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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

MarkKBauman@aol.com

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bstone@delmar.edu

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PRIMARY SOURCES

A Manhattan Jew in a Small Alabama Town:
Journals and Selected Correspondence
of Seymour Gitenstein

by

R. Barbara Gitenstein*

Journals:

Seymour Gitenstein, “First Chapter” (undated)

**Seymour Gitenstein, “Early Thoughts About
My Life in Florala” (undated)**

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
“The Franklin Ferguson Company 1932–1970” (c. 1970)**

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
“The Florala Memorial Hospital” (1970)**

Correspondence:

Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942

Milton Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, August 17, 1960

Rose Barbara Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, April 7, 1967¹

My father, Seymour Gitenstein, was a direct descendant of eastern European Jews who were part of the influx to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His identity and sense of self-agency were founded in embracing risk, which characterized those immigrants. In many ways this placed him squarely in the psychological history described so vividly in works such as Edward Cohen’s *The Peddler’s Grandson* and Stella Suberman’s *The Jew Store*.² But Seymour’s solitary move to Florala, Alabama, in the 1930s had significant

* The author may be contacted at rbgit@tcnj.edu.

differences from these histories. Like Cohen's and Suberman's ancestors, Seymour Gitenstein braved the isolation and loneliness of a move to a completely foreign part of the United States. It took special courage and powerful optimism to move from a home in a part of the country he knew well to a place with a drastically different dialect and totally different customs. Seymour's transition to Alabama from Manhattan at the age of seventeen echoed much of what the previous generations had experienced, both those who immigrated from eastern Europe to the United States and those who migrated from the Northeast to the South.³ Like many other Jews who preceded him in moving to the southern United States, Seymour sought to establish himself as a community leader. Unlike others such as Eli Evans's father, Emanuel "Mutt" Evans, as depicted in *The Provincials*, Seymour did not find his place in political but rather in community leadership.⁴ He did not establish himself as a voice for the Confederacy like Louis Rubin's uncles as described in *My Father's People*.⁵ In fact, Seymour Gitenstein developed a somewhat conflicted relationship with the myth of the Lost Cause. It would be inaccurate to describe him as a liberal proponent of civil rights for the Black community in South Alabama, but he also was no Confederate apologist.

Much of Seymour's beliefs can be understood by a close reading of four journal documents. Two of these focus on the history of his first years in Florala, Alabama—one on the history of the shirt factory he managed with his father and brother, the other on the building of the local hospital. While it is likely that my mother, Anna Green Gitenstein, actually wrote the latter two documents (her initials appear at the bottom of both), the substance and details of all four would have been provided by Seymour, and the authorship of the first two (more disjointed memories than formal journals) is clearly Seymour. Often awkward, sometimes inaccurate, always revealing, these narratives give great insight into Seymour Gitenstein and his version of survival and Jewishness in a small town in Alabama.

The documents about Seymour's early years in Florala reveal an insecurity, based in large part on his sense of being less valued by his family than either of his older siblings but also on the emotional barriers he created as a consequence of the emotional shock of his lonely move from New York City to Florala by himself at the age of seventeen. The histories of the

factory and the hospital are clearly written and straightforward descriptions of historical events and individuals who were important in the two enterprises. The emphasis on names in these histories characterizes how Seymour viewed any enterprise: people mattered more than things, and close interpersonal relationships fueled the success of any project. Although the tone of the histories illustrates a self-serving quality, the historical facts that underpinned the successes of Franklin Ferguson and the Florala Memorial Hospital are powerful. All four documents were likely intended for a larger audience and perhaps designed to serve, as they are today, as primary documents to help explain Seymour Gitenstein's life in the South. Although the four primary documents that are the focus of this essay do not detail Seymour's interpretation of Jewish values, these can be extrapolated, not just by his actions (for instance supporting education and health care for the community) but also by his consistent desire to make a difference.

In order to understand the import of these documents, I have provided a great deal of historical context in my analysis and augmented that analysis by reference to three revealing personal letters: one from Seymour to Anna a month before they married in 1943 describing the challenges of living in Florala; one to Seymour from his brother, Milton, regarding the possibility of Seymour's moving his family away from Florala; and one to him from his daughter, Rose Barbara Gitenstein, explaining the difficulties for the family growing up in Florala after Seymour made clear his preference for remaining in the small town.

Beginnings in Manhattan and Early Years in Florala

Seymour was a son of New York City, but he lived for over seventy-eight years in Florala, Alabama, a small town abutting the Florida panhandle. As "First Chapter" indicates, my father's grandmother, Celia (Sadie) Rosner Goran Bralower, was married twice. Her first husband, Harry Goran, died in a forestry accident in Traverse City, Michigan. Celia seems to have had three children with Harry Goran: Jenny, William, and Harry. It seems that Jenny and William were born in Romania, but only Jenny accompanied Celia to the United States. William may not have been reunited with Celia for almost a decade after her immigration. After Goran's death, in about 1885, Celia married Louis Bralower, who apparently adopted Jenny and Harry. Celia and Louis had three children who lived

to adulthood: Esther Rose Bralower (Seymour's mother), Charles Bralower, and Herman Bralower. Their first child died as an infant, and likely another daughter, Sallie, also died as a child. Seymour's father, Israel Gitenstein, emigrated from Moldova to the United States in 1891 as a twelve-year-old. In 1906, Israel married sixteen-year-old Rose Bralower.⁶

Seymour's memories of his mother and grandmother were somewhat conflicted. He admitted that they showed preference for his other siblings, particularly his older sister. As he writes in "First Chapter" (rendered as in the original with all errors intact), his older sister "was reay, very good natured and on the surface I guess the mostg talented at least letS say she had the mostg nerve and reallyg had also the mostg attention of my father and mother ans I guess the rest of the family including Grand ma who had come to live with us."⁷ Seymour's memories of Celia were complex: "Grandma of Roumanian Russian Jewish stock very strong minded and vy very self willed I guess, altho I didnt realize that until mwyny years later."⁸ He admired his grandmother's courage and her commitment to hard work. Seymour described her move back to New York after the death of her first husband as brave and remarked how she supported herself and her two children as a laundress.⁹

His memories of Rose were almost worshipful: "Now her name was really Esther Rose but Aunt Jennie mothers older sister said she discarded the Esther when she mwas in her teens Mother was very ambitious and when she was firstly matchedup with my fathdrs brother she threatened suicide if Grandma pushed this marriag she was all of 16!!!!"¹⁰

Like many other eastern European Jewish immigrants to the United States, Israel Gitenstein went into the textile industry. This history is well documented in the lives of the Phillips-VanHeusen family and in the novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* by Abraham Cahan, the editor of the *Forverts*. Even before the Great Depression destroyed the economy and resulted in millions of bankruptcies, my grandfather went bankrupt in 1926. To improve his business chances, he sought to reestablish the business by moving south—a region closer to the materials and employee base necessary for making shirts and men's underwear.¹¹ The South boasted abundant cotton and cheaper labor than the North. The family tried a number of different locales. Some family members even remember that the factory first moved from New York to Paterson, New Jersey, and only later to Jacksonville then DeFuniak Springs, Florida, and

Israel Gitenstein and Rose Bralower, c. 1900
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

finally Florala, Alabama, a town of about two thousand. The latter enterprise included a small ancillary factory that operated for a short time in Crestview, Florida.¹² A passage in "The Franklin Ferguson Company, 1932-1970" explains: "The Franklin Ferguson Company was founded in 1932 by Israel Gitenstein, father of the present partners, Milton and Seymour Gitenstein. Mr. Gitenstein [Israel] moved to Florala from Geneva, Alabama in 1932."¹³ Whatever the details of the various moves, they were driven by the business considerations of improving margins. Israel never intended to leave New York City or relocate his family to the South. Only after his younger son, Seymour, precipitously left New York at the age of seventeen did Israel spend more than a couple of days in any of the various factory locales in the South.

The Gitensteins' actions in many ways mirrored the impulse of many other Jews of eastern European descent. As Terry Barr writes, "[A]s many historians have noted, Jewish immigrants, particularly from eastern Europe, were adept at filling the needs of a new town."¹⁴ But Seymour's move to Florala was not typical. Rather than older son Milton's taking leadership, Seymour, the second son, did so. Rather than establishing

some commuting or temporary living situation in small-town Alabama, Seymour moved alone with little or no preparation in management, creation of a support system in the new community, or any implication that this move was either temporary or up for modification or sharing in the future.

Two years prior to the move, while working for his father at the age of fifteen, Seymour's heart was elsewhere. As he relates in "First Chapter," both he and his brother, Milton, knew that "it was expected of us to go into our family business and altho it hadnt really been that all good as I remember back when I was 12 and 14 years old we did make a living and we never lacked for anything."¹⁵ Seymour, a very good student, was admitted into Townsend Harris, a competitive liberal arts high school for boys in New York City. He remembered his years at Townsend Harris with great pride, noting that many of his friends – also children of Jewish immigrants – became well known in their fields. For instance, Seymour remembered Jonas Salk as a talented student but neither kind nor friendly. Education was the path to a life of economic prosperity embraced by Jewish families, like so many other immigrants to the United States. Seymour's memories of the caliber of the education might seem fanciful reminiscences of a sixty-year-old, but in fact he did not exaggerate the quality of education at Townsend Harris. In 1975, when I was completing my doctorate in English and American literature, my father called to ask me if I had read the obituary of his high school English teacher in the *New York Times*. When I seemed puzzled, he named Lionel Trilling.¹⁶

During his early teenage years, Seymour largely invested his psychic energy in classical music, particularly his budding talent as a pianist. His parents engaged several instructors to encourage his development. In his later years, Seymour remembered attending enthralling concerts with his mother at Carnegie Hall, hearing the great Moriz Rosenthal and meeting Sergei Rachmaninoff. This was Seymour's life before he moved to Florala, Alabama – Lionel Trilling as his high school English teacher and sitting behind Rachmaninoff while they both listened to Moriz Rosenthal perform.

Photographs of a young Seymour of that era match this life: he was quite handsome, with a full head of wavy black hair, piercing dark brown, almost black, eyes, and an aesthetic demeanor. The physical transformation to the craggy nonagenarian with bushy eyebrows and unkempt

wild hair, still curly but gray and thin, is a testament not just to the years but to an attempt to remake himself—to hide his essential gentleness. Throughout his life, Seymour retained two foundational commitments: a somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of Jewish values and a dedication to Floralá, a community where, although foreign to his Manhattan Jewish upbringing, he felt sheltered and that allowed him to develop without the pressures of an overbearing father and two older siblings who always seemed to outshine him. Living in Floralá allowed him to become a powerful enough presence in the small community to control the narrative of his life. As he references in “Early Thoughts About My Life in Floralá,” the social allowances provided to members of the leading families of a small community intrigued him.

