

**SOUTHERN
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HISTORY**

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SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

2007

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From the Editor . . .

This volume marks the tenth in the history of this journal. To commemorate the anniversary I asked seven early leaders to offer their reminiscences about the history of the society. Of those Janice Rothschild Blumberg, Eli N. Evans, Rabbi Saul Rubin, and Bernard Wax graciously complied. I purposely did not provide guidelines. The result is that the authors offer diverse perspectives reflective of what they perceived as the society's significance, and what most influenced them and what they influenced. Coupled with the Solomon Breitbart, Leonard Dinnerstein, and Stephen J. Whitfield sketches in volume 7 (2004) and excerpts in this issue from interviews Eric L. Goldstein had conducted of society patriarch Saul Viener shortly before his death, these essays record change and continuity in the society's history. Goldstein's interview of Viener illustrates how this visionary-activist's pivotal part in the founding of the society was integral to his life and numerous other endeavors. Evans's memoir appears at the end of the section because he not only poignantly reflects on the first meeting, Viener, and others but also looks to possible future directions for the society.

On January 14 to 15, 2007 the Gimelstob Symposium in Judaic Studies, Florida Atlantic University, took place on the topic, "The Jews of Florida: A Rich History, An Evolving Identity." Two of the participants submitted revised versions of their conference presentations. Stephen J. Whitfield laments the lack of publications on Florida Jewish history and argues for the inclusion of Florida Jewry within the study of southern Jewish history. Edward S. Shapiro sees a double paucity not only in the writing on South Florida Jewry but specifically on the Orthodox aspects of that history. In documenting Orthodoxy over the last decades, he brings to task those historians and sociologists who prophesied

the demise of what remains a vibrant, varied, and growing expression of Judaism.

James L. Moses provides a revised and expanded version of his presentation from the 2006 Little Rock conference on Rabbi Ira Sanders and civil rights. He places Sanders's role within the growing historiography on southern Jews (particularly rabbis) and civil rights and adds new insights and nuance. To him, Sanders provided significant leadership and served as a role model.

Jean Roseman presents an article that creates an entirely new category for the journal: The Unusual and Bizarre! Her tale of murder within the Orthodox community of Nashville, family mayhem, insanity, and black-Jewish interaction challenges the most macabre fiction. This is not typical historical fare and yet such publication has precedent in one of the most distinguished journals in American history. *The William & Mary Quarterly* used to publish primary sources on the bizarre in colonial America.

Dana M. Greene has solicited two review essays and several book reviews, continuing testimony to the burgeoning of the field.

In the last decade literally dozens of outstanding scholars have capably served rotating positions on the editorial board not only peer reviewing articles but also formulating policies and providing a needed sounding board. For this issue besides editorial board members, Canter Brown, Jr., Paul George, Jeffrey S. Gurock, Phyllis Leffler, Annette Levy Rankin, Stuart Rockoff, Leonard Rogoff, and Stephen J. Whitfield graciously offered their expertise as peer reviewers. Authors are frequently shocked at how many people undertake the tedious task of proofreading their articles. It always amazes Rachel and me that each individual picks up different types of errors. This year we gratefully acknowledge Bryan Edward Stone, Bernard Wax, and Hollace A. Weiner who joined us for the task.

From its inception this journal has flourished with the support and assistance of longtime treasurer Bernard Wax, an outstanding series of presidents and officers, the generous financial support of the Gale and Lucius N. Littauer foundations, and

the wonderful mixture of members who make this arguably the leader among regional Jewish historical societies.

Finally I would not have survived as editor of this journal without Managing Editor Rachel Heimovics Braun, my complementary voice.

Mark K. Bauman

Ruminations about the SJHS

by

Bernard Wax

Shortly after being appointed director of the American Jewish Historical Society in 1966, I became aware of a Southern Jewish Historical Society that had been formed in the mid 1950s. Created in the aftermath of the 1954 Tercentenary celebrations of the arrival of the first group of Jews to what was to become the United States, the organization had essentially disappeared. However, with the publication of Eli Evans's *The Provincials*¹ and several other books and articles, and with the growing interest in Jewish genealogy and a spurt of attention by a number of academics in ethnic history in the South, it seemed the time was ripe for the society's reincarnation.

A confluence of individuals and circumstances ensured that this would take place. Saul Viener of Richmond, who had been instrumental in forming the original society, had become an influential member of the American Jewish Historical Society board. Along with me, he convinced its members to hold a trustees meeting in Richmond while simultaneously sponsoring a conference on southern Jewish History. Other organizations were approached for support, and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Richmond Jewish Community Council, and, with the aid of Dr. Melvin I Urofsky, the Department of History of Virginia Commonwealth University generously participated.

Attending the 1976 meeting was a host of scholars, amateur historians, and interested lay persons. Among the latter was Rosemary Krensky of Chicago whose father, Rabbi Bernard C. Eh-

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renreich, had served as a rabbi in Montgomery, Alabama, during the early part of the twentieth century. She and her husband, Milton, were so pleased by the content of, and warm reception to, the meeting that they offered to underwrite the publication of its proceedings. As a result, *Turn to the South*² appeared, thereby giving further impetus to the resuscitation of SJHS.

Those of us involved with the planning were so amazed at the interest and enthusiasm of the participants in the Richmond sessions that a second conference was arranged to be held in Raleigh, North Carolina. Dr. Abram Kanof, a former president of the American Jewish Historical Society, offered to serve as our host and, along with Saul Viener, helped make arrangements. It was at this meeting that SJHS was formally organized, with a constitution and by-laws ultimately written, which resulted in SJHS being officially incorporated on August 21, 1978, in South Carolina. The society was recognized later by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) non-profit institution, giving it further legal status.

It was at this point that I was impressed by the truly informal operation that was created. Not only did people voluntarily solicit new members, promote attendance, and seek support for the annual meetings but several offered their time and talents in other areas as well. It was obvious that a newsletter had to be created to promote interest in our work and to bind the membership. Initially Sol Breibart, of Charleston, South Carolina, created and edited the *SJHS Newsletter* and was later succeeded by Helen Silver of the same city. More recently, the newsletter editorship was taken over by Dr. Leonard Rogoff of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, who modernized and renamed the publication, *The Rambler*. Also early on, Dr. Louis Schmier of Valdosta [GA] State College (now University) stepped in and served as what I term the administrator of this new organization. Not only did he manage and keep its records but he also continued to publish, stimulate interest in the field, and assist many attracted to the history of the southern Jewish community.

Over the years the major focus of the society has been the annual conference held in various communities throughout the South and which included local historical tours, visits to Jewish

Bernard Wax.

*Currently treasurer, Wax has been working
on behalf of SJHS since its inception.*

(Courtesy of Bernard Wax.)

landmarks, and academic papers. Although briefly discussed, the concepts of a permanent office with administrative personnel and the collection of books, manuscripts, and artifacts were to be left to other entities. One other possible institutional development, publication of a scholarly journal, remained. Propounded by a committee headed by Belinda Gergel and Patricia LaPointe at the 1996 meeting in Miami, the decision was made to publish an annual volume titled *Southern Jewish History* for a trial period. Dr. Mark K. Bauman and Rachel Heimovics were asked and agreed to

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serve as editor and managing editor, respectively. Under their dedicated efforts the publication is no longer “on trial” but is now in its tenth year and going strong. As SJHS became more comfortable in its growing academic niche made possible by the journal, it has taken on the task of instituting book and article awards, lectures, research, and publication grants, and even scholar and student travel subsidies. Much of this has been made possible by grants to the journal from the Lucius N. Littauer and Gale Foundations and individual contributions as well as the Bornblum Jewish Studies Program at the University of Memphis and Jerome M. Gumenick Family Foundation for conference speakers, and Lowenstein funds for research, some due to the efforts of past presidents Sumner Levine, Hollace A. Weiner, and Saul Viener, as well as other board members and the editors.

What I find amazing is that all of these accomplishments were made possible largely by volunteers who, for thirty years, have spent countless hours soliciting new members, raising funds, publicizing our activities, arranging meetings, proofreading, and writing articles, tasks all of which are normally associated with paid staff and organizations with substantial economic resources. As noted by Janice R. Blumberg elsewhere in this issue, the society has more than fulfilled its initial promise and, hopefully, will find new ways to illuminate the southern Jewish experience.

NOTES

¹ Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of the Jews in the South* (New York, 1973).

² Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979).

The Pioneer Period of the SJHS (1976-1983)

by

Saul J. Rubin

My association with the Southern Jewish Historical Society began in 1978 at the Raleigh conference. An earlier convocation in Richmond, in 1976, elicited several illuminating essays that were later published in *Turn to the South*.¹ Realizing that there was a hunger for a fuller exploration of our heritage and history, a follow-up convention was planned. That conference resulted in the election of officers and a plan for the future. Saul Viener was chosen the first president. Your humble servant was graced with the position of chairman of the board, the sole recipient of that title. Had I conducted myself with more aplomb, that office might have continued instead of being quickly jettisoned. I ended up the following year demoted to the position of a lowly board member.

I well remember conferences in Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, Jacksonville, and New Orleans. Savannah hosted twice. Camaraderie among the leaders resulted in growth and consensus. Prominent banquet speakers, including Eli Evans, Dr. Stephen Whitfield, Dr. Leonard Dinnerstein, and Dr. Malcolm Stern, enthralled large audiences of locals. Each conference featured gifted scholars. In time the level of research required to be a presenter was extraordinarily high.

I look back on that early period and consider how blessed we were to have talented officers and board members including Saul Viener, Jack Coleman, Solomon Breibart, Janice Rothschild Blumberg, Dr. Samuel Proctor, and Bernard Wax. Each

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one had a passion and expertise that resulted in an era of expansion.

My term as president was from 1980 to 1982. In my first address to the members I expressed a vision that I was determined to implement (with the help of many). First and foremost, the society was to dedicate itself to the amplification of knowledge about the southern Jewish experience. There were limited publications dealing with the Jews of the South. A few community histories existed, primarily volumes about Richmond,² Charleston,³ and Nashville.⁴ In addition, one could find articles in historical journals, a few diaries and family genealogies, as well as several generic books about southern Jews. With this situation in mind, I began researching my future book, *Third to None: The Saga of Savannah Jewry 1733-1983*.⁵ Thousands of copies were eventually purchased (now out of print), evidence of a latent yearning. Within a few years other major histories were written, including Myron Berman's *Shabbat at Shockoe* (about Richmond)⁶ and Steven Hertzberg's *Strangers within the Gate City* (exploring Atlanta's Jewish past).⁷ I believed the primary task of SJHS was to promote and encourage Jewish historical research and the publication of essays, books, papers, a journal, et al.

Furthermore, the membership was encouraged to establish archives and museums to ensure the preservation of artifacts, documents, photographs, and fragile records. Too much loss and deterioration had already taken place. I recommended the recruitment of a committee of experts who could assist individuals and organizations.

At the time I suspected that there was a contrarian faction that wanted the conferences to be more "appealing." My objection at the time was based on an awareness that we were in a pioneer phase and that we needed to focus on substantive research. In a letter addressed to board members, I stated, "We need to set high standards. Fluff is enjoyable for the moment but it is quickly gone, leaving little that endures." After the 1979 Charleston conference, I received correspondence from Sol Breibart, which included the following: "I agree with your assessment of the recent conference in Charleston, especially your criticism of the quality of the

*Rabbi Saul J. Rubin in the Temple study, in the 1970s.
Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah.
(Courtesy of Saul J. Rubin.)*

papers.” Sol, a history teacher, was instrumental in elevating future presentations. Jack Coleman, as president, responded, “The point taken in your letter about the quality of the papers is certainly in order. While we do have to appeal to the general public, quality should not be compromised.” This remains a contemporary issue—the tension between popularists and scholars. The question is how to balance competing interests.

According to Treasurer Sol Breibart’s 1979 financial report, the balance on hand was a mere \$114. By 1981, my handwritten notes of the board meeting indicate the society’s treasury swelled substantially. A \$6,000 CD was purchased after funds were allocated to sustain the annual conference. Membership numbered

361 active participants. Fiscal stability required grant solicitations. A few generous contributors graciously responded.

My election as president in 1980 resulted in a vigorous attempt to establish a solid foundation structurally. That required a second board meeting annually. State membership chairpersons were appointed to help in an expansion effort. Top-notch individuals accepted the challenge, including Rabbi Murray Blackman (Louisiana), Rabbi Elijah Palnick (Arkansas), Audrey Kariel (Texas), Rabbi Leo Turitz (Mississippi), Marvin Cohn (Alabama), Hilda Wallerstein (North Carolina), Rabbi Howard Greenstein (Florida), and Saul Viener and Irwin Berent (Virginia). South Carolina and Georgia were served by the society's leaders. The roster burgeoned as a consequence.

In the early days, David Goldberg, an officer, sent out society news to the membership. But, in order to facilitate communication between the board and the members and otherwise serve the society, a regular publication was created, the *SJHS Newsletter*, edited by Sol Breibart. The newsletter contained reports of interest as well as brief historical essays.

I initiated the idea of a speakers (later, a speakers and resource) bureau. Bernard Wax, director of the American Jewish Historical Society, provided the expertise to ensure a solid operation. I served as the chair, recruiting such scholars as Dr. Malcolm Stern, one of the premier American Jewish historians, and Dr. Kenneth Stein of Emory University (later of the Carter Center). Professional archivists were invited to join the team and offer guidance to institutions interested in founding museums, archives, or exhibitions.

The publications committee announced in 1981 that it was ready to publish a second volume of southern Jewish historical essays, consisting of conference papers and other submissions. Drs. Sam Proctor, Malcolm Stern, and Louis Schmier were the editors.⁸

Board member (later president) Janice Rothschild Blumberg agreed to serve as chair of the New Orleans conference (1982). Dr. Arnold Shankman was responsible for the gathering of papers. Dr. Joseph Cohen of Tulane was asked to open the university's

Rededication of the first Jewish cemetery (1733–1770), Savannah.

Saul J. Rubin, left, officiating;

Malcolm Stern standing to the right.

Photograph taken at the 1983 SJHS conference.

(Courtesy of Saul J. Rubin.)

Jewish museum/archives for the attendees. The conference exceeded our expectations. At the Saturday eve banquet, I defined the mission of SJHS as I envisioned it: “to promote a broader understanding of southern Jewish history through conferences, papers and publications; to increase communication among scholars and lay persons interested in research; to disseminate information via lectures to the American Jewish community; and to assist in the development and display of archival and museum documents and artifacts.” One suspects that mission remains at the core of the society’s enterprise.

As a postscript I want to add this personal revelation. It ruffled me as a rabbi fascinated with American Jewish history and as a Jew with southern Jewish roots (my mother was a native Georgian) that short shrift was made of the Jewish experience in this region. A northern/eastern bias was dominant at the time. The paradigm used by scholars for constructing American Jewish history lacked a southern perspective. The emphasis on antisemitic incidents educed that perception. The South was inclined to philosemitism (Civil War abuses, the Leo Frank lynching, and temple bombings notwithstanding). That is why I consider three papers delivered during my period of service (1980-1982) as seminal. The first was by David Goldberg of New Orleans. It demonstrated the philosemitism in this region by noting that between 1880 and 1914 Jewish mayors served every major port city from the Mason-Dixon Line to the Gulf coast of Texas, the only exception being Charleston. Nothing parallel to this happened elsewhere in America.⁹ Keep in mind that this was the era of massive eastern European Jewish migration. The second and third papers were by Dr. David T. Morgan.¹⁰ They dealt with two remarkable southern Jews, husband and wife Philip Phillips and Eugenia Levy Phillips. Philip was elected to the United States House of Representatives as a congressman from Alabama. Philip Phillips's memorial service was conducted in the chambers of the U.S. Supreme Court. Wife Eugenia served with Rose Greenhow as a Confederate spy. Her sister, Phoebe Levy Pember, was the matron of the largest Confederate military hospital (Chimborazo) in Richmond. The Randolph family of Virginia counted her among their closest friends. In these instances Jews mingled freely with America's "aristocracy" and were accorded respect and honor.

As a consequence of these papers and the stream of southern Jewish materials published from 1980 on, a reevaluation of American Jewish history occurred. Contemporary volumes are more balanced. I believe that is a direct result of the work accomplished by the SJHS. It should be a source of pride and fulfillment to us all.

NOTES

¹ Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *“Turn to the South”: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979).

² Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond, from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, VA, 1917).

³ Charles Reznikoff and Uriah Z. Engelman, *The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community* (Philadelphia, 1950).

⁴ Fedora Small Frank, *Five Families and Eight Young Men: Nashville and Her Jewry, 1850–1861* (Nashville, 1962); Frank, *Beginnings on Market Street: Nashville and Her Jewry, 1861–1901* (Nashville, 1976).

⁵ Saul Rubin, *Third to None: The Saga of Savannah Jewry 1733–1983* (Savannah, 1983.)

⁶ Myron Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979).

⁷ Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845–1915* (Philadelphia, 1978).

⁸ Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier with Malcolm Stern, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, GA, 1984).

⁹ David J. Goldberg, “The Administration of Herman Myers as Mayor of Savannah, Georgia, 1895–1897 and 1899–1907,” (master’s thesis, University of North Carolina, 1978).

¹⁰ David T. Morgan’s essays on Philip Phillips and Eugenia Levy Phillips appear in Proctor and Schmier with Stern, *Jews of the South*.

The Distance Traveled: Reminiscences of Twenty-five Years in SJHS

by

Janice Rothschild Blumberg

Antediluvian is the word that comes to mind when I think of the Southern Jewish Historical Society in the 1980s. The flood of regional Jewish historical societies had not yet begun—the Southern was the first—and very few, if any, universities offered courses in the subject. Interest was evidenced almost solely by the venerable American Jewish Historical Society, some of whose leaders, notably Saul Viener of Richmond, Rabbi Malcolm Stern, formerly of Norfolk, and Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus, godfather of American Jewish history, realized that Jews had been an integral part of southern life from colonial times onward. Their impact far outweighed their numbers.

By the 1980s a new generation had begun to research its roots. In the South the study followed the trend of scholarship elsewhere in the country. No longer the near-exclusive domain of senior citizens whose grandfathers fought for the Confederacy, the subject was now addressed by students of local and regional history with their broadened focus on community experience and societal development. Numbers of Jewish easterners who relocated to Dixie after World War II discovered that preconceptions of the area as *judenrein* had been gravely mistaken, and they became curious about the actual experience of their predecessors in the region. The time was right. Academicians who themselves were Jewish, serious amateur historians, a few rabbis, and leaders of the AJHS came to the rescue. Whereas an earlier attempt to

establish the Southern Jewish Historical Society had failed, this time it succeeded.

