Brody cousins, Sumter, SC, 1960s



Courtesy of Harold J. Brody

Wedding reception, Louise Levi and Harry Marcus, Eutawville, SC, 1949



Courtesy of Ernie Marcus

Rabbi David Karesh and Fort Jackson soldiers, Columbia, SC



Courtesy of Beth Shalom Synagogue, Columbia, SC

Shabbos dinner, Freddie Weinberg and Milton Kronsberg family, Charleston, SC, 1950s



Courtesy of Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum

Ida Levy and Isidore Gergel family seder, Columbia, SC, ca. 1930



Courtesy of Beverly Gergel Barnett

Seder for the children of Beth Or, Kingstree, SC, 1952



Photo by Jerome Moskow

Seder at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC, 1945



Special Collections  
College of Charleston Libraries



## The Next Chapter

by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

“There is nothing permanent except change.” –Heraclitus

This is a column about change and how for almost 30 years, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina’s existence was consistent year in and year out. Our longtime executive director, Marty Perlmutter, was at the helm, steering the Society. Dale Rosengarten was building the Jewish Heritage Collection at Addlestone Library, and David Cohen was the treasurer of the organization, working with Marty. The Society’s stalwart members and Pillars enabled the mission of the Society through their financial support and entrusted their family’s history to the Jewish Heritage Collection through donations of family papers, photographs, oral histories, and memorabilia. Foundations supported the Society by funding our key projects, among them the Jewish Merchant Project, cemetery records, Documenting South Carolina’s Synagogues, and other endeavors that have enabled the Society to become what it is today.

The rhythm of the Society was disrupted a few years ago with the retirement of Marty Perlmutter and the appointment of Mark Swick as executive director. Changes continued with Mark Swick’s departure and me taking the position of executive director, followed that same year with the pandemic and monthly Zoom programs. In January 2023, Marty’s passing left an enormous hole in all of our lives. Dale Rosengarten’s retirement in February 2023 and changes in our administration as Enid Idelsohn limits her work with the Society continues the

trend. We have lost past presidents and dear members. Each of the changes has been seismic and painful.

But the thing about change is how an organization handles it and the Society has proven to be resilient. Thirty years is a long run, and we are fortunate that the foundation laid in 1994 is solid, so much so that in 2023, even with many changes, we are thriving as an organization.

Now, the next chapter of the JHSSC is about to begin. Max Daniel will be joining Addlestone Library as coordinator of the Jewish Heritage Collection and Alyssa Neely will take on more responsibility as the JHSSC administrator and editor of the magazine. Our membership is strong, but we know we must engage younger members. This is of utmost importance as we move forward into our next decades. Thankfully, our Pillars and Foundations continue to believe in our mission to “study, preserve, and promote awareness of the history and culture of South Carolina’s Jewish community.”

“What’s dangerous is not to evolve.” –Jeff Bezos

The Society must evolve, and to do that we must attract new members and encourage all who join to become involved. We need an active Board of Directors and I encourage anyone with interest or suggestions to contact me at [rgbarnettsc@gmail.com](mailto:rgbarnettsc@gmail.com).

### Meeting registration, Columbia, October 7–8, 2023

#### Fee (per person):

Saturday & Sunday \$125

Saturday only \$75

Sunday only \$50

Online at [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](https://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)  
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Or by check, payable to:  
JHSSC, c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program  
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A block of rooms is reserved until September 6, 2023, at the special rate of \$199 avg./night at the Graduate, 1619 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC. Call 803-779-7779 or go to their [website](https://www.graduate.com).

#### Questions:

Enid Idelsohn, [idelsohne@cofc.edu](mailto:idelsohne@cofc.edu)  
Phone: 843.953.3918; Fax: 843.953.7624

or

Visit [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](https://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)

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