In New York, the Gitenstein family belonged to Anshe Chesed, a Conservative synagogue, but their adherence to ritual was closer to their Reform-affiliated friends. Seymour and Milton became *b'nai mitzvah*, and the family kept kosher, although they were viewed as less religiously observant than other members of the Gitenstein family. Part of the laxity can be explained by Rose Gitenstein's influence. A determined and principled woman, Rose would not allow the gender roles defined by Orthodox or Conservative Judaism to limit her sense of purpose or action. She became very well known for her involvement in supporting Jewish orphans of World War II. In fact, one year after her death, a notice in the *New York Times* indicated that the Federation for European Relief raised thirty-five thousand dollars in her memory to support the Rose Gitenstein Home in Bellevue, France, which housed a hundred orphan children from Warsaw.¹⁷ Like Seymour, Rose viewed her commitments to social reform and social justice as the main vehicles for expressing her Jewish identity. Seymour gave Rose most of the credit in assuring that the family always lived in comfortable quarters in the city: “Mother made sure we lived in a very comfortable apartment either back in Harlem as a very young man and then later during my teen age on the upper west side of Manhattan on Riverside Drive and also on West End Avenue which was just beginning to go down.”¹⁸

In 1942, Seymour had been living alone in Floralá for almost ten years when his sister and my mother's close friend from Hunter College, my Aunt Rhoda, reintroduced him to Anna Green. Thus began a tortured relationship that likely never satisfied either of them but that tied them to

one another in love and need for the rest of their lives. In early love letters to Anna, Seymour asserted that they could live in Florala or elsewhere, although the latter may not have been a sincere offer. A letter from Seymour's brother, Milton, on August 17, 1960, indicates how deeply this conflict about living in the small town permeated the life of the Florala Gitensteins. The letter was clearly precipitated by some strong reaction to an episode, likely initiated by Anna, about her unhappiness in living in Florala. Milton wrote:

It is not worth your getting upset and Anne upset and the kids involved to have to live in Florala.

As a matter of fact, if you want you can move to Montgomery right away by renting a furnished house. There is nothing that is impossible as long as the kids feel well and you have no health problems. The other matters can all be solved.

If you live in Montgomery, actually the commuting twice a week or 3 times a week is comparable to living in New York, where I spend almost 3 hours a day commuting. I know you are giving this consideration with Anne.

Then of course there is the possibility of your coming back to New York. Very few factories are run by families. Most of them are run by hired help so it is not as though we are doing something out of the ordinary.

This offer, twenty-eight years after Seymour moved to Florala, likely reflected Milton's genuine concern about his brother and his brother's family's emotional health, but the New York Gitensteins made no actions to facilitate such a move.

"First Chapter," begins with the words, "I guess I didn't really have to make that first trip down here [to Florala]—at least many years later mother and dad made that clear to me—But really as I look back at it I had to come." That expression, "I had to come," begs for analysis. The real reason Seymour moved to Florala and whether Rose supported the move are issues open to disagreement, but the lifelong commitment to remain in Florala and not live in New York is explainable by a powerful emotional rationale, some of which was the desire to separate himself from the family narrative of the second son. But there was also a suspicion throughout Seymour's life that one of the precipitating forces behind his move alone

to Florala at such a young age was to flee the fallout of a sexual encounter with one of his beloved piano instructors.

By the end of Seymour's life, his friends and family recognized his sexual orientation as the secret that both energized and threatened his success, although they never openly discussed it. During his life he struggled emotionally with identity issues that led him to seek psychological counseling, but he never shared the source of these issues with the family. Anna was likely aware of more of the details of Seymour's situation, but she shared none of this with her family and surely not with her children. However, when Seymour was in his 90s and a resident at the Florala Rehabilitation Center, he admitted to me that he was a homosexual and then almost immediately denied that he had said what he had just said—only to repeat the same conversation the next day. By this time, my sister, brother, and I were in our late 50s and 60s, and we greeted the information with the relief of finally understanding so much behind this complex, conflicted, generous, self-serving, frightened man whom we loved deeply.

In 1932 Seymour took that first daunting trip south to oversee the factory Israel owned. He describes his trip to Florala and his earliest days there in "Early Thoughts about My Life in Florala." He boarded a train at New York's Penn Station, traveled to Jacksonville, and transferred to another train to DeFuniak Springs, Florida. There Seymour was met by a man whom he had seen only once before, who had traveled to New York to try to impress those Yankee Jews that he was good enough to be a supervisor for their new operation in Florala, Alabama. Seymour never mentioned the man's name, but the man picked Seymour up at the DeFuniak station and drove the twenty-three miles to Florala. Seymour wrote that when he was left at the hotel that was to be his home for a short period, the man told the seventeen-year-old New Yorker to eat whatever they served him, no matter what it was. Seymour wrote, "a little tiny rotund woman waited on him [the manager] hand and foot. She cooked, she cleaned and she did everything else. The food was awful." It is hard to appreciate the poignancy of this shy, sheltered aesthete, a son of Manhattan, looking out the windows of that train hurtling south to his new life or trying to eat the overcooked vegetables and food fried in bacon drippings that were placed before him. Although in his later years Seymour openly ate pork and other nonkosher food, this food on his first nights in Florala must have been shocking.

In this Geronimo Hotel (which later became the Colonial Hotel), as he remembered, more roach guests resided than humans, but life in the hotel was a good initiation into the life of his new community. Two or three days after his first night, the young New Yorker returned to the Geronimo to find someone had shot out all the windows, either because he was angry or because he was drunk or simply because he *could* shoot out any windows he wanted. The shooter was Mr. Britton, the son of the family who owned the Britton Lumber Company in nearby Lakewood, Florida. Mr. Britton, Sr., was also the president of the Bank of Florala and the Lake Jackson Hotel Company.¹⁹ No one even imagined that the police should be called on anything that a Britton might do. The powers that be just rejoiced that it was only windows rather than people that had been shot. Seymour was impressed that in this new culture, if you were one of the town fathers, you could do pretty much whatever you wanted. He learned over time, however, that the rules differed for a Yankee Jew no matter how many years that Jew was a resident, but as a town leader he still received leeway to be himself. This suspicion of the newcomer is an ironic parallel to what Seymour observed in his "First Chapter" when he wrote of his family living on West End Avenue in Manhattan: "There were a good many old timers there who resented the influx of the Jews whether

"because they were just Jews or because they never really had any contact with these mysterious people."²⁰ In Florala, Seymour Gitenstein remained an outsider.

He eventually moved out of the hotel and lived in a series of rooms and apartments. Seymour wrote, "I lived in a little apartment of an old house owned by Mrs. R. L. Miller who was a doctor's wife. She had a little upright piano. I practiced there."²¹ Later he rented a larger place from Mrs. Miller that could accommodate a Steinway piano, one of the early Steinway grands made in the United States. He worked in the factory all day, came back to his piano at night, and practiced, practiced, practiced. The nights provided solace for this immigrant from the concert halls of New York City as he acculturated to the rough life of small-town South Alabama in the 1930s. As he remembered, the early years of 1932 to 1937 were very difficult for the business. Israel, unlike his son, saw no value in investing in modern equipment, so he did not provide sufficient financing. A nearby textile factory, Alatec in Andalusia, Alabama, gave significant competition, and every night Seymour was alone in a small room with a large piano.

Creating a Jewish Community

In "Early Thoughts" Seymour Gitenstein described the very small Jewish community in Florala when he moved there:

There was two Jewish families in town, one was a very fat lady and her two daughters and her husband. They owned a little retail store. I can't say they weren't nice to me. They were. Then there was another family who had a son and daughter. This was the mother and father of Jenny Lurie Young who turned out to be one of my best friends and who really was a very nice person. The boy was Mr. Herman Lurie with whom I am still very friendly with. These people were nice to me although they were selfish to the extent that they were looking for payrolls and things like that in town. I think this is what they were interested in.²²

During his entire time in Alabama, Seymour's Jewish affiliation was in Montgomery, a hundred miles from Florala, where he belonged to Temple Beth Or, the Reform congregation, an interesting choice considering that his family in New York had belonged to a Conservative synagogue.

Beth Or was the successor to Kahl Montgomery, a German Jewish congregation dating to the 1840s.²³ In the early twentieth century, recently arrived eastern European Jews formed the Orthodox Agudath Israel, and then Sephardic Jews established Etz Ahayem in the city.²⁴ My brother was a bar mitzvah, and he, my sister, and I spent many years traveling to Montgomery for Sunday school at Beth Or. But for the most part the Gitenstein's interaction with the Montgomery Jewish community was limited to the High Holidays and to social occasions during the periodic shopping trips to Montgomery that Anna enjoyed. Part of the reason for this isolation was that we did not fit into the social class of the temple community. The joke in Beth Or circles, hearkening back to its German heritage, was that as a member, you were either a Weil, a Greil or you were a schlemiel. Clearly, the Gitensteins from Romania and Moldova were not German; we did not fit into the class of the significantly more established Weils and Greils. Nevertheless, Seymour chose this Reform congregation for affiliation.

Seymour's other Jewish contacts were limited to the small Jewish community of Covington County, in which Florala is situated: the Bermans and Rosens in Andalusia, the Finkelsteins in Opp, and the Luries in Florala. Two Jewish families resided in Andalusia, twenty-two miles from Florala: Sam and Rose Berman and their children, Hilda, Anne Louis (known as Toopie), and Doris; and Sol and Rebecca Rosen and their daughter, Hannah. Sam Berman was born in Andalusia and owned a department store, I. Berman and Son, with his father. After Sam sold the store, he became a very successful real estate agent. Sol and Rebecca Rosen, who moved to Andalusia in the 1940s or 1950s, had a women's clothing store that Rebecca's parents, Harris Simon and Elizabeth Kaufman Turner, who also lived in Andalusia, had established.