Shortly thereafter, in 1981, I attended my first SJHS conference. Held in Mobile, Alabama, the conference was warm with southern hospitality and gulf breezes but otherwise hardly memorable. Its paucity of prospects may be indicated by the fact that I was instantly placed on the board. This undoubtedly benefited me more than it did the society; for it was there that I became friendly with Dr. Louis Schmier of Valdosta State College (now University) who mentored me through the completion and publication of the book that I was then hoping to write.¹

More significant was Schmier's dedicated guidance of SJHS in those formative years. Officially he served as secretary, no mean task in itself, but in addition he shouldered a multitude of other responsibilities including direction of the conference programs and coediting the society's first published book, *Jews of the South*, with Dr. Samuel Proctor and the help of Rabbi Malcolm Stern. He also compiled and edited *Reflections of Southern Jewry*,² a collection of letters from Charles Wessolowsky, a former Georgia legislator turned journalist for *The Jewish South*, the first newspaper published expressly for Jews in the southern states. The letters were reports by Wessolowsky about Jewish communities across the South in 1878 and 1879, addressed to his editor, Edward B. M. Browne, who was then rabbi of Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple) and many years later became my great-grandfather. Therein lies a personal vignette.

At the 1983 conference held in Savannah in conjunction with the celebration of Georgia's 250th Anniversary, which also commemorated 250 years of Jewish settlement in the state, I was scheduled to deliver a paper based on a chapter of the book that I was writing about the civil rights activities of my late husband, Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild. Thinking more of my own upcoming talk than of the current proceedings, I jumped to attention when I heard Susan White, a graduate student from Emory, begin reading her paper based on research she had done as an undergraduate assistant to Schmier for his book on Wessolowsky, which I had not yet seen. I did not know until then that the letters

were addressed to Browne. My family had never mentioned the Atlanta newspaper nor had I read anything about it in all of his memorabilia that had come into my possession. White's citations revealed that extant copies of the weekly were preserved at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati and available on microfilm. I later studied them there, bought a copy of the film for my own use temporarily, and then gave it to Atlanta's William Breman Jewish Museum. Thus did the 1983 SJHS Conference open new vistas for me, and led to easy access for others to the paper's origin.³

The society had not yet gone from a crawl to a walk by the time of the Savannah conference. One clear indication of this was my rapid ascendancy to the office of president-elect, which put me in the hot seat at the conclusion of the Richmond conference in 1984. I had absolutely no idea of how such an organization should function or what I was expected to do, my only experience having been to serve for several years as a very naïve, inactive member of the board of AJHS. As president of SJHS, I did begin to speak up at AJHS meetings, supported by fellow trustee and former SJHS president Jack Coleman, to try to affect a viable joint membership fee for the two organizations. Both societies sought to enlarge their constituencies but encountered widespread confusion on the part of prospective members who thought that the Southern was a subsidiary of the American. We never succeeded in solving the problem, but, as usual, time served to lessen it considerably. Now a similar confusion exists between SJHS and the Goldring Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, formerly the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, also a good friend, which many of us support individually but deplore the confusion surrounding our separate identities.

As president of SJHS I reached out in every direction I could see for ways to promote interest in southern Jewish history. I tried to get representatives for the society in each of the major southern cities; tried to persuade rabbis to explain the educational objectives of the society in their communities; tried through the good offices of community leaders like Jack Coleman and Saul Viener to obtain financial support from Jewish federations;

*Janice Rothschild Blumberg.
Greeting attendees at a past SJHS conference.
(Photo by Beryl H. Weiner.)*

collected congregational histories from the region; and with the assistance of Maryann K. Friedman tried to develop a speakers bureau on southern Jewish history as a resource for organizations seeking to develop programs.

None of this made any immediately visible impact, but hopefully all of it together did help to create the more receptive environment in which subsequent growth ensued. Whenever I addressed audiences or wrote for publication I emphasized the importance of giving family memorabilia to archival repositories rather than the trash heap, trying to convince those who told me "Oh, my family wasn't important. No one would be interested," that the dusty contents of grandmother's attic were the raw materials used by historians to breathe life into otherwise deadly statistics. I recommended that they read Jacob Rader Marcus's

books on early American Jewry to understand that most of the fascinating characters about whom he wrote were “just ordinary people,” known to us only because somebody saved their letters, diaries, and account books.

One of my efforts to arouse interest in local Jewish history succeeded in a way that I had not anticipated. Knowing that Memphis had a strongly rooted Jewish community, I determined to take our conference there in 1985, hoping to stimulate activity and increase membership on behalf of SJHS. At the time the only Memphians who belonged were Rabbi James Wax, who was retired and in poor health, and Judy Peiser, executive director of the Center for Southern Folklore. Peiser took on the responsibility for local aspects of the conference program and Wax’s successor, Rabbi Harry Danziger, convinced Harriet Wise Stern to take charge of hospitality. A major factor in our success was that Philip Belz, owner of the fabulous Peabody Hotel and an old friend of my husband, David Blumberg, generously gave us the exceptionally reduced rates that enabled us to be headquartered in such luxurious surroundings. Thanks to all of them and entertainment by the inimitable Peabody ducks, we had a marvelous time in Memphis. For that we said, *Dayenu*, even before knowing of its byproduct. Our *lagniappe* was to learn that the conference had motivated Memphians to establish their own Jewish historical society. This has grown through the years and continues to stimulate interest in local and state Jewish history. Furthermore, it continues to provide SJHS with new vigor and leadership, including two subsequent presidents, Dr. Berkley Kalin and Sumner Levine.

That SJHS was gaining recognition became evident in 1986 when, rather than having to request hospitality from some community, we received an unsolicited invitation to hold our next conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. We heard a few snide remarks questioning whether South Florida was actually either southern or historically Jewish. These naysayers were soon given their comeuppance, however, when Dr. Henry Green with Dr. Abraham Gittleson presented a paper titled “Bagels, Blues and Black Beans: A Miami Mosaic,” and spent the rest of his time at

the conference lobbying for support of a projected statewide traveling exhibit on the Jewish heritage in Florida. From this modest beginning, with the help of others such as Laura Hochman of the Fort Lauderdale Jewish Community Center, and most notably Marcia Zerivitz, its founding executive director, the Jewish Museum of Florida came into being.

Attendees at the Fort Lauderdale conference also benefited from other advantages of the South Florida location. They visited the Cuban synagogue in Miami, heard a paper titled "Hotel Cuba" by Robert Levine, and were treated to a presentation on "Aspects of the 'Portuguese Jewish Nation' in the Caribbean" by Woodrow de Castro who came from Panama City, Panama.

Meanwhile, between attendances at conferences, some members of SJHS were busy working on their own projects, one of which was plotting and documenting Jewish grave sites in southern cemeteries. Tom Sokolsky-Wixon, who chaired the SJHS historic sites committee, undertook the process of compiling all Jewish cemetery records in Mississippi as well as recording abandoned Jewish burial sites throughout the state. B. H. Levy had already done this for Savannah, as Sol Breibart had done for Charleston, South Carolina. Gus and Marian Kaufman recorded Jewish graves in Macon and Brunswick, Georgia, and raised funds for restoring a neglected Jewish cemetery in Eufaula, Alabama. Dorothy and Samuel Werth, working in the 1816 Hebrew cemetery in Richmond, which encompasses what is believed to be the only Jewish soldiers' burial ground outside of Israel, found markers that appear to be from as early as 1791.

Strides were also made during these years to increase financial support for SJHS. At the suggestion of David Blumberg, the categories of Century Club (\$100) and Life Member (\$1000 paid over five years) were introduced, with Rabbi Alvin Sugarman of Atlanta becoming the first Life Member. An evening program in Atlanta served to heighten the visibility of SJHS and gain many new members. This was repeated in Atlanta more recently through the efforts of Jackie Metzel and the late, beloved Saul Viener, and hopefully will inspire others to do likewise in their communities in the future.

*Janice Rothschild Blumberg (left) with Melissa Fay Greene.
Blumberg introducing the author of the award-winning book,
The Temple Bombing, at the 1996 SJHS conference, Miami Beach.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

Perhaps the single most effective means of attracting new members has been the SJHS practice of holding its annual conferences in different cities, widely separated from each other whenever feasible. In the past two decades host cities have been Durham and Raleigh, North Carolina; Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama; Charleston, South Carolina (twice); Jackson, Mississippi; Richmond and Newport News, Virginia; Atlanta,

Georgia; New Orleans and Shreveport, Louisiana; Miami Beach, Florida; Hot Springs and Little Rock, Arkansas; Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee; and Baltimore, Maryland. The only exception made to the practice of being hosted by a traditionally southern community took place in 2000, when at the invitation of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the society met on the campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati.

Reviewing my own experience at the helm of SJHS I realize that I was fortunate to be sandwiched between the administrations of two exceptionally knowledgeable teachers/scholars, Sol Breibart and the late Dr. Sam Proctor of the University of Florida. Both men gave me much needed advice and encouragement, and provided the society with wise guidance in its early steps toward maturity. Subsequent presidents—Rachel Heimovics Braun, Carol B. Hart, Sheldon Hanft, Beryl Weiner, Berkley Kalin, Bruce Beeber, Catherine C. Kahn, Hollace Ava Weiner, Minette Cooper, Sumner Levine, and currently Scott Langston—have also brought special strengths to the society, not least of which has been to broaden interest in southern Jewish history in the seven different states where they live.

Occasionally I encounter someone who expresses the erroneous belief that one must be either southern or Jewish to belong to SJHS. This fallacy has been disproved from the earliest years of the society's existence when several attendees regularly flew in from California for the conferences. Others have consistently come from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and among the society's most dedicated members there have always been non-Jewish scholars like Carolyn LeMaster, known for her expertise on the Jewish history of Arkansas, and the current president, Scott Langston. In recent years subjects relating to southern Jewry have drawn scholars to SJHS conferences from Europe and Israel as well as from all parts of the USA. Some attend as speakers and presenters themselves, others are there simply to be stimulated, learn, and network with those who share their interests. Keynote speakers have included the late Ambassador Morris B. Abram, best-selling author Eli N. Evans, prize-winning playwright Alfred

Uhry, and, most recently, Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat, all native southerners deeply concerned with their southern Jewish heritage.

Regardless of its success in other areas, the true measure of any organization is the service that it renders, and in this respect SJHS has matured decisively. From its earliest days it has produced a quarterly newsletter. At that time it also published two books and since then has provided partial subvention for others, a program now administered through a grants committee that also supports completion of historic work in diverse media. By means of a contest publicized through universities, it formerly encouraged students to research southern Jewish history, offering a modest cash prize and an opportunity to present the winning essay at the annual conference. The society's crowning achievement, however, has been the publication of *Southern Jewish History*. Now in its tenth year, this scholarly journal standing alongside its older distinguished counterparts in libraries everywhere, gives ample testimony to the growth of the society and confirms the premise of its founders that the southern Jewish experience is a unique and vital aspect of American Jewish history.

NOTES

¹ Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South* (Macon, GA, 1985).

² Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA, 1982).

³ The author's ensuing research on her great-grandfather led to an article in *Southern Jewish History*. See Janice Rothschild Blumberg, "Rabbi Alphabet Browne: The Atlanta Years" *Southern Jewish History* 5 (2002): 1-42.

Editor's Note on History and Memory

When Eli N. Evans was asked to reflect on the history of the society he requested a list of the presidents and conference meeting places. Our starting point was a list on the society's webpage that was hitherto largely accepted. Past presidents Janice R. Blumberg, Rachel Heimovics Braun, Catherine Kahn, and Hollace Ava Weiner clarified and brought the list up-to-date with Blumberg even going to her collection of society newsletters dating back three decades. As the memoirs came in, further questions arose and discussions ensued with the memoirists and past president Sol Breibart. Finally, our history detective Eric L. Goldstein came forward with archival research that altered key data concerning the society's history. One of the lessons re-learned from this experience is that oral history is excellent in unearthing an individual's perspective of what occurred in the past from their vantage point in the present but that it is essential to verify facts. Yet the written record – the seemingly authoritative list on the society webpage – should also be used with scrutiny.

In his search, Goldstein was assisted by Dale Rosengarten and Eve Casset at the College of Charleston Jewish Heritage Collection (which houses the society's records) and by Kevin Proffitt, archivist at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. He wishes to thank those individuals as does the editor. Thanks are also extended to the past presidents who assisted in the search and those who shared their reflections.

The following includes a brief history of the origins of the society largely compiled by Goldstein; the corrected list of presidents, dates, and conference sites; the first three pages of the first issue of the predecessor of this journal listing the earlier society's officers and editorial board, the table of contents, and a prescient forward by Jacob Rader Marcus, the late acknowledged

dean of American Jewish history; and finally additional pictures from the society's past.

To keep the record straight, here are sources Goldstein used for the history and the list:

Letter from Saul Viener, December 28, 1956, inviting interested people to attend an organizing meeting for the Southern Jewish Historical Society to be held on January 13, 1957, box 1, file 1, SJHS Papers, MS Coll 1056, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston.

Letter from David Goldberg to "Dear Members and Prospective Members," April 6, 1978, (following up after the Raleigh conference) that included an attached list of SJHS officers elected in 1978: Jack Coleman, president; Louis Schmier, vice president; Larry Capilouto, treasurer; David Goldberg, secretary; Saul Rubin, president of the board of trustees; Sam Proctor, Sol Breibart, Harriet Zimmerman, and Saul Viener, trustees; box I, file 1, SJHS Papers.

"Additional Facts About the Southern Jewish Historical Society," (flyer; c. 1984) (which says the Raleigh conference was in 1978 and lists the presidents to date), SJHS Papers.

Louis Schmier, "Historical Society Studies Southern Jewish Past," *Southern Israelite*, April 14, 1978, 29.

Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections on Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA, 1982), Introduction.

SJHS Savannah Conference Program, November 17-19, 1978, box 21, file 1, SJHS Papers.

Malcolm H. Stern Papers (which has a full set of SJHS newsletters going back to 1978 as well as the program for the original conference in Raleigh, March 11-12, 1978), Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Mark K. Bauman

Revisiting History

While working on his article that follows on page 39, Eric L. Goldstein discovered discrepancies in the early history of the Southern Jewish Historical Society that appeared on the society's webpage. He summarized these discrepancies in two emails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, on August 10 and 13, 2007. Here is a summary of the closest we can come to a correct history largely quoting from those emails.

The original SJHS was organized at a meeting on January 13, 1957, at the home of Saul and Jackie Viener in Richmond. That society remained active on and off for about a decade.

In October 1976 a conference on the history of southern Jewry, sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society and supported by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and the local Jewish community, convened in Richmond, Virginia, and stimulated great interest in southern Jewish history.

The following spring (1977), Saul Viener, Louis Schmier, Abram Kanof, and David Goldberg met in the Raleigh airport and organized the society with Kanof serving as host/acting president, but the documents they signed named Viener as the first "real" president of the organization.

The first SJHS conference following the Richmond conference took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1978. Viener presided at this founding conference of the newly reorganized SJHS. A circular (dated April 6, 1978) following up this conference states, "the momentum gained in Raleigh is now being continued by a membership drive." An article by Louis Schmier in the [Atlanta] *Southern Israelite*, April 14, 1978, reported, "[The] society is a reality after a year of planning . . . the launching effort was a conference on southern Jewish history held at Raleigh, NC and attended by 150."

At the 1978 conference in Raleigh, Jack Coleman was elected president and Rabbi Saul Rubin became president of the board of trustees. Coleman remained president through 1980 and was succeeded by Rubin. Saul Viener, meanwhile, moved into leadership positions of AJHS, becoming chairman of the board of trustees in 1978 and president the following year.

The next SJHS conference was held in November 1978 in Savannah. Since then, SJHS conferences have been held annually with one exception. Thanks to Hurricane Hugo, the 1989 conference set for Charleston, SC, November 3 through 5, was postponed until the following March.

Conferences and Presidents

The following table shows the year, the location, and the presiding president for each SJHS conference. All conferences were held in the fall unless otherwise indicated.

DATE	LOCATION	PRESIDENT
April 1978	Raleigh, NC	Saul Viener
1978	Savannah, GA	Jack Coleman
1979	Charleston, SC	Jack Coleman
1980	Jacksonville, FL	Jack Coleman
1981	Mobile, AL	Saul Rubin
1982	New Orleans, LA	Saul Rubin
1983	Savannah, GA	Solomon Breibart
1984	Richmond, VA	Solomon Breibart
1985	Memphis, TN	Janice Blumberg
1986	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	Janice Blumberg
1987	Durham, NC	Samuel Proctor
1988	Birmingham, AL	Samuel Proctor
March, 1990	Charleston, SC	Rachel Heimovics
1990	Jackson, MS	Rachel Heimovics
1991	Alexandria, VA	Carol Hart
1992	Montgomery, AL	Sheldon Hanft
1993	Atlanta, GA	Sheldon Hanft
1994	Raleigh, NC	Beryl Weiner
1995	New Orleans, LA	Beryl Weiner
1996	Miami Beach, FL	Berkley Kalin
1997	Hot Springs, AR	Berkley Kalin
1998	Nashville, TN	Bruce Beeber
1999	Richmond, VA	Bruce Beeber
2000	Cincinnati, OH	Catherine Kahn
2001	Norfolk, VA	Catherine Kahn
2002	Shreveport, LA	Hollace Weiner
2003	Memphis, TN	Hollace Weiner
2004	Charleston, SC	Minette Cooper
2005	Baltimore, MD	Sumner Levine
2006	Little Rock, AR	Sumner Levine
2007	Bethesda, MD	Scott Langston

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FOREWORD

THERE IS NEED for a journal for the Southern Jewish Historical Society. In the larger setting of American history, to the days of the great Civil War, the South was particularly important in our national period. Wealth and culture were present in a relatively large measure. It is essential that the life and story and achievements of those who lived south of the Pennsylvania border be more adequately studied and described. It may well be that in examining the history of the Southern Jew, new light may be shed on the trends and characteristics that prevailed in that important region of our country.

The Southern Jew was an urban dweller, a man of commerce and business, who played an important part in the economy of his community. A study of him as a shopkeeper and merchant is necessary, inasmuch as the political dominance of the plantation owner and his preoccupation with his own welfare has tended to obscure the importance of commerce and industry in that area in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century.

The Jew was deeply immersed in the relatively high culture of the South Atlantic littoral; therefore, it is not surprising that the reform of Orthodox Judaism was first undertaken in Charleston, South Carolina. In a sense, the rise of the Reformed Society of Israelites in 1824 is a significant chapter in Jewish history, for a generation was to pass before the European radical Jewish Reformers were to reach the stage of religious liberalization that distinguished the South Carolina Jewish pioneers.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, there has been a new South. Its rise has been marked by an industrial revolution. New cities are springing up — and new Jewish communities with them. Some day, in this South of tomorrow, there will blossom forth a new vigorous culture that will affect the Jew as American citizen and as Jewish religionist.

It is imperative that the story of the old be retold, correctly, and in proper perspective, that the magic of the new be captured while it is young and vital and everpresent.

The Southern Jewish Historical Society has dedicated itself to a great task. It is confronted with a challenge and an opportunity that must be met not only with enthusiasm, but also with earnest labor, scientific precision, a faultless methodology, and a passionate desire for objectivity.

To these ends I would have you dedicate your efforts, and this journal.

JACOB R. MARCUS

American Jewish Archives
Cincinnati, Ohio

SJHS History in Pictorial Memory*

*Six former presidents, Alexandria, 1991.
Left to right: Sol Breibart, Sam Proctor, Jack Coleman,
Saul Viener, Rachel Heimovics Braun, Janice Rothschild Blumberg.
(Courtesy of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.)*

* The pictures that follow were taken at SJHS conferences, except for the one of Berkley Kalin. Most are from the collection of the managing editor. Some were photographed by Bruce H. Weiner, DDS, at the 2003 Memphis conference, by Beryl Weiner in 1990 at the Charleston and Jackson conferences, and by other, anonymous photographers at various conferences. Dates and places are given where available.

Carol (right) and Ricka Hart, Jackson, Mississippi, 1990.

Berkley Kalin, Memphis, 1996 (photo by Leigh Rogoff).

Catherine Kahn, Memphis, 2003.

*Catherine Kahn (left), Bruce Beeber,
and Hollace Weiner, Memphis, 2003.*

Hollace Weiner (left) and Minette Cooper, Memphis, 2003.

Sumner Levine with Helen Wax, Memphis, 2003.

Scott Langston, Memphis, 2003.

Len Rogoff, Memphis, 2003.

Louis Schmier (right) with Bobbie Malone.

Mark Bauman, Memphis, 2003.

Stephen Whitfield, Memphis, 2003.

*Saul Viener (left) and Bruce Beeber, Richmond, 1999.
(Courtesy of Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)*

Making History: An Interview with Saul Viener

by

Eric L. Goldstein

With the passing of Saul Viener on July 25, 2006, the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) lost not only its founding president, but an inspirational leader who had continually guided the organization's growth and development over the last half-century. Saul presided over the first meeting of the organization in his Richmond, Virginia, living room in 1957, trying to build on the excitement generated by the American Jewish Tercentenary, which had been commemorated three years earlier. Although this first attempt at organization was relatively short-lived, Saul eventually won recognition for a rejuvenated society and helped establish it on a national basis.

In addition to his central role in the SJHS, Saul was a prominent leader of the Richmond Jewish community, where over the years he headed many institutions including the Richmond Jewish Community Center, the Richmond Jewish Community Council (now the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond), Congregation Beth Ahabah, and the Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, which he helped found in 1977. On the national scene, he was active with the Jewish Publication Society, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Council of Jewish Federations, and was a guiding spirit of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), where he served as chairman of the board of trustees (1978-1979, 1982-1985) and president (1979-1982). He was also a longtime board member of the Virginia Historical Society, which named him an honorary vice president. Alongside his

many organizational accomplishments, Saul published the results of his own historical research on American and southern Jews in various local publications, in the journal of the AJHS, and in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.¹

The following interview with Saul is presented as an effort to explore and reflect upon the role of an influential layperson in building the field of American Jewish history and its subfield, southern Jewish history. It resulted from my friendship with Saul, which began in 2003 when he and his wife, Jackie, moved to Atlanta in order to be closer to family as Saul's health was declining. As a lifelong supporter of Jewish scholarly endeavors, Saul soon became a regular attendee at cultural and educational programs in Atlanta, including those sponsored by the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies at Emory University, where I teach Jewish history. Over the next few years we got together regularly to discuss our mutual interests, including the affairs of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. In the spring of 2006, I visited Saul at Piedmont Hospital, where he was recuperating after a procedure related to his illness. We spoke about the fields of American and southern Jewish history, and Saul shared some stories of his early years as a builder of both the AJHS and SJHS. Upon further discussion, Saul revealed to me that despite his leadership in numerous historical societies and involvement in a Richmond-based oral history project, he had never sat for an oral history interview. It was clear to me that it would be important to record his experiences for posterity, and that being interviewed might also help lift his spirits as his health declined. With the encouragement of Jackie and their daughter, Helene Sowerby, Saul and I met on three separate occasions during the summer of that year. During the sessions we covered a wide range of topics from his childhood in small-town West Virginia to his naval career during World War II to his work as an institution builder.²

What follows is a transcript of our conversations, arranged, edited, and annotated so as to focus on the most important points, provide a clear, chronological narrative, and offer background. The dialogue is divided into four sections, each with a brief

introduction to place the interview within a larger historical context and to guide the reader through the various stages of Saul's life.

"In the Wilds of West Virginia": Growing up in Charles Town

Saul Viener was born in 1921 in Charles Town, West Virginia, where his Lithuanian immigrant parents had established themselves in the scrap metal business more than a decade earlier. Although their experience was not typical of Jewish immigrant families of that generation, the Vieners were part of a significant minority of American Jews who settled in small towns, seeking economic opportunity and a better quality of life away from the country's major urban centers.³ The small-town environment in which Saul was raised had a profound impact on his life and career. First, as he makes clear, living in isolation from the large American Jewish population centers forced his family to work harder to maintain their traditions and practices. The concerted effort required to keep kosher, observe holidays, obtain access to Jewish education, and stay in touch with other Jews made the Vieners more conscious of and committed to their Jewishness. Second, living as part of a small minority in Charles Town taught Saul how to interact with people of different backgrounds and to successfully navigate cultural and religious divides, a skill that would serve him well in later roles. Finally, Saul's hometown, where two of George Washington's brothers had lived and where abolitionist John Brown was tried for treason, provided a rich historical setting that helped spark his long love affair with the American past.⁴

GOLDSTEIN: Start by telling me a little bit about your parents, what their names were, and how they came to this country.

VIENER: I am the son of Chaim Yitzhok ben Boruch—Hyman Viener. My mother, Golda Rivkah bat Yosef, was from a nearby village.

GOLDSTEIN: What was her surname?

VIENER: Mozenter. And they came from Nemaščiai and Raseiniai [in Lithuania]. I'm not sure which are the villages and

which are the provinces.⁵ My father came in 1899, an orphan. His mother had been married twice before and widowed twice, and a match was arranged with my father's father, who was a much older man but had been widowed. So growing up as a child, my father had nephews and nieces who called him Uncle Hyman, and they were practically the same age. [His] mother was a businesswoman. She had a tavern and her husband studied. There was a robbery, and my grandmother was murdered. Her husband went to pieces.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father and mother know each other before they left?

VIENER: It was always a joke. My mother said, "I didn't know you," and my father said, "You did." My father traveled together with a brother, Harry, who later settled in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and also a group of *landsleit*, and they came secretly, as I think was often the case. They traveled by night and left from Hamburg. [They were] very young when they came. Pop, I think, was sixteen. Uncle Harry was seventeen. And they came into Philadelphia, where they were met by a cousin who put them on a train to Shippensburg [PA]. My father had an uncle who lived in Shippensburg who had come to the states some years before. His name was Bernard Viener. They called him "Bernie Diamond," because apparently he was quite successful; he wore diamonds. The boys arrived one day, and the next day they were given packs to put on their backs to sell notions and were sent out to the country. They spoke no English. The first night they slept in a haystack and Uncle Harry, the elder, cried himself to sleep. The next day they started out and they went to a farmhouse, where a very kindly woman said to her husband, "These boys do not understand any English. Tell them a few words." That one story is typical of these Pennsylvania Dutch people, who were so compassionate that in later years, my father would regularly go back once or twice a year to some of the families to see them and keep in touch. My mother came over in her late teens. I forget exactly if she came with someone or on her own, but she came to Philadelphia and she lodged with a lady who was a cousin of my father's, Rasha, whom I knew.

GOLDSTEIN: How did she get together with your father?

VIENER: One day Rasha saw my father, who was then working out in Shippensburg, and said, "You should marry her." And he went to [my mother] and she was scrubbing the floor, helping keep house. As the story goes, he went up to her and said "I want to marry you." With that she overturned the bucket and ran from the room. But they did get together, and they were married in Philadelphia and went to live in the Shippensburg area, where a number of the immigrants had clustered. They were all peddlers, and my father and Uncle Harry worked together. They noticed at one point that there were large boxcars parked at the railroad stations of various little towns, and people were bringing old tires and rubber and throwing [them] into the cars, and they were collecting and bringing old farm equipment. So they asked lots of questions and started buying up scrap iron and rubber. That's how they got started with that. Pop realized there were too many people doing the same thing, and he had to find another place to work and had heard a great deal about the South. My father learned English very quickly and someone had brought to his attention an advertisement in one of the newspapers of a place of business in Staunton, Virginia, and he took the train—the Norfolk and Western—to Staunton. On the way down, my father, who was quite gregarious, met a gentleman who extolled the virtues of the town where he lived—Charles Town, in West Virginia. He went on to Staunton, and what was advertised was not exactly what it turned out to be. So on the return, he decided he would get off at Charles Town and see what that was like. This was 1907. He hired a horse and buggy and traveled around through the county and found that it was a very pretty farming area, but there were two limestone quarries, which generated a lot of scrap. And he made arrangements to rent a house with a stable and a yard. He came back to Shippensburg and told my mother what he had done, and she said, "Great idea." It was as simple as that. But Uncle Harry and the whole family exclaimed, "You go down there into the wilderness, you'll become goyim."

GOLDSTEIN: But Shippensburg wasn't exactly a metropolis.

VIENER: That's right, but there were a couple dozen [Jewish] families. So they moved to Charles Town [with] a daughter, Chaya Sarah, named for both mothers, and a little boy, Harry.⁶

GOLDSTEIN: Were there any other Jews in Charles Town?

VIENER: Yes, it so happens. The Palmbaum brothers, George and Myer. They were quite some entrepreneurs. They owned a big ready-to-wear [store] and a hotel, the Palm Hotel. They were German Jews, part of the Baltimore sphere. There was another family, the Theodores, also out of the Baltimore orbit, and the last member of that family, who was my contemporary, died about a year ago.

GOLDSTEIN: They were eastern European Jews?

VIENER: Yes, but they called themselves German Jews. They had five daughters, and the second daughter, Ruth, worked for my father as a bookkeeper. They did not keep kosher, which we did. But periodically on the holidays, Mr. Theodore would come with a list [when] my father had an order to pick up in Washington or Baltimore.

GOLDSTEIN: At this time, about how big was Charles Town?

VIENER: About three thousand people, even when I was in high school. But there was another little town adjoining—Ranson—which was perhaps one thousand people. Why it was a separate municipality I never knew.

GOLDSTEIN: So there were these three Jewish families, essentially?

VIENER: There was another family, Herz—an unmarried brother and sister and their mother, and they were German Jews. Mr. Herz was a very prominent citizen in Charles Town. He was a very fine, lovely gentleman with whom there was a friendly relationship.

GOLDSTEIN: So your father set up a scrap metal business in Charles Town. I don't know much about the scrap metal business. How did it work, exactly?

VIENER: He collected, then shipped to the mills or to dealers. Then it went on to the steel factories. Some of it was scrap iron, but it was various [other] metals as well.

GOLDSTEIN: It seems to me that was a big Jewish business.

VIENER: It was an opportunity for Jews to be independent. Now, after living there a few years, my sister became ill and died—scarlet fever and something else. My parents had established a connection at Hagerstown [MD], which was on the Norfolk and Western, and they would send their chickens to be slaughtered. Depending on the season of the year, they came back within a few hours, and when it was the hot weather, they were [spoiled and] thrown out, of course. That's why there was an appreciation of vegetarian, dairy things on the part of many Jews who tried to be observant.

GOLDSTEIN: How observant were your parents?

VIENER: The business was open on Saturday and my father established a branch with two of my older brothers in Washington. He traveled [and] every now and then when he could he went to shul. But strictly kosher—never dreamt of eating anything forbidden. The holidays were scrupulously observed. Fifteen miles from Charles Town was Martinsburg, West Virginia, in Berkeley County, and there was quite a little community of Jews. My parents were involved in the organizing and building of a synagogue there, and we would go there for the holidays and stay with a family by the name of Fine.⁷ How we all stayed in that house, I don't know. Not only did we stay, but a young black woman who worked for us would go along, and I can still see Eleanor Cooper walking with my brother Eli and me from the Fine's residence to the shul. In Martinsburg, a *shokhet* from Hagerstown conducted the services, [and] ultimately they were able to hire a religious functionary who was a *shokhet*. There would be these weekly trips. Someone would drive my mother and a couple of us over [to buy] poultry, depending on the season. A gentile butcher shop made a corner of the space available for the *shokhet*. And the religious functionary traveled around the nearby towns to teach the boys and prepare them for bar mitzvah. I was the youngest of eight brothers, and there were big bar mitzvahs for the boys.

GOLDSTEIN: In Martinsburg?

VIENER: No. They were held in Charles Town. They'd have minyan and a party and all that. Also in the early years my parents hired a tutor, who lived with them, to teach the boys. And

there are pictures of the man as part of the family. He helped my father in the business. That was over a period of quite a few years. As time went on, the tutor was not available, and the last of the religious functionaries that were teaching the boys left Martinsburg, as the Jews were dwindling in numbers.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there something causing the economy to decline there?

VIENER: Actually, it was a big B&O railroad center and also Interwoven Mills was there. I don't know if it was just that the Jewish population dwindled. So I never really had any formal training, but when I was thirteen, my father showed me how to lay tefillin, and the order of service. And the boys, as long as they were home, put on a tallis and tefillin with some regularity. They didn't have a minyan. But we had a big house, and in the library they'd do the ritual, there in the wilds of West Virginia.

GOLDSTEIN: Where did you spend the holidays after the community in Martinsburg declined?

VIENER: We went to Baltimore and we stayed with *landsleit*, whom we knew extremely well. The families kept in touch until almost recent times. Their name was Hoffmann and they lived on Saratoga Street. Then, when we established the business in Washington, we became connected there. On the holidays my parents arranged with a kosher caterer, Mrs. Abrams, who ran a boarding house, to prepare meals. We ate in the social hall at the Fifth Street Shul.⁸ My mother would bring God knows what from Charles Town. Not only would we eat, but there were some other folks that were always invited, which was a unique experience.

GOLDSTEIN: How did your mother feel about living in Charles Town?

VIENER: Very lonely.

GOLDSTEIN: Did she socialize with the non-Jewish women?

VIENER: Not really very much. The schoolteachers loved to come to visit, particularly as mother was always serving cake with wine. And to a degree there were certain—I'll call them friendships, or relationships—with neighbors. On Fridays, my mother baked bread, challah, cakes, everything. And we had a neighbor next door, Mrs. Gardner, who was incapacitated. She would say,

“Oh, Mrs. Viener, I can smell those very nice fragrances. You’ve been baking.” So my mother would send her something over. So that became a ritual, too. The gentiles liked the matzo, and every year when the order went to Baltimore for the provisions for Pesach, they knew when Pesach was and they wanted this.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your parents speak Yiddish to you?

VIENER: We were a bilingual household. My mother spoke Yiddish a great deal of the time at home [and] a fair amount of English. My father, more English than Yiddish, but, you know, we all understood it—varying degrees of understanding and varying degrees of speaking it. My oldest brother, Harry, broke his teeth every time he tried to say something in Yiddish, whereas Joe was just the opposite. My father subscribed to the *Morning Journal*.⁹ Often, we sat at the table after dinner and my father read from it, and enlarged upon whatever the story was. We learned about lots of things that we did not know from the general press.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the predominant ethnic group or religious group among the non-Jewish population?

VIENER: Just a mix. Catholics were a minority, and the Catholic church was just a short block from us. We had neighbors, two maiden ladies, whose mother was a Catholic and father an Episcopalian. So Miss Betty assumed the responsibility as a Catholic of looking after St. James’s. She would go on Saturday afternoons to sweep out the church, put the flowers in there. There were a handful of people who came for Mass in Charles Town, and one priest served the entire county. There were a number of Italians at the quarries. Harper’s Ferry had a church that catered to a larger Catholic population. And there were a number of old [Protestant] families, [like the] members of the Washington family. Not George’s immediate family, but cousins and those sorts of descendants. There was Miss Christine Washington [who] lived up the street from us, and Dr. John Washington.¹⁰

GOLDSTEIN: Were you conscious of that as a child that they were related to George Washington?

VIENER: Oh, yes. Everybody knew that, and the history that Charles Washington¹¹ laid out Charles Town. The Washingtons owned vast tracts of land, which incorporated the eastern

panhandle of West Virginia. Charles Washington built a house in Charles Town, which is still standing, and Samuel Washington¹² built a house west of town. Charles's home [was] Happy Retreat, also known as Mordington, and Samuel Washington's was Harewood, where James Madison and Dolley Payne Todd were married.¹³ We were told all of this as we went through school, also about John Brown and Harper's Ferry. He was tried in Charles Town, in the courthouse, which is still standing about a block and half from where we lived.¹⁴ So we got a lot of that, and it affected all of us that knew that. When we went elsewhere, we could talk about the town where we lived, and it so happened that I loved all the stories.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father establish relationships with non-Jews through his business?

VIENER: Yes, he did—any number of them. I have a picture somewhere of my father with Mr. Rodefer, the butcher, in the volunteer firemen's organization. And then the Order of Red Men, that was very popular. [He was a member of] all these organizations. And my oldest brother ran and was voted in as a member of [the] city council. Terribly important to my parents was civic responsibility. Voting was very important. Came the Fourth of July or Decoration Day, we had a big front porch [with] hanging ferns and that sort of thing. My mother would put a flag in each one.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there ever any incidence of antisemitism?