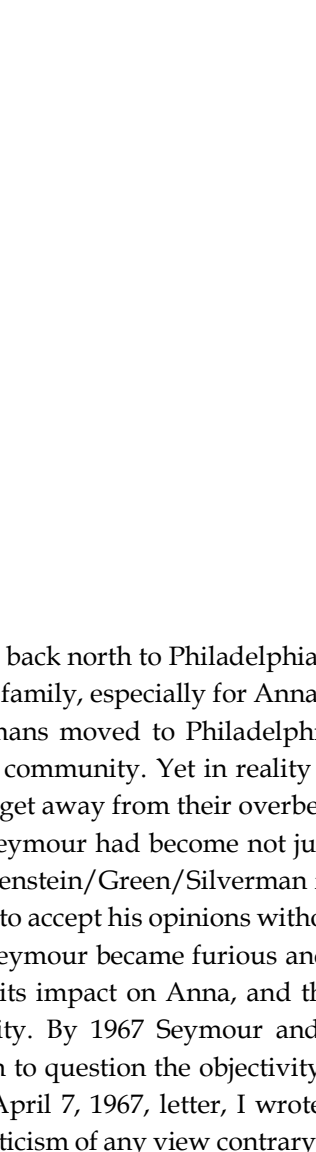
In Opp, twenty miles from Florala, Leo and Muriel Finkelstein resided with their four children: Nathan, Arnold, Rose Lynn, and Richard. Leo's brother-in-law, Myer Bukantz, established a dry goods store in Opp, which Leo took over after Myer died in a car accident. After her husband's death, Leo's oldest sister, Gisella Meller, moved to Opp to join her brother and sister, Hannah Bukantz, and niece, Nathalie Bukantz. In Florala, Mike and Esther Lurie, the parents of Jenny and Herman, owned a dry goods store, while Mike's brother Israel and Lakie Lurie, the parents of Bernice and Doris, owned a furniture and gift store. All of the Covington County

Jewish families welcomed the lonely young man from Manhattan, but the differences between their Alabama upbringings and his Manhattan past made the relationships somewhat tenuous. In later years, Anna developed a closer relationship with Muriel Finklestein, partially because, unlike the Bermans, Rosens, and Luries, Muriel was not from the Deep South, and my brother and I were close in age to the Finklestein children.²⁵

During his courting of Anna Green, Seymour Gitenstein made much of their radical contrast with the real (that is, Protestant) citizens of Florala.²⁶ That difference would become part of their bond to one another, a kind of special isolation from a world that had not been particularly kind to either of them. Such isolation was not comfortable, especially for Anna. She came to know Seymour through his sister, as both were students at Hunter College, graduating together in 1941. Anna majored in economics because that is what her father thought more practical than English. Neither the family nor Hunter College records can confirm Rhoda Gitenstein Sumberg's major. However, she became a greatly admired teacher in Westchester County, New York, of foreign languages including Latin, French, and Spanish. Initially Rhoda and Anna met by pure chance—in the classroom, students were seated alphabetically, thus Gitenstein sat next to Green—but they became close friends, eventually leading to Rhoda's introduction of Anna to her brothers, Milton and Seymour.

Anna and Seymour dated sporadically from 1939 to 1942, when Anna decided to get a job in Washington, D.C., and end her romantic ties with him. After a winter bout with pneumonia, she quit her job with the Federal Security Agency and visited her Hunter friend to recuperate. At the time Rhoda Gitenstein lived in Niceville, Florida, as her husband was a captain in the Quartermaster Corps stationed at Eglin Air Force Base, some thirty-five miles from Niceville. Rhoda invited her brother to visit his former girlfriend, and on January 16, 1943, Anna and Seymour married in Montgomery, Alabama.

Like many Jews who moved south from the Northeast, Seymour tried to create a Jewish family enclave in the isolated town, a pattern recognizable in the other Jewish families of Covington County. Seymour convinced Anna's parents to move to Florala in 1944, followed by her sister and her young family in 1955. In 1961, the first blow to Seymour's attempt to create a protective enclave for his wife occurred when Anna's father died. Then in 1967, Anna's sister Florence and her husband, Mel,



*Seymour and Anna Gitenstein,
c. 1942. (Courtesy of R. Barbara
Gitenstein.)*

moved back north to Philadelphia. This break in the group was traumatic for the family, especially for Anna. The publicly shared story was that the Silvermans moved to Philadelphia for more opportunities and a larger Jewish community. Yet in reality the Silvermans moved away from Florala to get away from their overbearing in-law, Seymour.

Seymour had become not just a city father, but the paterfamilias of the Gitenstein/Green/Silverman family. He expected all members of the family to accept his opinions without question. Mel chafed at this relationship. Seymour became furious and resentful of the Silverman decision to move, its impact on Anna, and the fact that anyone would question his authority. By 1967 Seymour and Anna's two elder children were old enough to question the objectivity of their father in this emotional event. In an April 7, 1967, letter, I wrote to respond to my father's resentment and criticism of any view contrary to his own about the Silvermans' move. The letter revealed a growing awareness that Seymour's view of life in Florala was self-serving. I acknowledged that our financial comfort was

largely based on his decision to remain in Florala and run the successful factory operation.

The fact remains [however] that the path you took and the path you set for Mom and us was not easy. You might have accomplished the same monetary success in some metropolitan community; but due to, at first, your family's need and then your own choice you stayed in Florala, choosing the really more difficult method. Because you chose this, we (Mom, Mark, Susie and I) in [effect] had our situation chosen for us. We were all put in a very difficult situation. This is a fact.²⁷

Although Seymour was not willing to acknowledge that living in Florala might have met his needs, it provided significant obstacles for the rest of the family.

Anna insulated her natural insecurity by fully embracing the cultural norms of middle-class nonimmigrant America. A beautiful woman, she dressed the part of a southern wife of a captain of industry and shunned any action or image of her family's immigrant past. (I remember her horror at my grandmother's predilection for carrying items in paper shopping bags.) Seymour, on the other hand, felt a strong tie to his Jewish

*Left to right: Mark, Anna, Rose Barbara, Seymour, and
(in front) Susan Gitenstein, c. 1959.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)*

identity, although this identity had more to do with social justice issues than religious dogma or practice. Our only nod to kashruth was that pork was not cooked in our home. We ate pork at restaurants and at friends' houses but did not make it at home. Like many other Classical Reform Jews, we changed our day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. After we abandoned the long Sunday round-trip drive to Beth Or for Sunday school, Seymour began a tradition of Sunday services for our immediate family and other Jews in Covington County. For Seymour, Jewishness was intimately tied to the music of the services that we held in our living room on Sunday mornings and not to ritual. The four documents that are the focus of this essay do not detail these services. However, understanding the characteristics of these services provide nuance to Seymour's life in Alabama.

Just as he led the family in other matters, Seymour planned and directed the services. When we moved into the large house Seymour built to placate Anna's unhappiness in Florala, he bought an electric organ, which he played to accompany the singing during Sunday services. The piano in the living room was for Chopin, Schumann, and occasionally for accompanying me singing Broadway tunes. The organ was for services, and just as he knew no pianissimo at the piano, Seymour played the organ at full volume. During the years the Silvermans lived in Florala, these Sunday gatherings normally numbered eleven people. In the early years when members of the Lurie family resided in Florala, their children, Marsha and Steve, sometimes joined us. Periodically, the Finkelstein children also attended. While my brother, cousin Alan, grandfather, and Uncle Mel read portions from the Bible or other Jewish sources, these were not the focus of the service; the focus was the music. My sister, cousin Emily, and I sang while Seymour played the organ. My mother, aunt, and grandmother were mostly observers. Everyone sang the *Sh'ma* and "All the World," and I sang the "Etz Hayim." Services ended with everyone singing the hymn "Father Let Thy Blessing," a singularly Christian-sounding hymn included in the *Union Hymnal*, accompanied by that singularly Christian—now Reform—instrument, the organ.

The Business and Understanding the South

In "The Franklin Ferguson Company, 1932–1970," Seymour asserts that the Gitenstein family established Franklin Ferguson of Florala in 1932

as a subsidiary of Riverside Shirt and Underwear in New York City. The use of multiple names for separate corporate entities of the business was a typical tactic taken by small businesses in order to separate the tax liabilities for separate functions. Riverside, the corporate umbrella, provided the executive center and the locus of most of the sales activity. Gitenstein Brothers was used interchangeably with Riverside. Franklin Ferguson was the factory where the product was made. A third entity, Smith Johnson Real Estate, owned the property on which the factory sat as well as the factory equipment. Franklin Ferguson was almost solely the responsibility of Seymour Gitenstein.

*Franklin Ferguson advertisement,
April 1, 1943.
(Floral News.)*

Franklin Ferguson began with forty employees, whereas at the time of the writing of its history, the factory employed some eight hundred.²⁸ During its heyday, the company had customers in every state in the union and Canada, as well as parts of Europe and Africa. Seymour and Anna took pride in the modern equipment (in opposition to his father's preference for older machinery) and air conditioning that supported the work of the employees: "Specially adapted machinery was introduced, such as the electronic button-holer, and the positioning single needle machines. Air conditioning installations were begun in 1944. . . . Other recent modern improvements include electronically controlled spreading machinery and the latest developments in electronic cutting machines."²⁹ Seymour and

Anna also took pleasure in celebrating employment opportunities for the local community. The journal lists sixteen individuals in leadership roles in the operation, all from the Florala region, and chronicles the number of employees who were citizens of Florala and surrounding towns in Alabama (Lockhart, Opp, Samson, Wing, Baker, Coffee Springs, and Kingston) and Florida (Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Laurel Hill, Ponce de Leon, Darlington and Lakewood). Anna and Seymour were also very proud of the benefits that they offered the employees such as life insurance, retirement, no-cost loans, medical coverage with minimal membership costs, college scholarships, a cancer fund, and preventative health care programs including the services of a full-time registered nurse, the wife of one of the doctors who worked in the clinic.