VIENER: Oh, yes. Joe and Harry were in the same class, even though they were two years apart. One time, they came home, crying. The teacher said, "The Jews killed Christ." Well, my father went up to school and Mr. Denny, the principal, was a very fine, upstanding gentleman. My father stood over six feet tall—no shrinking violet. Mr. Denny was most sympathetic. And then there were the occasional taunts about Jews this or Jews that, but by and large there was very little of that. So it was really a wholesome ending. But the gentiles—on reflection—recognized how it was [for us]. When my brother, Eli, who was two years older than I, was going to graduate from high school, [the principal] Mr. Hurley came to my father and said, "I'd like to have a Jewish rabbi come and speak to the graduating class [at] commencement

*Jefferson County Court House, Charles Town, West Virginia.
Landmark famous for the treason trial of John Brown,
following the insurrection at Harper's Ferry in 1859.
(Postcard courtesy of Eric L. Goldstein.)*

exercises.” It turned out the graduation was Shavuos. Because my father couldn’t get an Orthodox rabbi to come, he made some inquiries and arranged for a Rabbi Breslau,¹⁵ a Conservative rabbi, to come. He came and spoke brilliantly.

GOLDSTEIN: Where was he from?

VIENER: Washington. Many years later, when I rose in the ranks of the American Jewish Historical Society, I met a very nice lady, and her father was Rabbi Breslau. She was Ruth Fein,¹⁶ who succeeded me as president.

GOLDSTEIN: Tell me a little bit about high school.

VIENER: [There was] a chance to take Latin, which appealed to me. There were just a handful of boys and girls that signed up for that. The Latin teacher was Miss Martha Phillips. [She] was a neighbor who taught some of my brothers, too, and her father was head of one of the banks. Nice lady. And that was an eye opener. I just learned so much. She just happened to be a knowledgeable lady. And then, junior year, there were a fair number that took French. Miss Hill was a character, a *farbrente* Baptist. One day, she came to the front door and said to my mother, “Madame, I understand you’ve accepted Christ.” So [my mother] said, “No, I don’t think I have.” That took care of that. At some point, somebody must have come by and my mother said, “Thank you so much for your literature,” and that was [the source of the misunderstanding]. That was the first overture that we knew anything about. So she taught French, not too well. She had an allergy to chalk dust, so before class started, there were a couple of people—I will not name them—who banged the erasers.

GOLDSTEIN: Were you involved in any clubs or activities?

VIENER: Yes, there was a science club. I was not a sportsman. My brother Maurice, who was four years older, was manager of the football team. And, of course, one went to all the high school football games, the basketball games. That was *de rigueur*.

GOLDSTEIN: Tell me about your college experience.

VIENER: Living in Charles Town was a professor for the University of Pennsylvania, Stanley Shugert.¹⁷ He came back—his mother lived there—and he took an interest in my brothers, and my father went to him about school, and of course he worked for

*Saul Viener.
High school graduation picture, 1938.
(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and
Archives, Richmond.)*

the University of Pennsylvania, and the boys went. Joe went to Georgetown, but then Jake went [to the University of Pennsylvania, as well as] Reuben, Maurice, Eli.

GOLDSTEIN: So you didn't want to repeat that?

VIENER: I sort of knew and didn't know what I wanted. I wanted something different at that time, being the youngest child. My academic high school standing was pretty good. I didn't make valedictorian or salutatorian, but I was up there. I guess I could

have made [the Ivy League] too, but I didn't want to go away to school. A lot in my class were going to Shepherd College,¹⁸ so I went, except one year I went to George Washington University, then came back to Shepherd. One of my older brothers took me over to see about enrolling. There were all these people in the leadership of this little college [who were] truly educators. Anyway, I had a class in modern European history. I had a wonderful teacher who came from Hawkinsville, Georgia—Ruth Scarborough.¹⁹ Every Monday we were to have read the *New York Times* on Sunday, and we were quizzed. You could buy it in Charles Town, believe it or not.

Venturing Out

Saul's decision to remain close to home and attend Shepherd College was motivated in part by his strong identification with the Charles Town area and its history. By remaining in West Virginia during his college years, however, Saul delayed his encounter with the wider world only temporarily. When he finally did venture out, first as a commissioned naval officer in Brisbane, Australia, during World War II and later as a representative of his family's business in Richmond, Virginia, he found his surroundings full of new experiences and opportunities, especially in terms of Jewish community life. Unlike many Jewish military personnel during World War II who left behind thickly Jewish neighborhoods and got their first taste of the non-Jewish world, Saul's stint in Brisbane gave him his first chance to attend synagogue regularly and to socialize extensively with other Jews, including his future wife, Jacqueline (Jackie) Wolman, daughter of the local rabbi. When Saul and Jackie later married and settled down in Richmond, Saul immersed himself in an array of Jewish organizational activities that he had never dreamed of growing up in a small town.

Another unexpected opportunity came in the two years between Saul's navy service and his move to Richmond, when he enrolled as an M.A. student at West Virginia University. Knowing that he was interested in history but uncertain exactly on what subfield he would focus, his life was changed forever when his

adviser suggested that he write a thesis on the life of a prominent American Jew, Isidor Straus, the U.S. congressman and Macy's department store co-owner who died in the Titanic disaster.²⁰ At a time when there were no specialized programs in American Jewish history and students in secular universities were rarely encouraged to work on Jewish topics, Saul's experience stands out as unusual. Although Saul's hopes of becoming a history teacher ultimately gave way to his parents' insistence that he join the family business, his M.A. training did set him on a lifelong path of engagement with the history of American Jews.

VIENER: Well, I finished [college] in May of '42. I'd already signed up for the draft. My brother, Jake, had applied for a commission from the Navy and he was given an ensign's commission. So I applied, and this commission came through in August. I was sent to Cornell University Naval Training School and a program at Harvard. I finished on the 16th of December and went right away to report in Norfolk, to go to Brisbane, Australia. I reported Christmas Day 1942 and was really launched in the Navy. I was on the staff of Admiral Daniel Barbey, who was chairman of the Amphibious Forces of the southwest Pacific.²¹ We were at sea for six weeks and arrived in Brisbane on the last day of January '43. I became friendly with a couple of guys on the ship. One was a man by the name of "Cash" – Cassius Marcellus Keller – who had been with a radio station in Washington.²² He was much older, but knowledgeable, and had a lot to talk about. There were few other people like that. When we got to Brisbane, it was midsummer, and we were really close to a lovely residential area with poinsettias and flowers in bloom. The next day we were free, so we took the tram into the city, and we were impressed with the beauty, the old-fashioned nature of it. That night I went through the telephone directory, looking for a synagogue listing. I could not find one, so during the week, I mentioned it to Cash, who was Catholic and had located the major church. Later in the week he said, "Saul, look in the paper. Here's a Jewish wedding. Here's the name of the rabbi." So I went to the public phone there at the post, and [called]. I said I was a naval officer stationed at Camp

Doomben, and inquired about the synagogue, if there were services, and when. This very pleasant voice [which turned out to be that of my future wife, Jackie] said, "Services are at 5:15, before the blackout," and she said, "You're welcome to come here after services." You know, you refuse the first invitation, or decline, anyway. So she says, "Suit yourself." I called back, realizing that I didn't know how to get to the synagogue. So she told me about the tram, and which one to take. Meanwhile, I said, "I'd be happy to come. I appreciate it." So I went. The person intoning the service was the Reverend Wolman, who later became my father-in-law.²³ He was in uniform, because the rabbis of the principal congregations at each of the capitals—Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth—all became chaplains. So people collected the servicemen at the conclusion of the services. Blanche, Jackie's younger sister, was there, and she and her father collected all of us that were left over. The synagogue was really just a block behind where they lived, facing the botanical gardens. It was an old colonial house with a central hall, and a separate kitchen, like in the American South. And there, laid out, was a perfectly beautiful table—lots of silverware, china, and a gracious hostess, who became my mother-in-law.²⁴ In the group were several American army chaplains and some other American servicemen who had arrived in Brisbane pretty recently. And there were a couple of Australian servicemen, whose wives were Brisbane girls, who came every Friday night, because my mother-in-law just collected people, and looked after these young couples. It was just a wonderful occasion, there at the other end of the world. My mother-in-law would always say on Friday night, "You're welcome to come to services tomorrow morning, and come here afterwards, but I know that many of you have to serve on duty." After dinner, I went into the kitchen and said, "Could I help clean up?" And they said, "No, no, no. You don't have to. We don't want you to do that." Anyway, Jackie was washing dishes, and a couple of the other young women, and so I came back Saturday. They had lunch, and I lingered in the afternoon, and I lingered—they couldn't get rid of me.

GOLDSTEIN: How had your father-in-law become a rabbi in Australia?

VIENER: My father-in-law was a Londoner, and my mother-in-law was born in Manchester. My father-in-law's parents had come from either East Prussia or Lithuania many years before, and my mother-in-law's parents had come as young people from Lithuania. The chief rabbi was urging the young clergy to go out to the colonies, and all the rabbis in Australia were from England. He had been the rabbi in Cork [Ireland], where the girls grew up. Anyway, they signed up for three years, over the protest of his parents. So that's how they got there, and the war intervened.

GOLDSTEIN: Was Brisbane a jumping-off point for the rest of the Pacific? Did a lot of people come through there?

VIENER: Our outfit was one of the first groups of American military that reached Australia. When the Philippines were evacuated, and other places, the [evacuees] went all the way to Melbourne, which was on the bottom of Australia. As the forces were coming back up, MacArthur was there at Brisbane, a couple of blocks from where we were, and it was interesting. He was such a character, that everything stopped when his automobile was brought for him. People stood on the side, and everybody was saluting. He made himself even more important than he was. He was not very popular among those who came to Brisbane. Anyway, our offices were in a building that had been an office building. We took over one floor, and I was the communications officer, decoding and coding messages. Up the street was the headquarters of the Allied forces in the southwest Pacific. We used to see General MacArthur with frequency. I worked, and whenever possible I went to the Wolmans'.

GOLDSTEIN: How did you and Jackie end up getting married?

VIENER: Well, I started courting her, and she was receptive. I wrote to my parents, who raised questions, but nevertheless [she was] the rabbi's daughter. Her parents were very much opposed. On the day of the wedding, my father-in-law said to Jackie, in front of me, "It's not too late to change your mind."

GOLDSTEIN: What was the source of their misgivings?

VIENER: They just wanted to give their daughter some more time. They didn't know me, other than [my visits] and letters from my folks. I was still sort of young and not situated. So anyway, we were married.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father-in-law perform the service?

VIENER: Oh, yes. The service was in the Margaret Street Synagogue²⁵ in the presence of the congregation and servicemen that I knew. The congregation wives took care of the reception in the social hall. And, yes, my father-in-law married us. It was a traditional service. Jackie's sister, Ruth, was in the army, and she went AWOL to come to the wedding. And then after the wedding was over, my father-in-law, who was a chaplain, took her and reported in again.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the date of your wedding?

VIENER: March 29, 1944.

GOLDSTEIN: How long did you remain in Australia after you got married?

VIENER: Things were improving for the Allies. My mother was critically ill, almost at death's door, and I got permission to come back. We arrived in San Francisco and went across country slowly by train—three, four days. We stopped in Salt Lake City and so forth, heading to Martinsburg, West Virginia, which was on the main line, and we were met by family. My mother was doing somewhat better then. My orders were to Sanford, Florida, near Orlando. It was a naval air station and I was communications officer for the base. Jackie had a number of American relatives, [so] when I went to report in Sanford, Jackie went north to meet her Aunt Sarah and that family, and spend some time with them while I was in Florida, looking for a place to live.

GOLDSTEIN: So she came down to Florida?

VIENER: Yes, after I found a little apartment, Jackie came down and she became pregnant. It was a small town, but there was a little temple. Services were conducted by a local guy. [Our daughter] Helene was named there the following May, after my sister, whose name was Chaya Sarah. In '45 I was released and the base in Sanford was closing down as well.

*Wedding portrait of Saul Viener and Jacqueline Wolman
Brisbane, Australia, March 29, 1944.
(Courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society,
Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and New York, New York.)*

GOLDSTEIN: So once you were discharged, what was your plan for after the war?

VIENER: I really wanted to go back to school. I came back to Charles Town and I made application for West Virginia University under the G.I. Bill. Somebody in the family knew somebody – there was going to be a house available [in Morgantown] for several months. So we occupied that for three, four months. [After that,] Jackie went back to Charles Town, and I stayed with a Jewish family. I had a room, no board. And so I earned my master's.

GOLDSTEIN: What did you study there?

VIENER: I studied mainly history, some political science, some foreign affairs.

GOLDSTEIN: Any particular teachers that you remember?

VIENER: I had the head of the History Department, Charles Henry Ambler,²⁶ a distinguished figure in [the study of] Virginia and West Virginia history. He was a man of many years. And then there was Festus P. Summers,²⁷ who then took over head of the department. He had written a history of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He became my adviser. Meanwhile, I had a course on Southeast Asian history – the French in Indochina or something like that. The man who taught that had spent some years out there, so that was a broadening experience.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did you get onto the topic of Isidor Straus?

VIENER: One of Straus's closest friends was a man from Charles Town, William L. Wilson, who had been postmaster general, and Dr. Summers had written his biography. In trying to find a topic, I thought about trying to do something in European history, but I didn't know enough, and there weren't enough sources. So in one of my sessions with Dr. Summers, he said, "Now, Mr. Viener, I have a suggestion. You are a Jew, and William L. Wilson's closest friend was a Jew, Isidor Straus. How would you like to work on a biography of Straus? Nobody has done anything about him and his political career." So I said, "Well, I'd be happy to." And he said, "I'm going to introduce you to the librarian at R. H. Macy. I'd like you to go to New York and work at the library with all the records of the family." I communicated with Jackie's

great aunt, Sarah, and her two daughters. So I stayed with them in Brooklyn, and commuted into the city every day for a week. I examined all the things I could about Straus's political career.

GOLDSTEIN: So what was Isidor Straus's political affiliation?

VIENER: He was a Gold Democrat and really a businessman at heart. This was a one-shot deal, so my thesis had to do with whatever I could find up there—his life, his origins, the fact that his parents had come from Germany to Talbotton, Georgia, and went back to New York. It was all very interesting and worthwhile.

GOLDSTEIN: So when you finished that, what did you do?

VIENER: I went back to Charles Town. I wanted to teach, but my parents were very stubborn about the fact that I was married with a child and to teach would not generate much income, and I really ought to go into the family business. Not much I could do about it.

GOLDSTEIN: Were all your brothers already in the business, or some of them?

VIENER: Yes, all of them, either in Charles Town, Washington, or a place [we had opened up] in Richmond. So it was suggested I go to Richmond, so I could be helpful there.

GOLDSTEIN: How had the business progressed from the peddling days of your father?

VIENER: Well, it became better organized, and in Richmond, there was this melting and refining plant.

GOLDSTEIN: What were you doing in the business?

VIENER: I actually worked in the plant. I supervised loading, unloading, weighing in materials, stuff being shipped out.

GOLDSTEIN: They were processing metals for shipment?

VIENER: We made alloys for the automobile industry—shapes of roughly seventy-five to one hundred pounds. I had a chemist, a whole process. They could use that in making the battery plates, lugs, and whatever. That's what I did for many years, [also] some traveling on behalf of the company, to visit people that sold to us and some to whom we sold. At one point, I [also] taught American history in the extension school of the University of Virginia at Fort Lee, which was at Petersburg. I worked in the plant all day

and then would drive on down. I had to study and prepare lectures, and the session was two-and-a-half hours with a ten or fifteen minute break in the middle. Then I would drive back home. Jackie humored me. I wanted to do this, [but we had] two small children. Our second child, Philip, was born in 1949. So anyway, that was another part of my background.

GOLDSTEIN: How was living in Richmond different from growing up in Charles Town?

VIENER: It was quite an enriching experience because it was really the first time I lived in a Jewish community. I became involved in what is today the Federation, working in the campaign and learning more about that which might be called Jewish organizational life in America. I relished everything I could learn. Coming from a small town, to find these things happening and to promote and educate was up my alley. I became involved with the Jewish Center.

GOLDSTEIN: You appreciated it more than someone who grew up with all of that?

VIENER: That's right. People took these things for granted. Now mind you, there were a lot of people who were sincerely dedicated, and there were a lot of soldiers, former servicemen and women, who were anxious to enhance the work of the Federation and Jewish organizations.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there a lot of new population in Richmond after the war? People moving in?

VIENER: Oh yes, there was a fair size community. There were a lot of local people from different social backgrounds, a lot just like myself, children of immigrants. But as you know, World War II was a great leveler.

Pursuing the Jewish Past

Working by day at Hyman Viener and Sons, his family's metal smelting and refining company, Saul pursued his interest in history – particularly American Jewish history – at every available opportunity. With a Jewish presence dating back to 1769, Richmond provided abundant material for his historical pursuits. As both a newcomer and the son of eastern European immigrants,

Saul Viener, 1969.

*Viener, left, receiving gavel as president of the Richmond Jewish
Community Center from outgoing president, J. Y. Plotkin.*

(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)

Saul was quite different in background from the well-established German Jews of the city, some of whom traced their roots back to colonial times, yet he quickly won them over with his intense curiosity about their community's history. Touched by his earnestness and enthusiasm, members of the city's oldest Jewish families told him their stories and shared treasures from their attics.

Based on what he learned, Saul wrote a commemorative history of Congregation Beth Ahabah and two articles on figures from Richmond's Jewish history for the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*.²⁸ In 1954 he was the logical choice to head

Richmond's observance of the American Jewish Tercentenary, celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Jews in what became the United States. Meanwhile, Saul's growing renown as a local Jewish historian led to his activism in the AJHS. Recognized—in his own words—as “somehow different” because of his youth and southern roots, Saul impressed the scholars and philanthropists who headed the AJHS as a fresh addition to the field. His involvement with the society marked the first step toward a greater role in national Jewish affairs.

VIENER: When we found a house, it was just a few blocks from a Conservative synagogue. We really didn't like [the synagogue], and some of the folks we had met suggested [the Reform congregation,] Beth Ahabah. We really liked it. They were very welcoming. At this time Helene was a couple of years old, and in short order went into Sunday school. I offered to teach in the Sunday school, and I taught American Jewish history.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that something you came up with, or was that already part of their curriculum?