From the beginning of his time in Florala, the social and cultural differences from his former life shocked Seymour. He could not get accustomed to rigid southern segregation. He wrote, "There was no integration yet and it was a very difficult period for me to understand having been brought up in New York City forgetting about the religious differences, the social economic and other standards of life that were so different."³⁰ He found it hard to accept that his employees, particularly the women, could not get good (or, in some cases, any) health care. Often women would come to work despite being ill because their families needed the income: "[V]ery often a girl would come in and evidently she had tremors or some nervous disorder or had been out too late or what have you and we would take her to our little pitiful restroom which had a bed in it."³¹ He could not understand why the local physicians would not treat his female employees. Seymour recognized that his employees were very different from him, and many of their customs and cultural patterns were foreign and in some cases contradictory to his upbringing, but he refused to be judgmental. Acknowledging the complexity of his relationship to Florala norms, in the late 1980s Seymour wrote, "I had no idea of the morality or immorality of our people. Our little household was very strictly constructed. I can't be critical because later on these people taught me an awful lot and gave me a better understanding of life really than I got at home." This inelegant and confusing contrast between what he experienced in his "little household," under his mother's watchful eye, and the laxer rules of decorum, social interaction, and sexual encounters of "our people" of the factory did not translate into condescension.³²

The Hospital: A Jewish Touch to a Community Service

Observing how local doctors treated the poorer women who worked for him in the factory, Seymour developed a long-term desire to enhance medical care for the community. During the 1950s he worked with two local doctors to build a clinic for the factory employees. In 1962, after the death of his father-in-law, Seymour became obsessed with construction of a community hospital. He recorded the history in "The Florala Memorial Hospital," likely written in 1970. Seymour took great satisfaction in the fact that he personally contributed or raised from local and regional sources all the resources for the hospital. The hospital "was built entirely with personal funds and not money from what they called the Hill Burton Administration and of course spending all this personal money was a terrific strain. I spent my entire savings and even got my family to allow some of the funds to come from the company assets."³³ The personal savings that Seymour referenced eventually became the Anna and Seymour Gitenstein Foundation. The proceeds of the sale of the hospital in the 1980s increased the corpus of the foundation that has since supported higher education, notably scholarships for children of local residents; medical research, particularly related to Alzheimer's disease; and cultural programs, especially music and music education.³⁴

The hospital was founded in 1963 as a nonprofit, and on July 9, 1964, it welcomed three-thousand visitors to an open house. "The Florala Memorial Hospital" details the names of administrative as well as professional leadership and describes the twenty-three-bed facility that was "equipped with the latest scientific medical equipment . . . completely air conditioned and heated by heat pumps."³⁵ The operating room featured a defibrillator, pacemaker, and a cardiac monitoring system, technology that was previously unavailable locally. Seymour and Anna took pride in the number of people who attended the opening, the "favorable comment by travelers as well as out of town visitors" about the stained glass windows that were the distinctive architectural feature, the "lavish" praise of "[o]ut of state visitors," and the commendations of visiting doctors from Pensacola, Fort Walton Beach, Boston, and New York. In 1970 Seymour's dreams for the future were high: "Future plans for the hospital include additional rooms and improved medical equipment. The hospital is destined to grow into a larger complex over the years."³⁶

Floral Memorial Hospital under construction, c. 1962.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

Stained glass windows at the Floral Memorial Hospital, 1965.
(Powergrams, March 1965.)

Seymour wanted to make sure that the hospital provided a service to the community as well as a monument to values and people that mattered to him. Two artifacts that enhanced the grounds manifest that desire: the columns from the high school that previously stood on the property and the stained glass windows that had graced Temple Beth Or's abandoned 1902 building.³⁷ The columns became the centerpiece of a garden in memory of Cliff Matthews, son of Seymour's closest friend, C. N. Matthews, a local physician who worked with Seymour to improve health care in the community. The windows, salvaged from a garbage dump in Montgomery, became the central architectural feature of the small hospital. The columns are not particularly distinguished examples of Doric architecture, and the windows are not particularly exceptional examples of painted glass so typical of southern religious architecture. Nonetheless, together they acted as powerful symbols of Seymour's commitment to the community, bringing part of his Jewish heritage into the tight-knit Protestant community while simultaneously celebrating the distinctive history of Florala.

Confronting Antisemitism and Segregation

Building on his personal interpretation of *tzedekah* and dedication to community, Seymour relished the idea of being a town father. This communal dedication was similar to other Jews of the South including such predecessors as Jacob and Isaac Moses of Columbus, Georgia.³⁸ "By the 1950s, southern Jews, no matter their country of origin, were middle-and upper-class business people, from small store owners to department store owners to department store magnates. They held public offices. . . . Jewish citizens were frequently at the center of efforts to build schools, medical institutions, and cultural venues throughout the South."³⁹ Seymour's Jewish identity and his Yankee heritage made him both a part of and apart from the leadership of Florala. In order to solidify his position as a town father, during the 1960s he threw himself more and more into the workings of the small town. Although he genuinely cared for the people in Florala, he also relished being patron of his own fiefdom. He enjoyed the prestige, he enjoyed the devotion, and he demanded the attention. He significantly contributed to that community, in fact—organizing and helping fund the building of a hospital, recruiting and supporting doctors to help

provide the community with consistent health care, and helping mitigate racial tensions that were ever-present but that escalated during the 1950s.

As many scholars note, southern Jews were not for the most part leaders in the civil rights movement. Clive Webb aptly quotes a letter from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild: "I think we all have to admit . . . that there are Jews in the South who have not been anything like our allies in the civil rights struggle and have gone out of the way to consort with the perpetrators of the status quo."⁴⁰ Even the most principled members of the rabbinate were few and far between. "The importance of southern rabbis should not be exaggerated," Webb writes. "[I]n the drama of the desegregation crisis they were but supporting players. While some rabbis risked their lives in lonely support of civil rights, others remained willfully silent."⁴¹ Even in the years when Americans were becoming more aware of the horrors of the Holocaust and reacting with growing sympathy for Europe's Jews, as Dan Puckett notes, "Alabama's Jews, like the southern white non-Jewish majority, exhibited a profound cognitive dissonance in regard to the implications of Nazi fascism and the Holocaust to racial intolerance in Alabama and the South."⁴²

One of the most poignant descriptions of this disconnect is captured in the quotation of a Jew from Mississippi in the essay by Marvin Braiterman, "Mississippi Marranos": "We know right from wrong, and the difference between our God and the segregationist God they talk about down here. But their God runs Mississippi, not ours. We have to work quietly, secretly. We have to play ball. Anti-Semitism is always right around the corner."⁴³ Some historians have observed that by the early 1960s, the Jewish refusal to speak out was becoming more fraught. Albert Vorspan in "The Dilemma of the Southern Jew" describes the changing atmosphere for Jews in the South as synagogue bombings became more frequent.⁴⁴ Any connection between the awareness of the Holocaust and of the consequences of chattel slavery was overshadowed by the fear of synagogue bombings and ethnic violence.

Whereas Seymour Gitenstein never marched or demonstrated, neither did he accept southern racial mores even after living in the region for decades. Instead, like so many Jews in the South, he worked to achieve peaceful desegregation. In his early days in Alabama, Seymour felt the discrepancy between the values he brought from his New York Jewish upbringing and the culture of small-town white Alabama, even as he

Downtown Florala, Alabama, c. 1950s. (FloralaHistory.com.)

strove to become accepted in this new land. To be accepted meant that he either had to remain silent when he observed the racial prejudice so common in the 1940s South or become oblivious to those prejudices.

The primary documents analyzed in this article make no specific reference to Seymour's involvement in the desegregation of the Florala schools, yet in fall 1965 he was named chairman of the school board just as the community was navigating federal desegregation directives to school districts. Although he received tacit support from others in the community, white and Black, Seymour seemed to embrace the notion that it was his responsibility to get the community through the difficult days to come with as little violence as possible. To the white citizens he argued that it would be better if they crafted their future rather than resist and thereby invite the federal government to force a plan on Florala. To the Black citizens he argued that he, as an outsider, was the best liaison between them and the white leadership. The plan that was implemented was simple though draconian: the schools that had previously served only the white community remained open with plans for expansion; the schools that had served the Black community were closed. In many ways, Seymour's plan worked. During the integration of Florala's schools, while there were many raised voices and much animus and anxiety, no violence or destruction of property occurred.⁴⁵ Seymour provided important leadership during this transition, but he did not succeed alone. Other town

leaders helped. The white community did not view him as a firebrand for desegregation but a moderate voice of reason, and the Black community recognized him as an ally outsider.

While I can find no newspaper or journal documentation of the awareness in the community of the difference between the Gitenstein family relationship with the Black community and that of the rest of the white community, I have vivid memories of knowing it to be so. First, there was the way Seymour managed the desegregation directive. Second were the comments from white friends who would often “apologize” after some racist comment before me or my brother by saying something like, “I know you do not agree with this kind of talk.” Finally, my family broke social norms: I sat for lunch with the Black women who cooked and cleaned for Anna, even as a teenager; I cleaned my own room, unheard of in families who had “help”; and Anna hosted a party for her youngest child’s integrated eighth-grade class in our home. Viewed from a distance, that none of these behaviors resulted in violence is surprising. Perhaps the strangeness of our status shielded us—Yankees, Jews, and the family of the largest employer in town. Everyone knew that the Gitensteins did not follow all the norms of southern society, including racial segregation. Possibly this special status allowed Seymour to succeed in leading the town’s desegregation efforts.

In recent communications with current and former residents of Floral, it came as no surprise that white and Black perspectives differed dramatically. To a person, the white contacts had no awareness of racial strife or antisemitism from 1940 to 1970.⁴⁶ While not every Black person shared seriously negative experiences of racism, some did. Hazel Bryant was born in Floral in 1939 but moved to Jersey City, New Jersey, to attend high school. As a child she believed the move was for health reasons; as an adult, she learned from her father that she was sent north because her family knew that as an African American girl she would not have received the kind of education she deserved in South Alabama. In a December 19, 2020, telephone conversation, Bryant discussed numerous examples of the racism that permeated the South of her childhood. For instance, she informed me that if a Black person went to a store in Floral during her childhood, they were not allowed to try on shoes, only to buy the size they requested. The books that the students in the Black Carver Junior High received before integration were defaced hand-me-downs from the white

school, with the n-word written in the margins and whole chapters torn out. In the face of these everyday racist experiences, the memory of Jackie Waters's killing on the Floral square on January 15, 1920, was not a distant memory for the Bryant family nor the Black students who studied with the damaged and desecrated textbooks. After Waters was accused of raping a white woman, a white mob chased him to the town center, told him to run, and then shot him in the back.⁴⁷

Even in the face of Seymour's contributions to civic life in Floral, our acceptance in Floral was circumspect. No specific quotations from the four journal entries support this view, but childhood memories and ancillary research support my conclusion. In fall 1963, rumblings among the factory employees concerning the establishment of a union grew. Some of them started wearing "I'm for ACWA," the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Association, while others wore buttons that read "I'm for Seymour." Other community members outside of the factory became involved in the disagreement, and the undercurrent of antisemitism and its close cousin, resentment of interlopers from the North, became more

*Seymour Gitenstein
in front of a Floral
factory building, c. 1962.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara
Gitenstein.)*

apparent.⁴⁸ Although the workers never unionized, Seymour received death threats. He had created a powerful enemy in a local doctor who ran a hospital and interpreted Seymour's aspiration for a new hospital as competition. Dr. J. F. Holley's supporters fueled the growing anger at the Yankee Jew, and Holley attempted to build a small shirt factory to compete with Franklin Ferguson.

Interestingly enough, Seymour does not reference the reality of anti-semitism in any of the documents upon which this study is based. However, in a very early letter to his bride to be, Anna, he acknowledges the reality of what life will be like for the transplanted New Yorker. This honesty differs from the sensibility that permeates the rest of his writings and, in some ways, the manner in which he managed his life in Florala. On December 31, 1942, Seymour wrote Anna:

I will try my best to make you happy – wherever we may live whether it be here (Florala) or elsewhere – – – Please try and understand that Florala is no Bed of Roses – I explained to you how these people – are narrow, Selfish, Likeable, charming, hateful, Antisemitic, honest and Dishonest – I could go on – But you can grow to like it and broaden – with your Experience.

I am selfish I guess in asking you to give up your family, friends, to devote yourself to me – but maybe you will not be so lonesome here – You will have much *new experience* –

Please give all these things a thought and prepare *yourself for them* –⁴⁹

The local newspapers, the *Florala News* and the *Andalusia Star News*, offer little insight into the undercurrent of antisemitism present in Florala. Interviews with white, non-Jewish residents of Florala reveal no awareness by the majority culture of significant antisemitism. However, interviews with Black residents reveal a more nuanced narrative. Hazel Bryant described how, to the majority white community, Jews were outsiders, objects of derision and suspicion. She spoke of how her mother would hear comments from the white Protestant family members regarding these attitudes because the majority whites had so little regard for Blacks that they did not feel any need to censor their conversations in front of them.

A review of the history of John G. Crommelin provides further insight into covert and overt antisemitism in Alabama. Rear Admiral John

Crommelin was one of five brothers born in Montgomery, Alabama, who served with distinction in the military. John, the oldest son, attended the University of Virginia and the U.S. Naval Academy. He became a well-known officer and strong advocate for the air force wing of the World War II navy operation. In 1949, he joined what came to be known as "The Revolt of the Admirals."⁵⁰ The admirals who participated in this "revolt" received a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee. Consequently, Secretary of the Navy Francis Matthews branded Crommelin as "faithless, insubordinate and disloyal" and forced Crommelin to retire.⁵¹

In 1950, after his retirement, Crommelin began his career as a perennial suitor for public office in Alabama, first running against Lister Hill for U.S. Senate. Four years later, Crommelin was a candidate for Alabama governor and became a voice in Ten Million Americans Mobilizing for Justice, a group resisting the censure of Senator Joseph P. McCarthy. At a Madison Square Garden event, Crommelin spoke of a "Hidden Force" that was intent on undermining the federal government. The next year, after the organization disbanded, Crommelin defined that Hidden Force as a group of "300 Jew Zionists" who were attempting to "control the world."⁵² Over the next thirty years, such antisemitism permeated his campaign rhetoric, including second runs for the U.S. Senate and governorship, a nomination for the Vice Presidency of the United States with the National States' Rights Party, and numerous runs for local positions including mayor of Montgomery. During his multiple attempts at political office, Crommelin campaigned in Covington County and Florala in particular. Mark Gitenstein, Seymour's son, remembers that during at least one of those visits, Crommelin specifically called Seymour out as a Jew and thereby a danger to Alabama's way of life.

Crommelin was often dismissed as a member of a radical fringe, but he exerted tremendous impact on the politics of Alabama and America. In his races against such moderates as Lister Hill and John Patterson, he successfully pushed his opponents to adopt more rigid racial segregationist poses, and he always attributed social problems to Jews. In the twilight of his career as a perennial candidate, he had significant impact on up-and-coming voices for the militant right such as David Duke and John Kasper. Kasper introduced Crommelin to Ezra Pound and encouraged Crommelin's advocacy for violent resistance to internationalism and the federal

government. This resistance had a strong undercurrent of fears of an international Jewish conspiracy. All of these beliefs and commitments came to be foundational for contemporary right-wing militias.⁵³

The insidiousness of Alabama antisemitism is apparent in the attempt to erase the reality of such voices as John Crommelin. For instance, in 1996, Crommelin's obituary in the *Montgomery Advertiser* celebrated his patriotism with little mention of his political aspirations and no mention of his antisemitism. In 2003, the Alabama Military Hall of Honor celebrated Crommelin as a great hero.⁵⁴ On May 29, 2020, the *Andalusia Star News* published an article, as part of series on the five Crommelin brothers, celebrating John G. Crommelin while remaining entirely silent on any aspect of his political forays or antisemitic positions.⁵⁵ While the documents reviewed in this analysis do not speak to Crommelin's impact on South Alabama and his deleterious impact on Jews from Alabama, a short review of his continued admiration in the community reinforces my vivid childhood memories. Perhaps citizens of Florala and Covington County were not going to vote for John Crommelin, but they attended his political rallies and did not condemn his international Zionist conspiracy theories. And any person who hailed from New York City, even after forty years as a resident, was closer to the International Zionists than to the purity of white military leadership of the Crommelin family.

The Later Years

By the late 1980s, Riverside Shirt and Underwear Company was floundering. Seymour committed much of his personal resources to try to keep the company afloat, covering the payroll and trying everything to stem the inevitability of cheaper textiles from Asia. Still, in 1987, the company went bankrupt. Losing all that he had created in the business was a terrible personal loss for Seymour, but another loss would be greater. Within a year of the bankruptcy, Anna died. Seymour was alone again, as he had been before he convinced Anna Green to marry him. His life after Anna's death reinforced his idiosyncratic definition of being a Jew in small-town Alabama.

Seymour remained very proud of what he had accomplished in the small town, remembering with great pride that he had introduced air conditioning into the local textile industry; provided retirement and life insurance for his employees when other manufacturers did not; and that

Seymour Gitenstein with plaque marking a lab named in Anna's memory, c. 1992.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

he actually cared about his employees' health. In his history of the business he states that "[p]ersonal contact and communication between management and employee have been a continuing policy. Warm personal memories keep alive the tradition of concern in the company."⁵⁶ Seymour's management style was retail: focused on individuals, he knew every employee, his or her spouse, his or her children, and each family's current personal and financial challenges. When he walked around the plant he talked to everyone, and they all greeted "Mr. Seymour." He felt that personal relationships mattered, that his value was seen in his actions, not just his financial position. As he had learned from his mother, social and philanthropic actions were an essential part of his Jewish identity. He wanted to feel that he left the place where he lived better than when he arrived – all of which is true. But in his own Seymour way, he also wanted to receive credit for those gifts, to be recognized and admired. He wanted it confirmed that in the end there were those who loved him more than his parents and grandmother loved his talented older sister and his charming older brother.

From the time of Anna's death in 1988 until 2004, Seymour remained alone in a four-thousand-square-foot house that he had built for his wife in the middle of a pecan orchard. He spent time with friends, sometimes visited family, but mostly returned to that lonely life of the 1930s. He continued to attend High Holiday services at Temple Beth Or, but his Jewish life became more and more attenuated from ritual and from a congregation. After hip surgery, when he moved full-time into the local rehabilitation center, his trips to Beth Or became more often substituted by Sunday services at the local Methodist Church.

Seymour's funeral was held in the Floral High School four days after his death in 2010. To no one's surprise, he had left specific plans with the Evans Funeral Home director. The ceremony was a strange combination of Hebrew prayers, personal reminiscence, and a eulogy by a rabbi who barely knew Seymour. What really captured Seymour, however, was the music that he had chosen: "*Etz Hayim*," "Shall We Gather at the River," "All the World," Chopin, and "Hello Dolly." The ceremony closed with the only hymn that he could have chosen: "Til We Meet Again." The music represented his life, weaving Carnegie Hall with Hebrew prayer and Christian hymns.

Conclusion

Doubtless, the fates of Seymour Gitenstein and Floral High School became inextricably intertwined. Seymour had a tremendous impact on the cultural, economic, and social life of his adopted town. Seymour likely would never have succeeded in the way that he did on the larger and more competitive canvas of New York City. He needed to be the big fish in the small pond, and he needed to be seen as a city father, respected for his generosity and influence and indulged for his idiosyncrasies, including his volcanic temper. Like so many Jews who moved south in the early to mid-twentieth century, Seymour never found full acceptance as a fellow citizen, but unlike Anna, he learned to thrive in this liminal existence. The primary documents on which this article is based reveal the personal ruminations of a singular individual but also mirror much of the pattern of life for northern Jews who moved to small southern towns in the mid-twentieth century.

The current state of Seymour Gitenstein's two great projects reinforces the intertwining of his life and the life of Floral High School. In 1960 the River-

side Shirt Company employed almost a thousand people, and in 1970 its payroll approached three million dollars. In 1987, the competition from Japanese imports forced the company into bankruptcy. Currently, the factory buildings are abandoned. In 1964, the Florida Memorial Hospital opened with twenty-three beds, equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. It closed in 2013, and, after several unsuccessful attempts by investors, the city of Florida took over the buildings in February 2020. As quoted in the *Andalusia Star-News*, Florida Mayor Terry Holley stated, “We don’t know exactly what we are going to do” because the hospital buildings are in “pretty rough shape.”⁵⁷

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Journals:

Seymour Gitenstein, “First Chapter” (undated)

**Seymour Gitenstein, “Early Thoughts About
My Life in Florida” (undated)**

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
“The Franklin Ferguson Company 1932–1970” (c. 1970)**

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
“The Florida Memorial Hospital” (1970)**

Correspondence:

Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942

Milton Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, August 17, 1960

Rose Barbara Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, April 7, 1967

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The transcriptions reproduced below attempt to replicate the original documents precisely, including grammatical and typographical errors. The only changes were to remove words that were crossed out in the original typescripts, where it was plainly the author’s intent to delete them, and to reproduce in conventional typeface documents that were originally typed in all caps.

Seymour Gitenstein, "First Chapter" (undated)

First chapter :=

I guess I didnt really have to make that first trip down here – at least many years later mother and dad made that clear to me – But really as I look back at it I had to come.

Papa had just gotten over his first series of serious illnesses and he wasnt easy to handle. My brother and myself had already began to realize that it was expected of us to go into our family business and altho it hadnt really been that all good as I remember back when I was 12 and 14 years old we did make a living and we never lacked for anything.