VIENER: I think I mentioned this as a possibility, if I remember. The textbook they used was a very simple one; it couldn't have been so sophisticated for these youngsters. I am proud to say that I made it come alive, and there were supplementary things I did. It was a lot of fun. In due course, the romance of this old Jewish community captured me. Here were families that had been around for 100, 125, 130 years. And this congregation had been around—at least the earlier one [that it merged with, Beth Shalome]—since 1789. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. There were families who were part of that earlier congregation that went to Beth Ahabah. You know Kitty Meyers Cohen?²⁹ Her mother's grandfather, Joseph Cohn, was the last reader of Beth Shalome. When these congregations merged, the Cohns retained their traditional habits, and were known as the “*frommer* Cohns.”³⁰ As time went on, I was picking up on the local Jewish history. I became interested in all the stories, legends, and so forth, and trying to pinpoint, confirm, whatever term you want to use. There were some nice people whom we met who encouraged me. One

was Sadie Engelberg,³¹ who was head of the history department at John Marshall High School. Jackie had become active in the National Council of Jewish Women, and there were several ladies that were very cordial. Once Jackie invited two ladies; one we had known, Stella Bowman, and with her came another lady we had known a little bit, Miss Helen Ezekiel. Miss Helen said, "Saul, I gather you're very interested in the history of our congregation. I have some letters, about my mother's grandfather, who fought at the Alamo. Would you like to see them?" And I said, "By all means, Miss Helen. May I call on you?" It was that formal. She said, "Please do." I phoned the next day and made the date, and she loaned me the letters. I prepared a monograph and submitted it to the [*Publications of the*] *American Jewish Historical Society*, and it was accepted.³²

GOLDSTEIN: Did you have any relationship, at this time, with the American Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Yes, I had joined. I'd done some things in Richmond relating to community endeavors, and somebody involved with the American suggested I get involved. I think it was Jules Mintzer, the director of the Richmond Jewish Community Council, who led me into the American Jewish Historical Society. The way the society functioned in that time was [that] if people wanted to join, they had to be qualified in some fashion. You were asked to give a paper. So I was given an opportunity at the annual meeting in Philadelphia, at Dropsie College. We went to Philadelphia on the Friday morning, and Friday afternoon we visited with the surviving daughters of the Reverend George Jacobs, who had been the minister at Beth Shalom, and then went and succeeded Isaac Leiser [in Philadelphia].³³ Well, these three maiden ladies, Miss Emilie, Miss Virginia, and Miss [Adeline]—it was something like a Victorian novel, [with] all the dresses. They were wonderful. They had Richmond cousins, whom I'd gotten to know.

GOLDSTEIN: So did they tell you a lot of things about Richmond that you didn't know?

VIENER: Well, they had stories. For instance, when they moved to Philadelphia, they came with a servant who stayed with them and lived out her years with them. And there were two oth-

er sisters who never married. They were all schoolteachers. There were two brothers, no longer living, who had children. At a later date the Jacobs girls came to Richmond and we entertained them, along with their local cousins. Anyway, on Saturday I'd been invited to Shabbat services at Mikveh Israel,³⁴ and to be called up to the reading of the law. I was the guest of the president. It was quite an experience. On Sunday morning, there at Dropsie College, my father had come to town with my stepmother. My brother Louis was there and his wife and my brother Joe.

GOLDSTEIN: You spoke on Isidor Straus?

VIENER: Yes. There on the dais at Dropsie College were Lee M. Friedman,³⁵ Jake Marcus,³⁶ and all the luminaries. Edwin Wolf II³⁷ was probably on the dais, and some other Philadelphians and some New Yorkers. Like a dozen men; no women. And so I gave my oration on Isidor Straus. At the conclusion of my remarks, I was questioned. I was followed by Jack Solis-Cohen,³⁸ who spoke about a relative who had gone to California in the Gold Rush and had a colorful career. There were all sorts of things said that proved that he was an adventurer. In the audience were Jack Solis-Cohen's sisters and some cousins, all these maiden ladies. I can see them – tall, slender, white hair. One of them got to her feet in a very dramatic fashion, contending that Jack didn't know what he was talking about. So it was, shall we say, colorful. There was a collation afterwards and my brother, Joe, and Jake Marcus hit it off. Marcus had a daughter [who] lived in Washington, and my brothers got to know her. She was manager of a hotel not terribly far from where our business was, and Joe and Louis occasionally would see her at lunch. Tragically, she died in a fire.³⁹

GOLDSTEIN: Was there any sense of connection with Marcus because he was a West Virginian?

VIENER: Yes. As he put it, we were West Virginia *landsleit*.⁴⁰ At that point he was actively involved in the AJHS, and he [also] created the American Jewish Archives.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the reason?

VIENER: Well, he felt that the society was not doing what it should do. It was not as active, aggressive, and he was dissatisfied. He went to Cincinnati and there was Hebrew Union

College, which was an anchor, a base. The college had a following, and he was well thought of. He was also knowledgeable about getting people involved. The problem with the society was it was an orphan being taken care of through the kindness of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Isidore Meyer was the director.⁴¹ He was a Conservative rabbi and a historian, and struggling to keep the society going. [Then] Lee M. Friedman died, and left over a million dollars for the society to come to Boston.⁴² Friedman was really unique—an early benefactor. He had never married, and the society was his great love. He had published two books about American Jewish history; one I used when I taught Sunday school at Beth Ahabah as a resource. So on that Sunday [in Philadelphia] this distinguished kindly gentleman said nice things to me, and I was very proud to be in his company. When this million dollars became available, there were people in Philadelphia—Leon Obermayer⁴³ and Maurice Jacobs⁴⁴—who pushed for the society to go to Boston, and some sort of dialogue began with Brandeis.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that actually a condition of the bequest?

VIENER: I don't think it was, but it may have been in Mr. Friedman's mind. Obermayer and Jacobs and a couple others were strong for doing something at Brandeis, with it being an academic institution, a Jewish university. And there were those that opposed it, in New York, like Rosalie Nathan Hendricks.⁴⁵ There was a big cleavage and great animosity. There was a meeting I attended in New York where it almost came to fisticuffs. I was, on the board, what you considered one of the rebels. I was with those who didn't want to go to Boston. Of course, there was the pied piper who helped found Brandeis, [Abram L.] Sachar, and he wanted the society to come.⁴⁶ Also, in the Boston group was David Pokross, who was an extraordinary man. He was raised by his grandparents in Providence, Rhode Island, and he became a lawyer. He was hired by a law firm—the first Jew. He ultimately became head of the firm many years later.⁴⁷ Finally, the society bought a piece of property just off the university grounds and erected a building, which became the headquarters, and that's when Bernie Wax was hired [as director].⁴⁸ He was [previously] with the Illinois State Historical Library. Somehow, there was a

rapprochement. That group in New York was still very unhappy, but they stayed as members. Bernie was a great diplomat as well.

GOLDSTEIN: How had you risen from being a new member to getting on the board?

VIENER: Because, I guess, I was somehow different, I was young. [So] at one point I was invited to serve on the board. I became more regular in attending meetings and became more involved. Bernie and I became great friends. I made myself available and worked on behalf of the society, tried to do things in Richmond and elsewhere—missionary work. Now concurrent with all of this, I was getting involved in the Richmond Jewish and general community. The Tercentenary year was a banner year for the Jewish community of Richmond, because the first Jewish exhibition ever held in Richmond took place. It opened in September 1954 at the Valentine Museum [and] remained open for about three months. I was an integral part of the whole process, and it was phenomenal. We had on display Myer Myers⁴⁹ silver that was in the possession of a Richmond family, no longer Jewish, and for part of the exhibit, on loan from Mikveh Israel, were Myer Myers Torah ornaments. There was a family in Richmond, the Hutzlers. They had a big wall painting of the three Millhiser children. The Milhisers and Hutzlers were all interrelated. Naomi Cohn,⁵⁰ who had taken a great interest in us, said that I should meet Constance Hutzler, who was a lady of formidable presence. She made a point of taking me to meet Constance. The Hutzlers had come quite early with the German Jews, and they lived in a big house on the north side of Richmond, where the prominent Jews had built homes. Anyway, Constance said [the painting] could go to the Valentine to the exhibit. I went to her with a pickup truck, and I held that painting as we went from the north side to the Valentine Museum, in town. And that in itself was a piece of history. For the Tercentenary, we also did a pageant, “Under Freedom,” dealing with the history of the country and the people of Richmond, which was written by three people: Edith Lindeman Calisch,⁵¹ who was a writer and drama critic for the *Richmond Times*, and Allan and Louise Creeger. The Jewish War Veterans had their national encampment there that year, so the

pageant made history not only for the city. It was performed two nights, but with all these people from all over the country. We'd also had a Tercentenary Sabbath, and our scholar was Salo Baron,⁵² who spoke Friday night at Beth Ahabah, and Beth El was invited. Saturday morning, he came to the Orthodox congregation, Keneseth Israel. We arranged that to cover as much of the community as possible. The rabbi, [Jules] Lipschutz, who was an erudite scholar and gentleman, had Salo Baron and me for *shabbos* lunch, which was delightful. Then, to bring all the Tercentenary events to a conclusion, in the spring there was a reconsecration of the Franklin Street Burying Ground, the first Jewish cemetery, which had been neglected. There was a memorial plaque on a little stone put in there, and our speaker for the occasion was Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool.⁵³

GOLDSTEIN: So these were fairly big names. It must have been a nice thing for you to come into contact with them, and speak with them.

VIENER: We'd gotten to know the Pools a little bit, maybe through the American Jewish Historical Society. This was the first time in recent years that all the rabbis in Richmond assembled on one platform. So, to be seen with Rabbi Pool, who spoke movingly and significantly, it was quite a splendid occasion.

Institution Builder

Not wanting the glow generated by the Tercentenary observances to fade, Saul contemplated how he and like-minded individuals might create a lasting framework to preserve and commemorate the history of Jews in Richmond and in the South more broadly. This vision led to the living-room gathering in 1957 where Saul proposed the creation of the SJHS, the first regional Jewish historical society in the United States.⁵⁴ But with modest resources and a limited base of support, it was a struggle for him and his small group to sustain the society. After several years of ups and downs, the group ultimately dissolved. The idea of an organization dedicated to southern Jewish history, however, continued to percolate with Saul as he grew in stature in the AJHS and in other national Jewish organizations. Then, in 1976, with the

backing of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the AJHS, and the Richmond Jewish community, Saul convened a landmark conference in his hometown devoted to exploring the southern Jewish experience. By all accounts, the conference, which brought together more than two hundred scholars and laypeople, was a resounding success. The keynote speaker was Eli Evans, whose book, *The Provincials*, had been published just three years earlier and had drawn a wide readership.⁵⁵ The enthusiasm generated by the conference led to the rebirth of the SJHS, which met in March 1978 in Raleigh, North Carolina, and then settled into a cycle of fall conferences that have continued on an annual basis ever since.⁵⁶

In addition to placing him at the helm of the reorganized SJHS, Saul's success with the Richmond conference helped propel him into the leadership of the AJHS, as did his close friendship with the organization's president, David Pokross, the Boston attorney and philanthropist who became his mentor. In 1979 Saul succeeded Pokross as president of the AJHS, a role that gave him the opportunity to deepen his involvement in activities beyond the southern sphere. Saul's strong personal qualities helped him become an effective fundraiser and goodwill ambassador for the AJHS on regular trips around the country. During his presidency, the society staged an impressive exhibit on the Jews of Boston and issued a large number of publications, including an anthology of the papers delivered at the Richmond conference and two volumes in the field of America-Holy Land Studies. Saul also rallied support for an effort to restore and distribute old Yiddish films, laying the groundwork for what became the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, his leadership of the AJHS opened the doors to greater involvement in other national Jewish organizations. During our interview, Saul mentioned only a few of these major accomplishments, focusing instead on the personal relationships he forged. Although involved in his fair share of meetings, conferences, and strategy sessions, he recognized that it was the more intimate associations that infused an organization with real meaning and value.

Celebrating the America-Holy Land Project, 1978.

Cosponsored by the AJHS and the Institute of

Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

From left, Maurice Jacobs of Philadelphia and the AJHS; Moshe Davis,
director of the Institute and the America-Holy Land Project;

Bernard Wax, director of the AJHS, and Saul Viener, board chairman of AJHS.

(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)

GOLDSTEIN: How did the Southern Jewish Historical Society first come about?

VIENER: The Southern was an outgrowth of the Tercentenary. All the committee people involved in the Tercentenary in Richmond were learning about Jewish history. So I talked with a couple of people, and I said, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a regional Jewish historical society in the South?" One of my dear mentors was Rabbi Malcolm Stern,⁵⁸ who was in Norfolk. I talked to him and he encouraged me.

GOLDSTEIN: What was your connection with him before this?

VIENER: He was already doing research, writing, genealogy. He was in Norfolk and someone, I guess Ariel Goldberg,⁵⁹ our rabbi, introduced us. Malcolm would come up to Richmond. He was a lovely man, and he guided us. If you looked at the early journals, he did one article for us [in each issue].⁶⁰ I was involved at the Jewish Center, and the Jewish Welfare Board, which was connected with what became the Jewish Center movement, sponsored an American Jewish History Week. So the center director and his assistant thought it was a good idea, [and] we had a Sunday afternoon [gathering]. Malcolm was the speaker, and we drew a small but respectable group of people. Then some of us talked about establishing a society. One of them was Clare Levy Hutzler, who didn't talk about it or brag very much, but a friend told me, "You know, through her mother they've been here in the United States forever."⁶¹ She became secretary, I became president; somebody else did something else.⁶²

GOLDSTEIN: Why did that group in Richmond want to make it a *Southern* Jewish Historical Society rather than a *Richmond* or *Virginia* Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Because there were so many stories, so many experiences, and we felt, why not encompass a larger territory, having no idea how it'll all work out. That's why it was original.

GOLDSTEIN: Did other people from across the South get involved?

VIENER: Frances Kallison in San Antonio was very interested [and] became a founder in our little group. That was after I did the Moses Levy monograph that was published, having to do with the Alamo. She'd read it and she was a historian, head of the Bexar County Historical Society [in Texas].⁶³ We published three journals in a couple of years, but we didn't have a base of operation. So the Valentine Museum, which is a history center, made a little bit of space available, but they were small staffed. We had a locker there with papers and things. We had all sorts of problems, and as much as I loved it and tried to push, things fell by the wayside. There was a hiatus, a lapse of eight or ten years. Then, I was at a board meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society when the

chairman of the committee on academic affairs, a history professor who taught at a college somewhere in Massachusetts, reported on a conference, a modest one, on writing and collecting Jewish facts, and it proved successful. Bells went off and I put up my hand, and I said, "You know, if it can be done here in Massachusetts, why couldn't we have some sort of conference in Richmond and maybe we could collect some people and have papers?" Bernie [Wax] was interested. He said "It's a pretty good idea." So I came back to Richmond, and Mel Urofsky, with whom I'd become friends, was on the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University.⁶⁴ I discussed it with him and he liked the idea. Meanwhile, Jules Mintzer from the Richmond Jewish Community Council thought it was a great idea, and the council would put up some money and help sponsor it, [as would] the [Jewish] Center leadership. I'd become involved with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. Do you know anything about Harry Baron?

GOLDSTEIN: No.

VIENER: He was a federation director in New Orleans, but he had made a name for himself in the higher echelons of the Council of Jewish Federations for having pushed Jewish education, Jewish culture; all those things. He was selected [as executive director] when a wonderful man from Indianapolis [Julian Freeman], headed a small group to create the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. I was seated on the board because it was interested in helping the [American Jewish Historical] Society and other enterprises. So we approached them and they helped finance the conference, and it was extremely well attended.

GOLDSTEIN: By mostly people from Richmond?

VIENER: No, from all over. People that nobody knew about suddenly appeared. There were academics. From Valdosta, Georgia, came Louis Schmier.⁶⁵ For the opening session, Mel [Urofsky] was the speaker. Sunday night at the Jewish Center there was a banquet and the president of the Virginia Historical Society and the president of the National Foundation, Earl Morse, spoke.

GOLDSTEIN: I know that the conference led to the reestablishment of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. Why was it more successful this time around than when it was first started?

VIENER: Because we had interested substantive organizations and [raised] some money.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that because you had grown in your connections to people over the years?

VIENER: That's right, and because there was an excitement about it. Members of the board of the American [Jewish Historical Society] came to the conference—Ruth Fein, bless her heart, with whom I still keep in touch. This young man from New Orleans and a couple others said, "Let's have another conference." Well, we went to Raleigh, North Carolina, because I think Abe Kanof [a former president of the American Jewish Historical Society] had moved there by that time.⁶⁶ The momentum was there, and there was correspondence back and forth, bulletins to keep people connected. Meanwhile, we created memberships and that gave us money and wherever we went [for our conferences], the community usually threw some in the pot. It was altogether reorganized and I remained active for several years.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did things develop from those first couple of conferences?

VIENER: Well, every one was better than the one that had preceded it. Of course there was this lovely recollection of what happened in Richmond.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did that lead to you becoming president of the American Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Well I became more involved. And Bernie [Wax], bless him, encouraged me. David Pokross had become president. He was a man of many parts, and I think he must have realized that maybe I had the makings of becoming [president]. When I would come for meetings, the first time I stayed at a motel. And David said, "The next time you come, you stay at our house," because the meetings were quite often a late afternoon and the next morning, or an all-day thing. So I stayed, and in the morning when David awakened, he said, "I cook oatmeal, do you like oatmeal?" This very responsible citizen is cooking oatmeal for me and making my breakfast. So it became a loving friendship, and they would visit us. He was like a father figure. At meetings, he would see to it that I knew this, I knew that, and then he said, "I

think you ought to be the next president." This was after a year or so. I said, "Oh, I don't think so." But anyway, I became president, and this young man from West Virginia moved into another orbit.

GOLDSTEIN: What did you have to do as president? How much of your time did it take?

VIENER: Well, I think I spent more time than I should have. But it had to do with keeping the American Jewish Historical Society in the front, in the public, to help raise money and get people involved that could do for the society.

GOLDSTEIN: Did you need to be in Boston a lot?

VIENER: Oh, every couple of months I would go and it would be a couple of days. I wish I had a dollar for every trip I made. Sometimes I stayed with Ruth Fein, [sometimes] with the Pokrosses. Bernie Wax is an ice cream man, as am I, so when he took me to the airport after an all-day meeting, we stopped at one of the Boston eateries for a modest meal and we had a milkshake with the sandwich. And I said jokingly, "For dessert, how about some ice cream." He said, "What flavor?" I said, "Bernie, I'm teasing." He said, "But it's not a bad idea." So we had ice cream for dessert after the milkshake.

GOLDSTEIN: It seems as though the personal connections you made have really stayed with you.

VIENER: I may not have achieved as much as I would have liked to, but I did get people involved. We'd [also] go to the meetings of the Council of Jewish Federations and I was on that board. The General Assembly (G.A.) would start on a Thursday and continue, but there was never anything Friday night. So I talked with some different people. "Why don't we just have a *shabbos* evening in the hotel? We'll have a dinner and invite folks and maybe somebody will say something." Jackie and Eleanor Soble and her husband, Morris, we hit it off. He became president [of the AJHS]. So the Friday nights at the G.A. became almost like a local institution.

GOLDSTEIN: So as the president of the society, you now became part of a group of heads of organizations.