Mother made sure we lived in a very comfortable apartment either back in Harlem as a very young man and then later during my teen age on the upper west side of Manhattan o Riverside Drive and also on West End avenue which was just beginning to go down and some of the apartment building had seen much better days, and much better or rather much more affluent tenants –

There were a good many old timers there who resented the influx of the Jews whether because they were just Jews or because they neve really had any contac with these mysterious people albeit I am talking about the New York City of the 20" s. –

There were four of us, my older sister who was reay; very good natured and on the surface I guess the mostg talented at least letS say she had the mostg nerve and reallyg had also the mostg attention of my father and mother ans I guess the rest of the family including Grand ma who had come to live with us after Grandpa had passed on and unfortunately Mothers half brother had gone through the family millions I am not kidding grandma really had a lot of money which Grabdpa had amassed during the first World War and before that.

Grandma of Roumanian Russian Jewish stock very strong minded and very self willed I guess, altho I didnt realize that until mwny years later when my older sister came and stayed with my wife and myself during a very trying period of our lives both going thru serious surgey within 6 weeks of one another. – well enough of that

Grandma had two of her own children when she arrived from the old country and went straight out west to Traverse city Michigan with the

Seymour Gitenstein, "First Chapter," p. 1.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

young ones and it is there that she lost her first husband—he was tree fellsman and was unfortunately killed. —

she bravely went back to New York with the two children possibly around 1880 or maybe later and for a time worked as laundress in a laundry—there was a very trying period for her as—she must have been a very strong-willed young woman also an extremely good health.

She must have met my grandfather about 1885 —He was also from Roumania and although he also had left a family overseas he started all over with Grand ma and Mother (Rosie) was the first-born—Now her name was really Esther Rose but Aunt Jennie mother's older sister said she discarded the Esther when she was in her teens Mother was very ambitious and when she was first matched up with my father's brother she threatened suicide if Grandma pushed this marriage she was all of 16!!!! —

well my father must have been pretty good to her although I do remember some complaints later in life

Seymour Gitenstein, “Early Thoughts About My Life in Florida” (undated)

1-The train trip down from Pennsylvania Station to DeFuniak Springs, I bought my own ticket, I don't remember what it was, but when the train came to Jacksonville we were late and I had to stay over night in a strange hotel and then go over to DeFuniak Springs on a little “rinky-dink” railroad, it looked pretty good but it was very dirty as I remember.

When I arrived in DeFuniak I was picked up by one of the men who was training the people for the work in Florida. I was about 17. The gentleman I met I had met in New York. He looked to be in his late 40's. He took me to the old Colonial Hotel on the lake and told me no matter what they served me to eat it.

There was a beautiful old building in terrible state of repair later on as you will read on I took the old hotel and rebuilt it.

The manager sat in a great big “Grandpa's” chair in the lobby and a little tiny rotund woman waited on him hand and foot. She cooked, she cleaned and she did everything else. The food was awful.

My first night in Room 16 at the head of the staircase to the left, as you walk in the walls were full of water beetles or cockroaches whichever you please to call them and I covered myself with a sheet. A couple of days

later I came back from work, the plant was located over the Florala Fair and over the Lurie building, it must have been about 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening and I heard a lot of gun shots. When I got to the hotel there was a loud man shooting all the windows out of the building. It turned out to be Mr. Britton whom I never met but with whom I soon became very friendly later. I don't know why he did it. I guess he was either angry or upset.

There was two Jewish families in town, one was a very fat lady and her two daughters and her husband. They owned a little retail store. I can't say they weren't nice to me. They were. Then there was another family who had a son and daughter. This was the mother and father of Jenny Lurie Young who turned out to be one of my best friends and who really was a very nice person. The boy was Mr. Herman Lurie with whom I am still very friendly with. These people were nice to me although they were selfish to the extent that they were looking for payrolls and things like that in town. I think this is what they were interested in.

The first few years of our existence in Florala they operated what they called the "NRA", National Recovery Administration. This was an effort on the part of President Roosevelt to change the economy of not only the north but the South especially where people were very much underpaid.

There was no integration yet and it was a very difficult period for me to understand having been brought up in New York City forgetting about the religious differences, the social economic and other standards of life that were so different.

I lived in a little apartment of an old house owned by Mrs. R. L. Miller who was a doctor's wife. She had a little upright piano. I practiced there. I owned quite a few good pieces of music. Later on I rented a small apartment from her, put a Steinway piano there, believe it or not, which I bought in New York from a warehouse. I paid \$350.00 for this piano. It was a beautiful grand. I remember the number 40860 so you know it was one of the early Steinway Grands made in the United States. I played pretty well. The action on the old Steinway, of course was awful.

Years 1932 through I guess, 1936 or 1937 were very hard work and very little results.

We couldn't afford to put in good equipment and our competition which then was only Alatex in Andalusia had put in new equipment such

Seymour Gitenstein, "Early Thoughts," p. 1.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

as the famous 9560 and we didn't have the funds or the know how to realize that this was the fancy deal.

My father believed only in old equipment and of course this was very negative for the company.

The business with the NRA came and went. We were sued. We gave our employees some money back then it was discovered to be unconstitutional. Some people returned the money, very few did and that was the end of that. Those years 1932 through 1936, I guess, I was between 17 and 21 or 22.

My brother stayed in New York and he did help my father. He had his law degree already and he did the best he could.

Annette, I believe, was married already to Dr. Carl Zelson.

Little Rhoda was still in high school. She then went to where she later met my future wife, Anna Green. This was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me.

Here is another experience I'd like to mention and it is the germ for my later building the hospital. I had no idea of the morality or immorality of our people. Our little household was very strictly constructed. I can't be critical because later on these people taught me an awful lot and gave me a better understanding of life really than I got at home. To get to the point very often a girl would come in and evidently she had tremors or some nervous disorder or had been out too late or what have you and we would take her to our little pitiful restroom which had a bed in it, I remember it was in the back of the first floor over the *Floralia Fair*. Mrs. George has very helpful to try to be good to these people.

We tried to get a doctor. Would you believe we couldn't get a doctor to come up to see these people? We had at that time almost 6 doctors in town. We finally did get one of the lesser people to come. He was very nice though. We even had a girl to poison herself in the plant and later to die all connected to some of her activities at night which were not approved on at that time. You must realize this was 50 years ago. The standard of morality was entirely different.

I'm certainly not criticizing these people because they later became so close to me, all of them. It was then I decided somehow or another I would either build a clinic or certainly a hospital because you see in 1964 that came to past but that was 30 years later, earlier than that in the late 40's I did build a clinic with Dr. C. N. Matthews and later Dr. O'Neal. It

wasn't operated properly but we did a good job. It's been a long draw but it has been very interesting and I must say that the people working with me always were appreciative of whatever we started.

This was the germ for the little hospital my wife and I really did build. It was built entirely with personal funds and not money from what they called the Hill Burton Administration and of course spending all this personal money was a terrific strain. I spent my entire savings and even got my family to allow some of the funds to come from the company assets. My Mother and Father had both passed away by that time, Mother was only 56 years old when we lost her to cancer. My Father stayed on until he was 86 years old and was a wonderful person and managed to instill all these good deeds into myself and my wife. Meanwhile, my Father and Mother-in-law both came down from New York and lived on the lake in a beautiful house there. The building of the hospital was the highlight of the period 1962 thru 1964. The front of the hospital had a beautiful set of 7 stained glass windows and were constantly admired by all people. The hospital had the most modern equipment and also 26 beds plus a fully equipped lab and fully equipped x-ray department with the latest equipment there was in 1964 which of course today has since become outmoded.

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
"The Franklin Ferguson Company 1932-1970" (c. 1970)**

The Franklin Ferguson Company was founded in 1932 by Israel Gitenstein, father of the present partners, Milton and Seymour Gitenstein. Mr. Gitenstein moved to Florala from Geneva, Alabama in 1932. Purchasing and financial operations have always been conducted in New York City under the direction of Israel Gitenstein, and later under Milton Gitenstein. In 1946, Bernard Sumberg joined the corporation and is now in charge of all sales and customer relations. However, some sales are made in Florala. The factory has been the primary responsibility of Seymour Gitenstein, who has resided in Florala since 1932.

From a small beginning, of about 40 operators, the factory has grown to a present employment of approximately 800. During the early years the factory operated in four rented spaces above store buildings in the center of the business district. These spaces were gradually released in the early

1940's when the main plant was built. A branch operation in Crestview was closed at this time and all machinery was moved to Florala.

During the 10 year period from 1932-1942, employment rose to 250. Buildings were added periodically. Specially adapted machinery was introduced, such as the electronic button-holer, and the positioning single needle machines. Air conditioning installations were begun in 1944. Franklin Ferguson was one of the first factories in the area to make this step towards the comfort of the employee. Other recent modern improvements include electronically controlled spreading machinery and the latest developments in electronic cutting machines.

Employee benefits include free life insurance and retirement. A free loan service is available. A medical service plan is offered for a very small fee. A scholarship program is offered to the community, with many of the awards going to employee's children. The company has financed a cancer fund which takes care of medical expenses for any participating employee who suffers from a malignancy. Preventative medicine has been carried out throughout the year. Flu shots, chest x-rays, Red Cross blood programs and other preventative measures have been offered at no cost to the employees. Recently, a full time registered nurse, Mrs. Willie Rae O'Neal, has been employed to supervise the health care of the employees. Mrs. O'Neal works under the supervision of Dr. A. G. Williams, Dr. C. N. Matthews, Dr. Eugene Celano and Dr. Joseph Harper.

The employees of Franklin Ferguson come not only from Florala, but also from the outlying areas. Approximately 500 people come from Florala and Lockhart; 100 or more from Opp, Samson and Wing; 100 from Crestview, DeFuniak Springs; another 100 from Baker, Laurel Hill, Coffee Springs, Kinston, Ponce de Leon, Darlington and Lakewood.

The payroll of the company was \$25,000.00 in 1932. Today it exceeds \$3,000,000.00. In spite of the threats and inroads of competitive imports, the company has managed to retain its employment level, by diversifying its products. New and different items, such as ladies shirts, neckties, childrens' and mens' novelty shirts, have been added to the standard shirt product.

The character of a company is more than its financial and productive structure. The personality of its management and its employees define the kind of operation any company is. Franklin Ferguson has 40 employees who have been with the company for 30 years; 300 have been

with the company for 20 or more years. There are many others who have been employed for over 10 years. This, in itself, is an indication of the employer-employee relationship in this operation. There has been a history of mutual concern since 1932. Personal contact and communication between management and employee have been a continuing policy. Warm personal memories keep alive the tradition of concern in the company. Men like Israel Gitenstein, Samuel Green and John W. Miles, now deceased, have left their mark. There are not many corporate organizations today that can boast of assets such as warmth and friendship. Yet, these qualities are undeniably part of the net worth of Franklin Ferguson company. The heritage of earlier management and the continuing personal involvement of Seymour and Milton Gitenstein have set a pattern of well-being for employees, factory and community.