VIENER: Yes, the Council of Jewish Federations and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. I was also on the board of

the Jewish Publication Society. There were a lot of interesting people. They were special times. I just got carried away with all the opportunities. They were formative years.

Teaching Southerners about Jews and Northerners about the South

Having always had one foot in the Jewish world and one foot in the non-Jewish southern world that surrounded him, Saul often played the role of interpreter between these two overlapping but distinct cultures. His work for the AJHS and his success at organizing the 1976 Richmond conference helped create a new awareness of southern Jewish history among American Jews. As the SJHS began to flourish, Saul enlisted the support of the AJHS board members and staff. His longtime friend, AJHS Executive Director Bernie Wax, even became the treasurer of the organization. Whenever Saul helped launch a new project or exhibit pertaining to Jews in the South, he made sure it came to the attention of his northern friends and colleagues. Even as he taught northern Jews about their southern cousins, Saul devoted much of his activity in Richmond and Virginia to educating the non-Jewish public about the role Jews had played in southern life. In 1963, as a member of Richmond's Civil War Centennial Committee, he helped weave aspects of Jewish history into the community-wide program of events. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saul was a key player in the intense lobbying effort to convince the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation to recognize the contributions of the Jewish naval officer, Uriah P. Levy, and his family in rescuing and preserving Monticello as a national shrine. In 1985, he was one of the principal speakers when a plaque recognizing the Levy family's role was unveiled at Jefferson's Virginia home.⁶⁷ Saul helped initiate the bicentennial commemoration of Virginia's 1786 Statute for Religious Freedom, which had paved the way for the full inclusion of Jews and other religious minorities in American life. The commemoration resulted in the founding of the Council for America's First Freedom, a Richmond-based, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing understanding and respect for religious freedom through education.

One of Saul's most enduring legacies was the role he played in the Virginia Historical Society (VHS), an organization founded in 1831 that had very few Jewish members when Saul joined in the late 1950s.⁶⁸ As Saul became active and ultimately joined its board of trustees, he pushed the VHS to broaden its traditional concerns by confronting the diversity that had characterized Virginia society since the colonial period. In 1997 Saul was the inspiration behind the VHS's ground-breaking exhibition, *Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia*.⁶⁹ Curated by his friend and frequent collaborator Melvin Urofsky of Virginia Commonwealth University, *Commonwealth and Community* was a tribute to Saul's role as a builder of bridges between people of different backgrounds.

VIENER: I served on the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. My brother Jake was friendly with the mayor, and there'd been publicity about this. So he said to the mayor, "He's very interested in history," or something like that, and I was invited to serve on the board. The chairman of the committee became my "uncle," J. Ambler Johnston.⁷⁰

GOLDSTEIN: Did you say your uncle?

VIENER: Yes, he became my "Uncle Ambler." He had a big engineering firm, but his father and his uncle had fought in the Civil War and his ancestors had come to western Virginia in colonial days. So he had all this history, a courtly sweet man. I was intrigued by the thing right off the bat. There were all sorts of plans about things relating to the Civil War; they published pamphlets. So I would talk back and forth with Mr. Johnston, and he said one day, "May I call you Saul?" I said, "By all means." But I said, "Mr. Johnston, I can't call you by your first name." [So, he said,] "Well, you call me your Uncle Ambler." One of the events we did was at Hebrew Cemetery in Richmond at the soldiers' section and the mayor of Richmond appeared, Mrs. [Eleanor] Sheppard,⁷¹ a very fine lovely lady. Rabbi Goldberg participated. It was a great afternoon. Mr. Johnston was very interested in real history being taught. I became the cultural member [of the committee], and I knew that to tell the story, we needed a little drama.

Saul Viener, November 1, 2002.

*At an event sponsored by the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.
(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)*

In Richmond we had Dogwood Dell, [where] the Department of Parks and Recreation had a summer festival. There were plays, the local ballet performed—different things. And the lady who really was the top dog, Rose Kaufman Banks,⁷² was Jewish. We'd had some connections because of the Tercentenary pageant, and Rose and the whole Department of Recreation and Parks helped put on the pageant. So I talked to Mr. Johnston and Bobby Waitt, the director [of the committee]. Why not try to have something in Dogwood Dell? Adrian Bendheim, president of the temple and one of the founders of what became the Jewish Federation, was involved, and he had a flair for drama.⁷³ Adrian's grandfather had been Reverend Michelbacher [rabbi of Beth Ahabah], who had been very involved with the soldiers [during the Civil War].⁷⁴ We asked him if he would participate and play the Reverend Michelbacher. He was delighted. There was one scene where Reverend Michelbacher, who traveled around to the camps, conducted a little religious ceremony. And Adrian, who had never worn a yarmulke, had brought with him a proper yarmulke he had acquired somewhere. The evening at Dogwood Dell with the pageant was enormously successful. I don't know how many people came. There were all different kinds of people. There was a member of city council who was a prominent black citizen, and I went to him and told him what was going on. I felt there ought to be some sort of representation. He thought about it [and] said, "Maybe we can get some young people involved from the high school." It was a little effort to integrate.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did that lead to your involvement in the Virginia Historical Society?

VIENER: Mr. Johnston had been on the board of the society, and recommended me to go on the board.

GOLDSTEIN: You were already a member of the society?

VIENER: Yes, I was a member. That goes back to [when] Malcolm Stern said to me, "You ought to join the Virginia Historical Society because they have a whole Jewish collection of the Myers family, who disappeared as Jews."⁷⁵ One of the descendants was a lawyer whom I got to know, McDonald Welford. The society was then housed at the Lee House on Franklin Street. General [Robert

E.] Lee had lived there, near the state capitol. I made a date to come and to meet the director [because], of course, you had to be approved. His name was John Melville Jennings,⁷⁶ a Virginian who captured what was a local manner of speaking. "Now tell me, Mr. Vah-ner. How was it that those early Jews married into the best Virginia families?" And the Almighty was with me. I said, "Mr. Jennings, because they were the very best people." He changed the subject. Anyway, I was accepted for membership. Speaking of being accepted for membership, a man who became a great benefactor, a Virginian who was an executive in South America, was interested in becoming a member. They gave him the third degree, and he was not accepted. Later, he was very much accepted and became a vice president of the society. So it was not only the Jews but the non-Jews [who] went through a baptism of fire. [As a board member,] I was a little bit active. Very little was asked of the board members. Whenever the board met it was a cut and dried affair. John Jennings really ran the meeting. The president sometimes had a chance to say a word, and maybe it would have lasted forty-five minutes or an hour. Then they moved to another part of the headquarters for a little libation. Another world altogether.

GOLDSTEIN: So it was very different from the Southern Jewish Historical Society or the American Jewish Historical Society.

VIENER: Absolutely, [and] different from other things in Richmond, Virginia.

GOLDSTEIN: How did the Virginia Historical Society develop from the organization you describe to one that launched Commonwealth and Community, the exhibit on the Jews of Virginia?

VIENER: Commonwealth and Community was a joint effort of the Federation and the Virginia Historical Society. Charlie Bryan⁷⁷ [was] the director [of the VHS] to whom I went. I said, "Charlie, the journal has come out and it's recycling the early church of Virginia. I think there ought to be more of a focus on the other religious groups, like the Jews." [So he said,] "How do we start, Saul?" So we talked about how, and my experience with the American and Southern [Jewish Historical Societies]. And he said, "Well, we really need somebody to do a history and to really give

it focus. Let's see if Mel [Urofsky] would do it." Mel, I think, was on the board. Meanwhile, he had risen in the ranks of Virginia Commonwealth University. So we had a little meeting one morning and went through what we needed to do. And Charlie said, "We need a historian." So Mel said, "What about so-and-so." And then I said, "No. I don't think he'd do it." Finally, as Mel tells the story, the light went on [and he asked,] "Would you like me to do it?" We both said, "Yes indeed." That was a happy thing to happen, and he went forward with it, and I raised the money and it was special. I encouraged the board of the American to come to Richmond for the opening. David Pokross had a place in Florida, and they came up and we had not seen each other for a long time. When I met him at the airport he cried, I cried, so we took them home. They were very special guests. And on Saturday, some of the folks were in town, so I arranged a tour of Richmond, a Jewish tour. I asked some friends if they would mingle and they came on the bus, and several things happened. These New York types, of which there were a number, their eyes opened up. We got to the cemetery and I told the story of the soldiers' section. And Arthur Obermayer⁷⁸ was on the board and he looks over at a close grave. It was his father's aunt and uncle who had lived in some part of Virginia, but were buried there. Things like that happened, and the opening was very successful. It made a little bit of history.

Saul's Legacy

While interviewing Saul, I could not help but wonder whether he might have pursued the academic study of Jewish history beyond the M.A. level, had that been a realistic option for him in the 1940s. Because of limited opportunities for such work in American universities of that era, as well as the pressure brought to bear by immigrant parents who felt that a life of scholarship would be impractical for their son, he instead came to express his passion for the Jewish past through his involvement in organizations like the AJHS and the SJHS. Today, professional academics often dismiss the work of laymen who headed such organizations as being too celebratory and lacking scholarly detachment. But as my discussion with Saul drove home, at a time when graduate

programs in American Jewish history were unheard of and only a handful of scholars—all trained in other areas—cast their attention toward the history of American Jews, it was largely people like Saul and his compatriots who established the groundwork on which the fields of American and southern Jewish history later emerged. Surely, Saul's interests were never purely academic. As his interview reveals, the personal and emotional dimension of connecting with the Jewish past, bonding with his fellow Jews, and winning respect for them in the larger community were often in the forefront of his approach. In fact, one wonders whether he would have been able to touch so many people and make his mark in so many diverse settings had he confined his talents to the ivory tower. While helping to weave an appreciation for history into the collective consciousness of Jews in Richmond, the South, and across the nation, however, Saul also cultivated the interest of young scholars, provided them with myriad opportunities to reach a receptive audience, and helped build archival collections to support their work. That the SJHS in particular persists as an arena in which scholars and laypeople not only work together but celebrate the unique character that their collaboration brings to the organization is a testament to Saul's enduring influence.

NOTES

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¹ These include *A Commemorative History of Congregation Beth Ahabah, 1841-1966* (Richmond, 1966); "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy: Letters of a Texas Patriot," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 46 (December 1956): 101-113, and supplement, 49 (March 1960): 202-207; "Rosena Hutzler Levy Recalls the Civil War," *American Jewish Historical*

Quarterly 62 (March 1973): 306–313; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Calisch, Edward N.” and “Richmond.”

² The recorded interviews have been deposited with the American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History in New York.

³ On the small-town Jewish experience in America, see Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, 2005); Ewa Morawska, *Uncertain Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1880–1940* (Princeton, 1996); Eric L. Goldstein, “Beyond Lombard Street: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns,” in *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns*, ed. Avi Y. Decter and Karen Falk (Baltimore, 2003), 27–79.

⁴ On the history of Charles Town and surroundings, see Millard K. Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County* (Boyce, VA, 1972). See also Saul Viener’s memoir, “Growing up in Charles Town: History and Memory,” *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society* 66 (December 2000): 19–30.

⁵ According to the detailed biography of Hyman Viener (1882–1969) in *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* 54 (1973): 442, he was born in Eržvilkas, a town in the district of Raseiniai, Lithuania, and died in Charles Town. His wife, Golda Rivka (Rebecca Goldie) Viener was born c. 1884 in Nemaksciai and died in 1947.

⁶ Ultimately, the Vieners had nine children: Sarah Ida (Chaya Sarah, 1904–1912), Harry Benjamin (1906–1975), Joseph Michael (1908–1964), Louis Mayer (1910–1970), Jacob Max (1912–2002), Reuben (1914–1982), Maurice Abraham (1916–1990), Eli (1918–1998), and Saul (1921–2006).

⁷ Beth Jacob Congregation was founded in Martinsburg in 1912. On the history of the town’s Jewish community, see Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850–1958* (Philadelphia, 1963), 1025–1037.

⁸ Congregation Ohev Sholom was founded in Washington in 1886 by eastern European Jewish immigrants, and from 1906 to the late 1950s was located at 500 I Street, NW, at the corner of Fifth Street (hence the name “Fifth Street Shul”). Today it is known as Ohev Sholom: The National Synagogue.

⁹ On the *Morgen zhurnal* (Jewish Morning Journal), a conservative Yiddish daily established in New York in 1901, see Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, IN, 1999), 100–109.

¹⁰ Christine Washington was a descendant of Samuel Washington, a brother of President George Washington. Her father, Richard B. Washington, was a Confederate veteran and a member of the Stonewall Jackson Brigade. See *Washington Post*, May 16, 1937. Dr. John Augustine Washington was a nephew of Christine Washington, the son of her brother S. Walter Washington. See *Washington Post*, September 24, 1987; and James E. Surkamp, “The Washingtons of Jefferson County: Interview of John A. Washington,” *Jefferson County Historical Society Magazine* 69 (December 2003).

¹¹ Charles Washington was the youngest brother of President George Washington. He arrived in Jefferson County, VA (now West Virginia), in 1780. Seven years later he laid out

the streets of Charles Town on eighty acres adjoining his private estate. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 29, 42–43.

¹² Samuel Washington was the first of his family to live in the vicinity of what became Charles Town, arriving by 1770. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 25–27.

¹³ In 1794, when the wedding was held, the mistress of Harewood was Lucy Todd Washington, daughter-in-law of Samuel Washington and sister of Dolley Payne Todd. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 27.

¹⁴ Brown was found guilty of treason in 1859 for his seizure of the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, VA (now West Virginia). His trial and execution were held in Charles Town because it was the county seat of Jefferson County, where Harper's Ferry was located. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 173–204.

¹⁵ On Rabbi Isadore Breslau, an army chaplain, officer of the Zionist Organization of America, and community leader in Washington, DC, see *American Jewish Year Book* 80 (1980): 362–363.

¹⁶ Ruth B. Fein served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1982 to 1985, the only woman to hold that office. She also headed Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies from 1980 to 1983 and was the founding president of the New England Holocaust Memorial. See Larry Tye, *Home Lands: Portrait of the New Jewish Diaspora* (New York, 2001), 117; and Jonathan D. Sarna and Ellen Smith, eds., *The Jews of Boston* (Boston, 1995), 119.

¹⁷ On Stanley Pulliam Shugert, a mathematics professor at the University of Pennsylvania from 1919 to 1955, see *Who's Who in America* 29 (1956–1957): 2347.

¹⁸ Founded in 1871, Shepherd State College (now Shepherd University) is located in Shepherdstown, WV, thirteen miles north of Charles Town. In 1930, the school became an accredited four-year college devoted to teacher training. See Arthur Gordon Slonaker, *A History of Shepherd College, Shepherdstown, West Virginia* (Parsons, WV, 1967).

¹⁹ Ruth Scarborough served as a history professor at Shepherd State College from 1936 to 1966, during which time she also chaired the Department of Social Sciences. In 1977, the university's library was named in her honor. See "Dr. Ruth Scarborough," online at <http://www.shepherd.edu/libweb/about/ruth>, (accessed: July 15, 2007).

²⁰ The final product was Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus" (master's thesis, West Virginia University, 1947).

²¹ On Vice Admiral Daniel Edward Barbey, a leader in the development of amphibious warfare in the Pacific during World War II, see his memoir, *MacArthur's Amphibious Navy: Seventh Amphibious Force Operations, 1943–1945* (Annapolis, MD, 1969).

²² On Cassius Marcellus Keller, later a news editor and writer for *Voice of America*, see *Washington Post*, November 2, 1971.

²³ Rev. Joseph Wolman was the rabbi of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation from 1937 to 1946. He subsequently served as the rabbi of the Wellington Hebrew Congregation in Wellington, New Zealand.

²⁴ Saul's mother-in-law was Reka Corwin Wolman (1891–1982).

²⁵ The Margaret Street Synagogue was built in Brisbane in 1886. On the synagogue's centennial, Saul and Jackie Viener erected a stained glass window in memory of Jackie's parents and their service to the congregation.

²⁶ Charles Henry Ambler was a professor in the Department of History at West Virginia University from 1917 to 1947, serving as chair of the department from 1926 to 1946. Among his many publications were *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910); *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley* (Glendale, CA, 1932); *A History of West Virginia* (New York, 1933); and *George Washington and the West* (Chapel Hill, 1936). See "Charles Henry Ambler," *West Virginia History* 19 (1957-1958): 152-153.

²⁷ Festus Paul Summers was a professor in the Department of History at West Virginia University from 1939 to 1965, serving as chair of the department from 1947 to 1962. Among his published works are: *The Baltimore and Ohio in the Civil War* (New York, 1939); *William L. Wilson and Tariff Reform: A Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953); and, with Elizabeth Cometti, *The Thirty-Fifth State: A Documentary History of West Virginia* (Morgantown, WV, 1966). See the sketch of his career in *West Virginia History* 27 (1965-1966): 306-308.

²⁸ See note 1, above.

²⁹ Katherine (Kitty) Meyers Cohen, a native of Richmond, is an attorney in Atlanta and a longtime friend of the Viener family.

³⁰ Joseph Cohn, a layman, was authorized to chant the liturgy for Beth Shalome after the departure of Rev. George Jacobs for Philadelphia. He served as the reader of the congregation from 1869 to 1873 and again from 1878 to 1898. When Beth Shalome was absorbed by Beth Ahabah in 1898, the Cohn family began to maintain a private synagogue in Richmond where they could perpetuate their Orthodox practices. See Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry: Shabbat in Shockoe, 1769-1976* (Richmond, 1979), 60-62.

³¹ Engelberg, along with William E. Hemphill and Marvin W. Schlegel, wrote the high school textbook *Cavalier Commonwealth: History and Government in Virginia* (New York, 1957).

³² Viener, "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy."

³³ Rev. George Jacobs was the *hazan* of Beth Shalome from 1857 to 1869, when he became the rabbi of Beth El Emeth in Philadelphia. See Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 59-60.

³⁴ On the history of Congregation Mikveh Israel, see Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman, *The Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957).

³⁵ Lee Max Friedman, an amateur historian and collector of Judaica, was president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1948 to 1952. He was the author of *Early American Jews* (Cambridge, MA, 1934), *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (Philadelphia, 1942), and *Pilgrims in a New Land* (New York, 1948). For a sketch of his career, see Isidore S. Meyer, "Necrology: Lee Max Friedman (1871-1957)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47 (1957-1958): 211-215.

³⁶ Jacob Rader Marcus, Reform rabbi and historian, was principally responsible for the establishment of American Jewish history as a professional field of study in the United States. From 1926 until his death in 1995, he taught at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish

Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, where he also founded the American Jewish Archives in 1947. From 1955 to 1958, he served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society. On Marcus's career, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jacob Rader Marcus (1896-1995)," in *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus's Essays on American Jewry*, ed. Gary Phillip Zola (Hanover, NH, 2004), 3-12.

³⁷ Edwin Wolf II was the librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia from 1953 to 1984. He was co-author, with Maxwell Whiteman, of *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957).

³⁸ Jacob Da Silva Solis-Cohen, Jr., was a real estate consultant and appraiser from a prominent Philadelphia family. Active in Jewish community affairs, he served as president of the Jewish Publication Society of America from 1933 to 1949. See Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988* (Philadelphia, 1989) 173-174, 375.

³⁹ Marcus's daughter was Merle Judith Marcus, an actress and singer who later became a sales manager for hotel chains in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. She died in an apartment fire in Los Angeles in 1965. See Jewish Women's Archive, "Personal Information for Merle Judith Marcus," online at <http://www.jwa.org/archive/jsp/perInfo.jsp?personID=1035> (accessed July 15, 2007).

⁴⁰ Like the Vieners, Jacob Rader Marcus's family had migrated from small-town Pennsylvania into West Virginia around the turn of the century. Marcus was born in New Haven, PA, but spent much of his youth in Farmington and Wheeling, WV. See Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 842-845.

⁴¹ Dr. Isidore S. Meyer served in a position at the American Jewish Historical Society called "Librarian-Editor" from 1940 to 1968, but since the society had no official director at the time, Meyer was the principal member of the administrative staff. See Jeffrey S. Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*: The Journal of the American Jewish Historical Society and the Writing of American Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 81 (Winter 1993-1994): 205-206.

⁴² The exact amount of the bequest was \$1.4 million. See Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*," 227.

⁴³ Leon Jacob Obermayer was a prominent attorney who served as president of the Philadelphia Board of Education. See Jacob Rader Marcus, *Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography* (Brooklyn, 1994), 2:471.

⁴⁴ Maurice Jacobs served as secretary of the Jewish Publication Society of America from 1936 until 1950. In the latter year he opened Maurice Jacobs, Inc., which became "one of the leading specialty printers in the United States, and one of the foremost printers of Judaica anywhere in the world." See Sarna, *JPS*, 175-218.

⁴⁵ Rosalie Nathan Hendricks is described by writer Stephen Birmingham as "a grande dame of New York Sephardic society." She was responsible for gathering and donating to the New-York Historical Society a vast collection of manuscripts related to members of her husband's family, who were copper merchants in early America. See Birmingham, *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite* (New York, 1971), 16-18.

⁴⁶ Abram Leon Sachar, a professor of American history at the University of Illinois, became the founding president of Brandeis University in 1948 and held the post for the next two decades. See *New York Times*, July 25, 1993. For an account of the controversy over whether to relocate the AJHS, one that provides a different list of key individuals, see Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*," 227–230.

⁴⁷ For a brief biography of David R. Pokross (1907–2003), see *Heritage: Newsletter of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (Spring 2004): 9.

⁴⁸ Bernard Wax began as director of the AJHS in 1966, two years before the headquarters on the Brandeis campus were completed. He served in this capacity until 1991 and is now director emeritus. See his reminiscences of Saul Viener in *Southern Jewish History* 9 (2006): 201–204, and of the founding and early years of the SJHS elsewhere in this volume.

⁴⁹ Myer Myers was a gold and silversmith in colonial New York, where he made both secular pieces and Jewish ritual objects. Three of his children settled in Richmond before the end of the eighteenth century. See David L. Barquist, et al. *Myer Myers: Jewish Silversmith in Colonial New York* (New Haven, 2001); and Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, 1917), 47–50, 58.

⁵⁰ Naomi Silverman Cohn was an activist for social causes and women's rights in Richmond. See *Virginia Dictionary of Biography*, s.v. "Cohn, Naomi Silverman." Although not a native Richmonder, her husband's family was among the oldest and most prominent in Richmond's Jewish community. See note 30, above.

⁵¹ On the career of Edith Lindeman Calisch, see *Virginia Dictionary of Biography*, s.v. "Calisch, Edith Elliott Lindeman."

⁵² Salo Wittmayer Baron taught at Columbia University from 1930 to 1963, where he held the first professorship in Jewish history created by a secular American university. His works include the eighteen-volume *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1952–1983). See Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York, 1995).

⁵³ David de Sola Pool, rabbi of New York's Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel, served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1954 to 1955 and was author of works on early American Jewish history, including *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682–1831* (New York, 1952); and, with Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World: Portrait of Shearith Israel, 1654–1954* (New York, 1955). See *New York Times*, December 2, 1970.

⁵⁴ The meeting was held on January 13, 1957, at the Vieners' home at 302 Greenway Lane in Richmond. See the circular announcing the meeting, dated December 28, 1956, in the Southern Jewish Historical Society Papers, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston (hereafter, JHC-CC), MS 1056, box 1, folder 1.

⁵⁵ Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973).

⁵⁶ On the Richmond conference and the rebirth of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, see the articles by Bernard Wax, Saul Rubin, Janice Rothschild Blumberg, and Eli N. Evans in the current volume; Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., "Turn to the South": *Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), ix–xii; Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878–1879* (Macon, GA, 1982),

169-171; and Deborah R. Weiner, "'A Sense of Connection to Others': A Profile of Stephen Whitfield," *Southern Jewish History* 7 (2004): 58, 63. Correspondence and circulars concerning some of the early conferences can be found in the Southern Jewish Historical Society Papers, JHC-CC.

⁵⁷ For an account of AJHS activities during these years, see Saul Viener's two presidential addresses in *American Jewish History* 70 (December 1980): 189-199; and 72 (September 1982): 127-131. The papers of the Richmond conference were collected in Kaganoff and Urofsky, "Turn to the South."

⁵⁸ Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern (1915-1994) was the rabbi of Norfolk's Congregation Ohef Shalom from 1947 until 1964, when he became the Director of Rabbinic Placement for the Central Conference of American Rabbis in New York. He was also a pioneer in the field of Jewish genealogy. His magnum opus was *Americans of Jewish Descent: A Compendium of Genealogy* (Cincinnati, 1960), most recently reissued as *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654-1988* (Cincinnati, 1991). See Kerry M. Olitzky, "A Memorial Tribute to Malcolm H. Stern," *American Jewish History* 82 (1994): 329-330.

⁵⁹ Dr. Ariel Goldberg served as rabbi of Congregation Beth Ahabah from 1946 to 1970. See Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 322.

⁶⁰ Stern's articles in the *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* were "Moses Myers and the Early Jewish Community of Norfolk," 1:1 (November 1958): 5-13; "Monticello and the Levy Family," 1:2 (October 1959): 19-23; and "Some Notes on the History of the Organized Jewish Community of Norfolk, Virginia," 1:3 (November 1963): 12-36.

⁶¹ Clare Levy Hutzler was a descendant of three longstanding Richmond families, the Ezekiels, the Levys, and the Mayers. See Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 69, 162, 190.

⁶² The original officers were Saul Viener and Louis Ginsberg, co-chairmen; Clare Levy Hutzler, secretary; and Samuel Z. Troy, treasurer. See *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* 1:1 (November 1958): 1. Ginsberg, an amateur historian and writer from Petersburg, VA, was the author of *History of the Jews of Petersburg* (Petersburg, VA, 1954) and *Chapters in the History of Virginia Jewry* (Petersburg, VA, 1969).

⁶³ Frances Rosenthal Kallison also co-founded, along with Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1979. She was the author of "Was It a Duel or Murder? A Study in Texas Assimilation," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (March 1973): 314-320; and "100 Years of San Antonio Jewry" (master's thesis, Trinity University, 1977). The monograph Saul refers to was his "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy."

⁶⁴ Melvin I. Urofsky is professor emeritus of history and public policy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, where he taught from 1974 to 2006. He served with Saul Viener as co-chair of the 1976 Richmond conference. Among his publications not cited elsewhere in this article are *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, NY, 1975); *Louis D. Brandeis and the Progressive Tradition* (Boston, 1981); *A Voice that Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany, NY, 1982); and *A March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States* (New York, 1988).

⁶⁵ Louis Schmier is professor of history at Valdosta State University, where he has taught since 1967. Schmier was the founding secretary when the SJHS was reestablished following the Richmond conference.

⁶⁶ Abram Kanof, M.D., was president of the AJHS from 1961 to 1964. See Margaret Kanof Norden, "In Memoriam: Dr. Abram Kanof, 1903-1999," *American Jewish History* 87 (1999): 95-96; also see page 25 of this journal for details about the organizing meeting Kanof hosted in 1976. David Goldberg of New Orleans was apparently the "young man from New Orleans" to whom Saul refers. Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry*, 170-171 n11.

⁶⁷ See Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family's Epic Quest to Rescue the House that Jefferson Built* (New York, 2001), 247-253; and Melvin I. Urofsky, *The Levy Family and Monticello, 1834-1923: Saving Thomas Jefferson's House* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001), 200-202.

⁶⁸ On the history of the VHS, see Melvin I. Urofsky, *The Virginia Historical Society: The First 175 Years, 1831-2006* (Richmond, 2006).

⁶⁹ See the exhibit's companion volume, Melvin I. Urofsky, *Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia* (Richmond, 1997).

⁷⁰ J. Ambler Johnston, an architect by profession, was an amateur military historian and scholar of the Civil War. He was known widely as "Uncle Ambler," especially among students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he was active in alumni affairs. See *Richmond News Leader*, February 7, 1974. At Saul Viener's invitation, Johnston wrote an article on a Jewish soldier who had fought alongside his uncle, N. B. Johnston, in the Civil War. See "Not Forgotten: Henry Gintzberger, Private, C.S.A.," *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* 1:3 (November 1963): 6-10.

⁷¹ Eleanor P. Sheppard served as mayor of Richmond from 1962 to 1964 and was later a member of the Virginia General Assembly. See *Richmond News Leader*, July 2, 1962; November 2, 1969; and November 3, 1971.

⁷² Rose Kaufman Banks was founder of the Richmond Community Theater, later absorbed by the Richmond Theater Guild. From 1941 to 1975 she organized arts programs and special events for the Richmond Department of Recreation and Parks. See *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, s.v. "Banks, Rose Kaufman."

⁷³ On Adrian L. Bendheim, see *Richmond Times Dispatch*, February 5, 1983, and *Richmond Times Leader*, February 5, 1983.

⁷⁴ Rev. Maximillian J. Michelbacher was the first rabbi of Richmond's Congregation Beth Ahabah, where he served from 1846 until his death in 1879. On his tenure there, and his work with Confederate soldiers during the war, see Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 139, 190-193, 211.

⁷⁵ On this family, the descendants of Solomon and Judith Myers, see Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 217.

⁷⁶ On Jennings, see Urofsky, *Virginia Historical Society*, 124-140.

⁷⁷ Charles F. Bryan, Jr., became director of the VHS in 1988. On his career there, see *ibid.*, chap. 7.

⁷⁸ Arthur S. Obermayer is a high-tech entrepreneur and philanthropist in West Newton, MA, and a longtime trustee of the American Jewish Historical Society. He is the son of Leon Obermayer, mentioned earlier in this article.

Reflections on the Past and Future of The Southern Jewish Historical Society

by

Eli N. Evans

I recall so well the conference in Richmond in 1976 that was the rebirth of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. I first met the ringmaster and convener, Saul Viener, in 1969 to get his advice and names of people to see and places to go as I began my two year journey across the South interviewing for what would become *The Provincials*.¹ And I saw him numerous other times over the years, particularly as I spent many weeks in Richmond retracing the steps and life of Judah P. Benjamin.² Saul was a rare combination of so many of the early enthusiasts who kept the flame of southern Jewish history alive. They were the amateurs whose avocation was to research and write and who immersed themselves in southern Jewish history out of a love of the subject. Saul was a constant gardener, the daily learner who might have been leading a yeshiva in earlier times, and he knew everyone in the field and beyond. He radiated special qualities of the natural leader—trust, certitude, wisdom, charm—and had it not been for him, the society may never have had a second beginning.³

During the conference Saul was the catalyst, the heart, the beloved father figure, the mensch in the middle, the all important philanthropist who could not only give but ask, and whose invitation to come together in Richmond drew more than two hundred people from across the country and the region. All sensed that the time was right and that Saul was the person who could make it happen. Saul was a quintessential southern Jewish gentleman, really a sweet man, radiating a quiet charisma who, as I remember

him through those years, could have been the inspiration for a character in a novel. Impeccably dressed, tall and slender with perfect bearing and a soft accent that sounded as warm as the fresh breeze in a Virginia spring, over the years he invited guests like me into his beautiful library of Jewish history where he loved to converse about the major Jewish figures in southern history but particularly in Richmond during the Civil War. They were, as Saul introduced them, not musty figures buried in the dusty files of history, but old friends he knew and wanted to share with a guest in his home. He spoke with intimacy and relish of such figures as:

- Gustavus Myers, the major Jewish figure in Civil War Richmond, a leading lawyer married to the daughter of the Governor of Virginia, a member of the Richmond City Council for thirty years and its president from 1843 to 1855, and Judah P. Benjamin's closest friend in Richmond.
- Rabbi Maximillian J. Michelbacher of Beth Ahabah who had written General Robert E. Lee requesting furloughs for Jewish soldiers during the High Holy Days, and Lee wrote back stating "no exceptions for soldiers of the Jewish persuasion" and then added with an adroit touch of patriotism "I feel assured that neither you or any other member of the Jewish Congregation would wish to jeopardize a cause you have so much at heart by the withdrawal even for a season of a portion of its defenders."⁴
- Saul's favorite was an artist, Moses Jacob Ezekiel, the first great American Jewish sculptor who was born in Richmond but lived forty years in Rome and whose life work portrayed the memory of the heroic past with a series of classic marble statues along Monument Avenue. Saul drove me down the wide expanse of the avenue pausing at every statue—Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, Jefferson Davis. (He also insisted I go to the Confederate Museum to see the pathos in Ezekiel's *Virginia Mourning her Dead*, and urged me to visit the Virginia Military Institute where the original is located, pointing out that Ezekiel was a cadet who fought with the

“Baby Corps” at the battle of New Market where so many cadets were killed).⁵

In inviting me to the conference, Saul had asked me to prepare keynote remarks and to think about the future of the society. I was deeply honored; *The Provincials* had been published in 1973 and had been getting review attention in major newspapers, north and south, with comments from southern literary lights like Willie Morris and later Pat Conroy as well as the national Jewish press. But I was very uneasy about talking in front of such a knowledgeable audience. I actually argued with Saul, pointing out that I was an inappropriate keynoter, a newcomer to Jewish history, a first-time author without a Ph.D. (only a law degree) who had written a single book, and not such a scholarly one at that. I wondered how most of the attendees, individuals who had nurtured the field for years, would react. But Saul was insistent and urged me not to think of it as an academic paper with footnotes, but just to be myself and imagine the society of the future.

The excitement about the conference was palpable with probably the largest gathering ever of our small field, harboring great expectations that something important would happen. I did not want to let Saul or the moment down, but my anxiety was understandable. After all, attending were the fabulous Sam Proctor, the dean of southern Jewish historians from the University of Florida, who would later be so crucial to me in my Judah P. Benjamin biography by giving me access to the papers of Senator David Levy Yulee; Bernard Wax, the director of the American Jewish Historical Society, who enthusiastically supported the idea of the rebirth of a regional society in the South; Rabbi Malcolm Stern, universally regarded as the father of American Jewish genealogy who had already published his monumental *Americans of Jewish Descent*⁶ and would serve as my intellectual mentor for over twenty years (and whom I invited to preside over my wedding as well). And there were so many others, seasoned historians in the field and young scholars who over the coming years would write a prolific number of books and articles—Stephen Whitfield from Brandeis with his infinite curiosity about Jewish and American culture and a fascination with the South; the unconventional Louis

Schmier who would teach for forty years at Valdosta State University in Georgia and was elected as an officer at the meeting; and Melvin Urofsky from Virginia Commonwealth University who was "Saul's historian" because he taught in Richmond and had a dependable and solid work ethic that turned out a steady stream of high quality academic work both at Saul's request and on his own. All would later become colleagues and leaders in the society.

To reread my remarks today is to revisit another time, to remember both how innocent and optimistic we were about the future of the field and the possibility of the society, to consider what it has become and to imagine how it might evolve over the coming decades.⁷

Looking back, it is remarkable in a way that the society has not only survived all of these years, an accomplishment on any level given its early history, but it can count among its leadership a number of the renowned personalities who were eyewitnesses to history and who lent their considerable reputations and prestige to the validation of its mission. Serving as presidents (and active members for thirty years) have been the beloved Sol Breibart (in 1983–1984), the patriarch and living encyclopedia of Charleston, who spent a lifetime making certain that the documents, letters, and ephemera of that city's earliest history, as well as its many stories and legends filed away in the total recall of his remarkable memory, would not be lost to indifference or to the Coming Street Cemetery; and Janice Rothschild Blumberg (in 1985–1986), the widow of the legendary Rabbi Jacob Rothschild, who inspired us because she lived the history of Atlanta we were writing about.⁸

In recent years, the society seems to have found a niche that enables it to maintain its place and lay the groundwork for future growth if it can find the funds to expand its mission and enable itself to think in a more visionary way about its purpose. It already gives a book prize to "the most significant contribution in the field," provides a newsletter, offers small grants for travel, research, and "project completion," and of course publishes the highly regarded *Southern Jewish History*. The society is trying to

Eli N. Evans.

(Credit: Anne Marie Rousseau.

Courtesy of the University of North Carolina Press.)

help create a literature of the region and deserves much more money for that mission. It is essential to increase the size and number of grants for research and travel so more writers can explore region-wide subjects; and to enable *Southern Jewish History* to publish more frequently each year.

There is a more exciting Jewish world emerging in the South today. What has changed dramatically is the growth of the Jewish community in the South and its institutional framework in cities across the region. Looking at the last thirty-five years, the Jewish population has tripled since I first started writing about it in

1970—from 382,000 to an estimated 1.2 million in 2004. But the growth in the urban South has been accompanied by the continuing economic woes of the small-town rural South where the textile mills have fled and the chain stores have displaced family businesses that have been steamrolled by the Wal-Mart colossus.

Paradoxically, Jewish studies in the South is coming of age at universities across the region, a phenomenon which now provides an opening for the society to create a partnership with these popular programs.⁹ There is a growing audience of interest on college campuses among Jewish and non-Jewish students and faculty.¹⁰ This expansion of activity represents the opportunity to build a broad community of interest through the Internet, by embracing the revolution in telecommunications. One major goal should involve transforming the society website from being a source of information about the society into a digital resource for research on Jews in the South, linked as a partner with every other archive, society, and university-based Jewish studies program in the region and the nation.