Franklin Ferguson is proud of the relatively new people in the management program. Top management personnel include Colonel W. G. McKoy, Wade Phillips, Ivan Parker, Edgar Kyser, Robert Whitaker, Wilbur Buckelew, Alphus Henderson, John Chandler, Charlie Welch, George Scroggins, Glen W. Manning, James Wise, Roland DeFranco, Jewell Ludlam, Aubrey Hart, Lamar Mitchell and many, many others.

The management of Franklin Ferguson has complete confidence in the future stability and growth of the company in Florida.

A.G. G.

**Anna Green Gitenstein and Seymour Gitenstein,
"The Florala Memorial Hospital" (1970)**

The Florala Memorial Hospital was founded in 1963 as a non-profit corporation. The building was completed in 1964 and it was formally opened to the public on July 9th, 1964. The open house was attended by approximately 3,000 visitors and physicians from Pensacola, Opp, Geneva, Andalusia and DeFuniak Springs.

The inspiration for a modern fully equipped and staffed hospital came about when a close relative of Mr. & Mrs. Seymour Gitenstein had to be rushed to Pensacola in a critical condition. Mr. J. W. Bancroft came to Florala during the planning and building stage of the hospital. Mr. John W. Miles was also helpful in the financial planning. Mr. Bancroft had been

administrator of Escambia General Hospital in Pensacola and was prepared to help with the specifications for the hospital. Before he left Florala in 1966 he helped to train the present administrator, Mr. James N. York, a Florala native.

The hospital is unique in many ways. No state or federal assistance of any kind was furnished towards the building of this facility. All funds came through gifts from interested citizens and friends, in Florala and elsewhere and through the Anna and Seymour Gitenstein Foundation. Gifts have been generous, not only in the building of the hospital but in the continuing of its operation and improvement.

The hospital is a completely modern facility with a 23 bed capacity. It is equipped with the latest scientific medical equipment. The building is completely air conditioned and heated by heat pumps. The building was constructed by C. E. Buffalow. The furnishings are comfortable and attractive. The operating room is modern in every respect; it features a defibrillator, pace maker and a cardiac monitoring system. Several of the rooms are also equipped with cardiac monitoring equipment. All rooms are equipped with built in oxygen and suction outlets.

"In the operating room, Mrs. Bessie Wagner, R.N. (left) and Mrs. Sarah Manwaring, R.N., have placed electrocardiograph and electronic machines in place where they would be used with a patient." Operating room at Florala Memorial Hospital, 1965. (Powergrams, March 1965.)

Jean Ziglar R.N. is the supervisor of a fine nursing service. Nurses employed by the hospital are: Sue Zorn R.N.; Grace Clenny R.N.; Florence Foster R.N.; Cassie Rogers R.N.; Annie Evans R.N.; Bernice Hall L.P.N.; Patricia Goolsby L.P.N.; Mildred Thompson L.P.N.; Mary Jane York L.P.N.; Mamie Ingram, Nurses-Aide; Nellie O-Pry Nurses-Aide; Martha Turberville Nurses-Aide; Irene Whitley Nurses-Aide; Chalmers Barnes – Orderly; James W. Butts – Orderly; Archie McDougald Orderly; William Wallace – Orderly.

Lenore Glass is the full time anesthetist. Bessie Wagner is in charge of the operating room and central supply. Mageline Crosby is an assistant operating room nurse, as well as assistant lab technician.

The efficient laboratory and x-ray department are supervised by Ed Thomas. Lillian Strickland is in charge of an excellent dietary department. A new dining room was added in 1968 and the kitchen was enlarged and remodeled. Dietary helpers under Mrs. Strickland are: Jenny Flowers, cook; Dora M. Hobbs, cook; Effie L. Roberts, cook; Beatrice Rowe, cook; Shirley Barnes, cook; Jeannette Barnes, cook.

Gertha Smith is the housekeeping supervisor. Working with her are Connie Hobdy, Arthur L. Miller, Lillie Smith and Linda Stone.

The business office is managed by Eloise George and a dedicated staff including: Elva M. Posey, Linda Harrison, Hilda Hoover, and Delatha Dearing, who is in charge of medical records.

James York is the administrator of the entire hospital complex and personnel. He is in the process of receiving further education in hospital management at the University of Alabama.

Dr. A. G. Williams, Jr. is chief of staff, a position which he alternates with Dr. C. N. Matthews. Dr. Williams, a native of Florala, returned to our community in 1965, after many years of practice in Niceville, Florida, where he managed his own hospital. Dr. Matthews, also a native of Florala, came home to practice medicine in 1947, after serving in the Second World War. In order to ease the burdens on Dr. Matthews and Dr. Williams, of an overwhelming practice, the hospital has been able to obtain the services of Dr. Joseph Harper and Dr. Eugene Celano. The doctors practice under the auspices of the Florala Memorial Hospital Out Patient Clinic. These doctors have office hours Monday, Thursday and Friday and Saturday in Paxton, Florida. In addition, there are also doctors in residence during the middle of the week and on the weekends, in order to relieve

Dr. Williams and Dr. Matthews. There is a physician on duty continuously to handle any emergencies that may arise.

Dr. Andrew Giesen and Dr. James Huddleston are the x-ray specialists for the hospital. Dr. P. B. Jones and Dr. F. G. Stevens serve the hospital as staff pathologists.

An outstanding attraction of the hospital is the beauty of the European stained glass biblical windows. Over the past six years, the windows have stimulated a great deal of favorable comment by travelers as well as out of town visitors.

Future plans for the hospital include additional rooms and improved medical equipment. The hospital is destined to grow into a larger complex over the years. Local citizens are not the only ones who appreciate the fine medical, surgical and nursing care available at Florala Memorial Hospital. Out of state visitors, who have had occasion to use the hospital are lavish in their praise of the personal attention they receive here. Visiting doctors from Pensacola, Ft. Walton, Boston, New York and elsewhere, have complimented the hospital services and facilities. Mr. York, the administrator, has been told many times how unusual it is to find such facilities in so small a hospital.

A.G. G.

Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942

Dear Anna—

Just got home and ate supper—Am listening to Grieg Concerto—Very Inspiring—All of a sudden—

I don't know if it's the real you or the Soul that I really like—(Love—as you like)—What you see in me—I still can't make out.—

Did it really happen to me (us)!

Please Listen !!

I will try my best to make you happy—wherever we may live whether it be here (Florala) or elsewhere— — — Please try and understand that Florala is no Bed of Roses—I explained to you how these people—are narrow, Selfish, Likeable, charming, hateful, Antisemitic, honest and Dishonest—I could go on—But you can grow to like it and broaden—with your Experience.

Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942, p. 1.
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

I am selfish I guess in asking you to give up your family, friends, to devote yourself to me –but maybe you will not be so lonesome here – You will have much new experience –

Please give all these things a thought and prepare yourself for them –

Mother will help explain things to you – That's why I wanted you to spend some time with her.

Be sure to see Annette too She's so kind and understanding – reasonable thoughtful

Please think of me (Selfish again) – or should I be saying these things?

Best regards to all at home

Devotedly

Seymour G

Floralia Ala

Remember

Please Say hello to Mother & Dad – Green – Florence Aunt Tillie

Milton Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, August 17, 1960

Dear Seymour:

In line with our conversation this morning, we have time to think about this. I don't want to rush into anything but we should start looking for a superintendent from this end or do you want to from that end? Actually it all depends on where you want to move to.

If to Montgomery, we probably can get along with one of our own local men and build him up and give him title of Superintendent, temporarily to Miles as plant manager or plant superintendent and the man you have in mind as assistant. After all, John is 61 years old. I looked it up.

It is not worth your getting upset and Anne upset and the kids involved to have to live in Florala.

As a matter of fact, if you want you can move to Montgomery right away by renting a furnished house. There is nothing that is impossible as long as the kids feel well and you have no health problems. The other matters can all be solved.

This page and next: *Rose Barbara Gitenstein to
Seymour Gitenstein, April 7, 1967, p.1.*
(Courtesy of R. Barbara Gitenstein.)

If you live in Montgomery, actually the commuting twice a week or 3 times a week is comparable to living in New York, where I spend almost 3 hours a day commuting. I know you are giving this consideration with Anne.

Then of course there is the possibility of your coming back to New York. Very few factories are run by families. Most of them are run by hired help so it is not as though we are doing something out of the ordinary.

Very truly yours,
Milt

Rose Barbara Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, April 7, 1967

Durham, North Carolina

Dear Daddy,

I know that you instructed us not to write you any more on the subject of Aunt Flo's and Uncle Mel's leaving: But I feel like I should say something. That last letter you wrote us really hurt Mark. I don't know what he said to ya'll word for word, but I do know the gist of what he said. To be more frank than I should, I don't see what you could have resented. Anything that he said or that either of us think is merely meant as an observation not as a condemnation of anyone's actions, most especially not yours. Don't you realize that Mark and I are intelligent enough kids to realize the reason we have gotten all the opportunities we have (i.e. schooling) is that you DID live in Florala. The fact that you succeeded in Florala and then stayed to make it more successful has sent Mark to Indian Springs, me Holton-Arms, and us both to Duke (not to mention all the years for both of us at camps, etc.). But to both of us all of this is obvious, we couldn't and wouldn't ever condemn it. . . . how could we?⁵⁸ The fact remains that the path you took and the path you set for Mom and us was not easy. You might have accomplished the same monetary success in some metropolitan community; but due to, at first, your family's need and then your own choice you stayed in Florala, choosing the really more difficult method. Because you chose this, we (Mom, Mark, Susie and I) in affect had our situation chosen for us. We were all put in a very difficult situation. This is a fact. The question of this choice being the best decision

or not is a subjective opinion. I think that it was, and so does Mark. The fact that we lived in Florala with all its limitations and policies which are foreign to our religion and spirits (Especially segregation) made better people of us. Thank-you, we appreciate the amount that you and Mom had to give up to make us what we are and how much more work and worry was involved in bringing us up in Florala. I only hope that I will be able to live up to what should be Anna and Seymour Gitenstein's daughter. Mark has already lived up to that standard, I believe.

I hope that you understand Mark and my opinions now. And I also hope that you don't resent this letter. I don't mean it as anything which requires resentment, it was written for the sake of explanation. Please don't feel that you ever have to explain to us your actions previous to now. They need no explanation. Not to us anyway. We know the "why" for many of your actions . . . more than you will give us credit for.

Will speak to ya'll on Sunday

Love ya',
Bobby

NOTES

¹ The typescripts of the primary documents reproduced below attempt to replicate the original documents exactly, complete with grammatical and typographical errors that are particularly evident in "First Chapter," "Early Thoughts About My Life in Florala," and Seymour Gitenstein's letter to Anna Green dated December 31, 1942. These documents, all in the author's possession, give insight into a complex individual who was on the one hand tremendously insecure and on the other hand aware of his important impact on his local community. As discussed below, some people viewed him with great affection and others with some suspicion.

² Edward Cohen, *The Peddler's Grandson: Growing Up Jewish in Mississippi* (New York, 2002); Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store: A Family Memoir* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

³ The literature on Jews in the small-town South is extensive. See, for example, Ira M. Sheskin, "The Dixie Diaspora: The 'Loss' of Small Southern Jewish Community," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 165-90; Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," in Bauman, *Dixie Diaspora*, 108-42; Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, 2005).

⁴ Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (Chapel Hill, 2005).

⁵ Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *My Father's People: A Family of Southern Jews* (Baton Rouge, 2002). Memoirs of southern Jews have become a regular genre of primary literature. For other examples, see Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob Rothschild and the Troubled South* (Macon, GA, 1985); Harriet Keyserling, *Against the Tide: One Woman's Political Struggle* (Columbia, SC, 1998); Herbert Keyserling, *Doctor K: A Personal Memoir* (Beaufort, SC, 1999); Stella Suberman, *When it Was Our War: A Soldier's Wife on the Home Front* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Charles H. Banov, *Office Upstairs: A Doctor's Journey* (Charleston, SC, 2007); Stella Suberman, *The GI Bill Boys: A Memoir* (Knoxville, TN, 2013); Lee Shai Weissbach, ed., *A Jewish Life on Three Continents: The Memoir of Menachem Mendel Frieden* (Palo Alto, CA, 2013); Alexander Z. Gurwitz, *Memories of Two Generations: A Yiddish Life in Russia and Texas*, ed. Bryan Edward Stone (Tuscaloosa, 2016).

⁶ Three family members provided information through electronic communication regarding the Bralower family: Judy Gitenstein, daughter of Milton Gitenstein; Robert Sumberg, son of Rhoda Gitenstein Sumberg; and Allen Kurtz, husband to Dr. Linda Rosenbaum Kurtz, who is Sarah Bralower Begecher's granddaughter. Sarah was Louis Bralower's sister. Mr. Kurtz is an amateur genealogist, whose information is carefully documented by citations to primary documents including marriage licenses, death certificates, census data, and ship manifests. There were multiple e-mails during January 2021 from Judy Gitenstein and Robert Sumberg. Of particular significance is a January 29, 2021, e-mail from Kurtz that attached a fifteen-page genealogical study of the Bralower family focusing on Louis and Celia.

⁷ Seymour Gitenstein, "First Chapter," 1. Seymour had three siblings who survived infancy: Annette Gitenstein Zelson (February 23, 1911–January 1, 2008), Milton Perceval Gitenstein (May 13, 1912–October 7, 1999), and Rhoda Gitenstein Sumberg (July 1, 1919–April 3, 2020).

⁸ "First Chapter," 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The Gitenstein family decisions about the garment industry and the relocation of their factory were somewhat typical. Baltimore, North Carolina, and South Carolina witnessed the same phenomenon for Jewish and non-Jewish factory owners. See Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010); Eric L. Goldstein and Deborah R. Weiner, *On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 2018); and research in progress by Diane C. Vecchio on Jews and the garment industry in Upcountry South Carolina.

¹² Robert Sumberg, e-mail to author, January 25, 2021.

¹³ Seymour Gitenstein and Anna Green Gitenstein, "The Franklin Ferguson Company 1932–1970," 1. Robert Sumberg maintains that the move was not from Geneva, Alabama, but from DeFuniak Springs, Florida. In any event, the "move" to Florala was a move of the operation and not of Israel Gitenstein, who lived in New York City for his entire life. Of the leadership of the company, only Seymour Gitenstein moved to or lived in Alabama.

¹⁴ Terry Barr, "A Shtetl Grew in Bessemer: Temple Beth-El and Jewish Life in Small Town Alabama," *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000): 7.

¹⁵ "First Chapter," 1.

¹⁶ Lionel Trilling was a world-renowned writer and professor, considered one of the most important literary critics of the twentieth century. He was the first tenured Jewish professor in Columbia University's English department.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, March 19, 1948. Judy Gitenstein alerted me to this article.

¹⁸ "First Chapter," 1. For background see Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Jews of Harlem: The Rise, Decline, and Revival of a Jewish Community* (New York, 2016).

¹⁹ Seymour Gitenstein, "Early Thoughts About My Life in Florida," 1.

²⁰ "First Chapter," 1.

²¹ "Early Thoughts," 2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "Our History," Temple Beth Or, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://templebethor.net/our-history>.

²⁴ "Montgomery, Alabama," Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://www.isjl.org/alabama-montgomery-encyclopedia.html>.

²⁵ A number of people provided information about the Covington County Jewish community through phone calls and e-mail communications: Lisa Young Donnelly (Jenny Lurie Young's daughter), telephone call with author, December 3, 2020; Lynda Cohen Cassanos (Hilda Berman Cohen's daughter), telephone call with author, December 12, 2020; Rose Lynn Finkelstein (Leo and Muriel Finkelstein's daughter), e-mail to author, December 8, 2020; and a series of December 2020 e-mails to author from Florida contacts including Max Richburg, Jim Yeaman, David Williamson, Dick Cannon, and Chas Pelham.

²⁶ Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942.

²⁷ Rose Barbara Gitenstein to Seymour Gitenstein, April 7, 1967.

²⁸ "Franklin Ferguson Company," 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ "Early Thoughts," 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 5. The Hill-Burton Act is a 1946 federal law that provided resources for modernizing hospitals across the country with the understanding that patients would get free or low-cost care at the facility.

³⁴ According to an e-mail to the author dated February 1, 2021, from Ed Reifenberg, Seymour's accountant from the early 1980s until Seymour's death in 2010, the hospital was first sold in 1986 and resold a number of times since then. According to a history of the hospital published by the Alabama Power Company, in 2006 Robert Deverna and Hospital Holdings bought the hospital from United Florida Inc. Alabama Power Company, "Origin of a Hospital: Faith— and Seven Stained Glass Windows." *Powergrams: Alabama Power Company* (March 1965): 1–5, 24. In 2013, the hospital closed without notice, and in February 2020 the city of

Floralia took ownership of its buildings. Christopher Smith, "Floralia takes ownership of hospital buildings," *Andalusia Star News*, February 12, 2020.

³⁵ Seymour Gitenstein and Anna Green Gitenstein, "The Floralia Memorial Hospital," 1. There is some disagreement as to actual number of beds in the facility over time with several documents indicating twenty-six beds.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁷ Temple Beth Or's first building was located on Church and Catoma Streets in Montgomery. This edifice, now a Church of Christ, is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places. In 1902, the congregation built a new synagogue on Sayre and Clayton. In 1961, when this building was abandoned, the congregation moved to Old Cloverdale on the outskirts of the city. "Our History," Temple Beth Or, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://templebethor.net/our-history>. When the 1902 building was abandoned, the windows were removed with other material from the site and discarded at the Montgomery dump. Seymour was not pleased that the plans for the new synagogue did not include the old windows, so he salvaged them for his hospital.

³⁸ Scott M. Langston, "Being Jewish in Columbus, Georgia: The Business, Politics and Religion of Jacob and Isaac Moses, 1828–1890," *Southern Jewish History* 18 (2015): 1–61.

³⁹ Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, "Introduction," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Waltham, MA, 2006), 15.

⁴⁰ Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth Century South," in Ferris and Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, 192. See also Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001); Clive Webb, "Closing Ranks: Montgomery Jews and Civil Rights, 1954–1960," in Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora*, 331–52. For an alternate interpretation, see Mark K. Bauman and Berkeley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, 1997); P. Allen Krause, *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Mark K. Bauman with Stephen Krause (Tuscaloosa, 2016).

⁴¹ Webb, "Tangled Web," 205.

⁴² Dan J. Puckett, *In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama's Jews, the Second World War, and the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa, 2014), 222.

⁴³ Marvin Braiterman, "Mississippi Marranos," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge, 1973), 355–56.

⁴⁴ Albert Vorspan, "The Dilemma of the Southern Jew," in Dinnerstein and Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South*, 334.

⁴⁵ Two other features helped the transition to desegregation remain peaceful. One was other white citizens of Floralia who were supportive of a peaceful transition to desegregation and the second that in the small community, everyone knew each other—whether white or Black. Forrest "Shug" Cannon was on the city council at the time of the integration of the schools, and, as a liaison with the police department, he was in attendance when the first Black students entered the white county high school. His son, Dick Cannon informed the

author that “[t]he principal had all white students assemble in the auditorium. When they brought the few Black students in the auditorium, Dad said that Dennis Truman, who was the biggest player on the football team was heard to say ‘Hey, that is just Angela there.’ Dad said everyone laughed and all the new students sat down and that was it.” Dick Cannon, e-mail to author, December 12, 2020.

⁴⁶ Electronic and telephone communications from Florala contacts informed this section: e-mails to the author in December 2020 from Dick Cannon, Kermit George, Max Richburg, Jim Yeaman, David Williamson, Chas Pelham, and Delbra Thompson Thrash and Hazel Bryant, telephone interview with author, December 19, 2020.

⁴⁷ Bryant interview.

⁴⁸ For antisemitism in the South see Howard N. Rabinowitz, “Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South,” *American Jewish History* 77 (March 1988): 437–51.

⁴⁹ Seymour Gitenstein to Anna Green, December 31, 1942.

⁵⁰ In 1949 several retired and active United States Navy admirals raised public objection to a reduction in federal financial support for the Navy. The objection was part of an internecine battle between the Navy and Air Force, jockeying for responsibilities in “strategic bombing” for the United States. See Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945–1950* (Washington, DC, 1994).

⁵¹ Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens, GA, 2010), 107.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 109–10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁵ John Vick, “Crommelin Brother Had Storied Career in Navy,” *Andalusia Star News*, May 29, 2020.

⁵⁶ “Franklin Ferguson Company,” 3.

⁵⁷ Christopher Smith, “Florala takes ownership of hospital buildings,” *Andalusia Star News*, February 12, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ellipses in original, here and below.