The Society in the Digital Age

Think of the current website dramatically redesigned as the society's window to a world-wide community and imagine its future in a digital world. Think of its power as a vehicle to create a community that joins together the scholarly world and a public with teachers and educators across the South and beyond who have an interest in our work. Imagine it as a hub with pathways to other sites wherever there is information on our subject. It is not so difficult to foresee a time when anyone with an interest in Jews in the South will turn first to the society's twenty-first century website for insight, guidance, and information. For scholars, it should contain a comprehensive guide to collections around the country, mapping out in detail the locus of papers, photographs, and collections so the user will be able to call up articles and references from an on-line world.

For example, the Center for Jewish History in New York City received a \$2 million federal grant to digitize the collections of the constituent partners, and the American Jewish Archives in

Cincinnati has built a new hi-tech building to house its collections. Mark K. Bauman paved the way for the society by publishing a list of articles relating to southern Jewish history that have appeared in the publications of the *American Jewish Historical Society*, the *American Jewish Archives Journal*, and *Southern Jewish History*, and we should seek funding to help make that material an early priority for digitizing to assist research in our field.¹¹ There is already much on the web and material is growing. For example, the Jacob Rothschild papers at Emory University were central to Melissa Fay Greene's remarkable book, *The Temple Bombing*.¹² The society can provide a guide and a unifying presence that can enable users and researchers to assemble the information from many sources as the digital movement gallops ahead in the coming years.

The digital resources are already growing in other overarching ways—The Library of Congress exhibition, *From Haven to Home: 350 years of Jewish Life in America*, is now available on line; *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* exhibit about the history of Charleston and of South Carolina (which owes its creation to Dale Rosengarten) is available through the University of North Carolina website with guides for teachers and students and course suggestions for adult education.¹³ Soon, the Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina project, sponsored by the Jewish Foundation of North Carolina and headed by Leonard Rogoff, will have its major documentary film, museum exhibition, photographs and essay book, and traveling exhibition available for schools and the public. Eventually, it too will migrate to the Web.

In 1976 I urged the society to take the oral history form seriously because I had experienced it in my own work through my grandmother's oral history in 1939, dictated to one of her eight daughters; I discovered it twenty-five years later, which inspired *The Provincials*. Atlanta has a long-standing oral history project as do many other cities, towns, and congregations, stimulated partially by the 350th celebration. These local and family histories were of vital use to me in my research on the South because they treated not just facts of families, but how

*Eli Evans at a SJHS conference, probably in Hot Springs, 1997.
Evans speaking with Gertrude L. Samet, right.
In the center are Carolyn LeMaster, left, and Rachel Heimovics Braun.
(From the managing editor's collection.)*

previous generations felt and dreamed, hoped and remembered. Just recently, the society made a prescient grant to assist the Institute for Southern Jewish Life and the Jewish Women's Archive to conduct oral history interviews about the Jewish experience during and after Hurricane Katrina. These first-person narratives will be of vital importance to present and future historians to understand what happened to the hearts and souls of Gulf Coast Jews in the aftermath of one of the greatest natural disasters in American history.

In that regard, the society should spread its wings through its website and think about other forms than academic research as its province. Three of the most difficult forms for which to find a publisher are poetry, short stories, and photography. Yet, for a field that is evolving, all three forms are well suited for the Internet, and the society's website could be a source of on-line

publication giving creative and talented people in these forms some visibility and status.

In order to reach into new generations, every student who takes a course in southern Jewish studies should be given a free membership in the society and receive its publications. The society should run occasional competitions to attract college students and should work closely with Jewish studies departments to publish on its website outstanding student work.

The Research Agenda for a New Century

In 1976, I wrote, "I suggest that scholars and lay people reactivate and reinvigorate the Southern Jewish Historical Society, not just for academics and amateur historians and rabbis who have an interest, but for everyone who lives in the South." I would amend that today, with the perspective that the audience of interest in southern Jewish history is national, as well, because the religious South has arrived in the national psyche—emotionally, psychologically, and politically—in part because of the rise of fundamentalism and the assertive nature of religious politics. Jews have always played a complicated role in the southern religious narrative. Immigrants who came to the South as peddlers stayed to raise their families, began their congregations, and built centers of education in the American Bible Belt, where religious affiliations were expected. As they practiced their faith in town after town across the South, they were, merely by their presence and their interaction with neighbors, serving as "teachers" who every day illustrated the power of religious pluralism in an otherwise Christian region of America.

Jews are shaped by the ethos of the South they live in. No one would have imagined in the 1970s, that the fastest growing Christian churches in the twenty-first century would be Evangelical and Pentecostal, already representing more than twenty-five percent of the Christian population in the South. There are many nuanced complexities to facts like that, since Jews understand that there is a continuum among the different churches that ranges from tolerance toward others to religious fanaticism.

I was recently interviewed by a journalist who grew up in a Christian family in a medium sized southern town who told me that as an adolescent, at the insistence of her mother, she attended a religious school in a synagogue for a year so she would know the kind of childhood that Jesus experienced. Rabbis in the South have told me how respected they are in cities of all sizes in that they are invited to take turns with Sunday morning "devotionals" on radio and television, are expected to become head of the local ministerial associations, invited to churches for guest sermons, and generally are respected as in no other part of the country. As I have traveled the South, Jews have repeatedly told me that "the biggest supporters of Israel in this town are the Christians." Yet, in questions like prayer in the schools and a range of issues surrounding separation of church and state, Jews in the South are at opposite poles with many of their Christian neighbors.

Of course, I realize the degree to which these stories may be linked to an apocalyptic and Messianic vision, but respect and affection exist as well, and as researchers and scholars we need to explore the deeply human interface in the daily interactions between races and religions. We need to know not only what white and black congregants believe, but how they act and feel toward Jews and how Jews react toward them. It is a subject that echoes in the oral histories of the peddler generation that draws us deep into southern Jewish history but which takes on a new dimension today. Earlier generations have labeled it "philosemitism," a love of the Jews through a special attraction to the Old Testament and to Israel. This idea, experienced by Jews in the region, emerged in the last eight years as a major force in U.S. policies toward the Middle East and in our national politics, and deserves monitoring and exploration. In the great debate as to whether being Jewish in the South is distinctive or the same as other regions of the country, the nature of the Christian world around us and the Jewish relationship to it deserves detailed attention and examination.

An unusual recent book is *A Jew Among the Evangelicals: A Guide for the Perplexed* by Mark Pinsky.¹⁴ Pinsky became the openly Jewish religion editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* and found himself at

the center of the nationwide evangelical movement with headquarters in the city. It is a surprising book that takes the reader into the heart of Sunbelt evangelicalism and discovers a diversity of opinions and attitudes that make it an informed and very human contribution to the literature of a changing America. *Publishers Weekly* selected it as one of the ten best religion books of 2006.

Finally, there is the ever present question of Jews and their relationship to the black community in the South. How has the relationship changed after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 brought millions of black voters to the ballot box and transformed southern politics not only with regard to representation, but by changing the tone and language of the public dialogue and moderating the very atmosphere of society itself? Even the definition of what it means to be a southerner has changed, making it easier in some ways to be a Jew, or any other minority, in the South. The South has been defined so deeply by films and books about it, by novels and reporting of its racial politics that the typical northern view still is that it is a place simmering with hatreds. In certain areas of the South race still permeates like the mist hanging in the marshland that echoes with the sounds of night creatures. I have often thought of the many ways that my own life was defined by race, growing up in the transition from segregation into a new South with a better future for all races. There are still elements of the southern soul that do have a dark side, but, all in all, Jews in the South are energetically part of their communities where to be openly religious is the norm. They know that a better community for everyone is a better community for Jews.¹⁵

It is an exciting time to be a southern Jewish historian—and writer, journalist, playwright, novelist, poet, and filmmaker—to continue to unravel the blended identity of what I have called a “unique Southern Jewish consciousness.” In the end understanding southern Jewish life is a continuing puzzle, made up of deeply intertwined strands of religion, race, gender, varying state-by-state “markers” like Katrina, and different eras and generations swept by economic and social change. And don’t overlook

memory and storytelling. It is, in the end, what binds us to each other and to the immigrants who preceded us.

NOTES

¹ Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973; Chapel Hill, 2005).

² Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York, 1988).

³ For a detailed tribute to Saul Veiner's life, see Eric L. Goldstein, "In Memoriam: Saul Viener, 1921 to 2006," *American Jewish History* 93 (March 2007): 85-90, and Goldstein's article in this volume of *Southern Jewish History*.

⁴ Evans, *The Provincials*, 60.

⁵ Once, after our discussion of Judah P. Benjamin, the Jewish "brains of the Confederacy," I remember asking him, "Could JPB ever be added to Monument Avenue?" Interesting idea but "little chance," Saul replied. "The Jewish community probably would not support it." I could write a twenty-five page essay on the meaning behind that answer but not here.

⁶ Malcolm H. Stern, *Americans of Jewish Descent: 600 Genealogies 1654 to 1838* (Cincinnati, 1960).

⁷ The Richmond conference proceedings were published in Melvin I. Urofsky and Nathan Kaganoff, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville VA, 1979). A more expansive version of my original remarks can be found in a chapter titled, "Southern Jewish History, Alive and Unfolding," in Eli N. Evans, *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner* (Jackson, MS, 1992).

⁸ For his most recent contribution, see Solomon Breibart with Robert N. Rosen and Jack Bass, *Explorations of Charleston's Jewish History* (Charleston, SC, 2005); see also, Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten, "In Distinguished Company: A Profile of Solomon Breibart," *Southern Jewish History* 7 (2004) 1-26. For her first-person account of the life she and her husband led in the caldron of racial drama in Atlanta and their relationship with Coretta and Martin Luther King, Jr., see Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South* (Macon, GA, 1985).

⁹ Two recent books that stimulate inquiry and new research will facilitate the creation of new courses on the graduate and undergraduate levels: Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Hanover, NH, 2006); Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa, 2006). See also individual state books: Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman, eds., *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas* (Hanover, NH, 2007); Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten, *Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia, SC, 2003); Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham-Chapel Hill and North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, 2001).

¹⁰ The growing interest in women's studies across the country and its fascination with understanding history through the eyes of women provide appealing doorways for a southern Jewish perspective on the female encounter with gentile culture in the South. See Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York, 2003). Bingham spent ten years analyzing over ten thousand letters of three generations of one family animated by the voluminous correspondence of the highly literate Jewish Mordecai women. The collection radiates a special warmth, emotion, and poignant turmoil in the souls of these women as they struggle with love, marriage, faith, and home. With a different perspective, see Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, 2005), which explores southern Jewish food culture and the nexus between southern and Jewish customs—foods rejected and embraced—as a reflection of dual southern and Jewish identities.

¹¹ Mark K. Bauman, "Articles relating to Southern Jewish History Published in *American Jewish History*, *American Jewish Archives Journal*, Their Predecessors, and *Southern Jewish History*," *Southern Jewish History* 6 (2003): 163-185.

¹² Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (Reading, MA, 1996).

¹³ For the beautiful catalogues accompanying the exhibitions, see Michael W. Grunberger, ed., *From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America* (Washington, DC, 2005); Rosengarten and Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People*.

¹⁴ Mark Pinsky, *A Jew Among the Evangelicals: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Louisville, KY, 2006).

¹⁵ For an earlier perspective, see Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews Race and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006).

Framing Florida Jewry

by

Stephen J. Whitfield

Florida is more than the twenty-seventh state to have joined the Union. Florida is also a state of mind. But too few historians of Jewry have managed to pay much mind to the state itself. At least until fairly recently, it has been the stepchild of Jewish historiography, even though census-takers count twice as many Jews in Broward County as in Moscow, for example. The Jews who live in Miami-Fort Lauderdale, a Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area, or CMSA, outnumber the Jews who live in Paris.¹ Or take another way of measuring demographic power. The best-selling fiction in American history is Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' *Left Behind*, the pre-millennial dispensationalist series that has sold a staggering sixty million copies. According to its evangelical eschatology, the rapture will lift up all true Christians into heaven, leaving behind "the great tribulation," a seven-year struggle against the antichrist that will require as many as 144,000 Jews to disseminate the true knowledge of God. Yet over four times that theologically decisive number can already be found living in Florida.² It happens to have been the third state to secede from the Union (right after South Carolina and Mississippi). Yet even specialists in southern Jewish history have tended to neglect Florida. The temptation therefore cannot be resisted to proclaim that the Sunshine State has largely been forgotten (except by the future, dangling forever before those poised to make their homes or their fortunes there).

The Historiography Considered

Surprisingly, the first conclave on the subject of Florida Jewry was held slightly more than half a century ago. On February 16, 1956, a Conference on the Writing of Regional History in the South took place in Miami, sponsored by the University of Miami, the Historical Association of Southern Florida, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS). Speakers included the Librarian of Congress as well as two past presidents of the Southern Historical Association. On that occasion, a message was read from the formidable Allan Nevins, the Columbia University historian, who lamented that the broader regional context of southern Jewish history was blurred and elusive. It was presumably “so full of vitality, color and promise, [yet] remains to be told; not only are its details largely unascertained,” he acknowledged, “but even its broad outlines are not accurately known.” At that conference the JTS announced “the preparation of the history of Jews in South Florida,”³ a promise that was not kept. Indeed, even though professional historians of the next generation or so would begin serious research into southern Jews, little scholarly attention has been focused on their coreligionists in South Florida. And to highlight this neglect, the argument of this essay is framed primarily in terms of the scholarship on southern Jewry.

Less than two decades ago, for example, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience was built in Utica, Mississippi, near Jackson. Since 2000 the museum has flourished under the auspices of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and its writ officially extends to retrieving and making accessible the Jewish heritage of an even-dozen states. Ten of them—all of which had belonged to the former Confederacy—are there, plus two that did not secede from the Union. One is Kentucky (the home state of Abraham Lincoln). The other is the Sooner State, which ranks lowest among “southern” states when pollsters ask Oklahomans whether they think of themselves as southern. No extra credit is given for guessing which state is formally outside the range of interest of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, despite the secession of Florida from the Union a century and a half ago.⁴

Isidor Cohen.

The first permanent Jewish settler in Miami arrived there in 1896. In 1912 he helped found the first Jewish congregation in Miami. In 1921 he helped write the Miami City Charter.

(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)

The author hastens to add that *Southern Jewish History* itself is not guilty of the sin of omission. To date the nine annual issues of the journal have included the publication of two excerpted memoirs on Florida, plus two scholarly articles, and one book review dealing with historical events in that state. This is a respectable and defensible proportion of the pages allotted to scholarship on southern Jewry.

Another way of gauging the attention paid to Florida Jewry is to examine what scholars call canonization. By reprinting or commissioning articles in a field that is lively enough to attract a cohort of researchers, editors of anthologies draw from the pool of talent. Thus they present work that helps to define the contours of a field and to address its major themes and problems. The historiography of southern Jewry has been punctuated by six such anthologies.

The earliest was *Jews in the South* (1973), edited by Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson.⁵ They reprinted twenty articles, nine of which could be said to focus upon particular communities or states. One deals with Florida, or at least with a Floridian, by profiling David Levy Yulee, the first Jew to serve in the United States House of Representatives and then in the United States Senate. Leon Hühner's biographical article was originally published in 1917 (which was only a little more than two decades after the city of Miami was incorporated). Three years after the publication of *Jews in the South*, a conference was held in Richmond to revive the Southern Jewish Historical Society. The papers presented at that 1976 conference were published three years later as *Turn to the South*, edited by Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky.⁶ Their book consists of fourteen chapters, of which three could be characterized by communal specificity. One article is devoted to Florida, or at least to a Floridian: Rabbi Irving Lehrman, who had delivered one of the two scholarly papers at the Miami conference on regional history in 1956 (and who also coauthored a pioneering pamphlet, "The Jewish Community of Miami Beach"). Gladys Rosen's profile of Lehrman has the virtue of putting his career at Temple Emanu-El on Miami Beach within the setting of Jewish history in that community, a context that Hühner could not have found and therefore could hardly have been expected to portray in his article on Senator Yulee in *Jews in the South*.

A slim volume, *Jews of the South* (1984), edited by Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier with Malcolm Stern, plucked presentations from conferences of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. This anthology includes Joseph Gary Adler's article on Senator Yulee's father, "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida," the latter an impractical enterprise that was probably doomed even before Seminoles burned down Pilgrimage Plantation in 1835. An entrepreneur who was also a utopian, a slaveholder who also wrote in favor of abolitionism, Levy was an unusual figure, having come to Florida from the Caribbean, dreaming in vain of turning Pensacola into "the New York of the South." He is finally the subject of an excellent 2005 biography by C. S. Monaco.⁷ Because *Jews of the South* has only 130 pages of text,

the attention given to Florida cannot be considered disproportionately small.

But the career of one of the editors of this anthology reveals the extent of the lacunae. Proctor himself graduated from the University of Florida in 1941, earned his doctorate there in 1958, and taught for half a century in Gainesville, where he edited the *Florida Historical Quarterly* for three decades. The leading academic specialist of his generation on the history of Florida did much to promote and to publicize its past. He was also unashamedly Jewish. Yet Proctor produced only one article dedicated to the Jews of Florida. The essay is neither analytical nor synthetic but was described, when delivered at the Miami conference in 1956, as a "recital of the various personalities who emerged in Florida's history." The chronological thrust of Proctor's piece on pioneer settlements stops in 1900,⁸ an ironic date because 1900 is the start of the century when South Florida shows such cultural divergence from the rest of the South.

A more specialized anthology was published in 1997: *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*.⁹ The struggle for racial equality that crested in the 1960s was famously waged outside of Florida. Perhaps St. Augustine was the only site of a significant civil rights battle, in 1964, even though segregation was entrenched throughout the state. Only about half a century ago, in downtown Miami, a black customer was forbidden to sit down for a cup of coffee in a department store or at a five-and-ten. Even in Dade (now Miami-Dade) County businesses could not defy with impunity the laws passed by a vehemently segregationist legislature in Tallahassee. On the other hand, Miami was no Montgomery (where heroism was required to challenge white supremacy), and the dependence of South Florida on wish-you-were-here tourism helped make racial attitudes more progressive.

When bus stations in Miami—where diversity went beyond the bifurcation of race—had to put up signs that read "Reservados Para Hombres Blancos" and "Reservados Para Señoras Blancas," the irrational and anachronistic character of Jim Crow had become obvious. After all, Miami has been closer culturally as

*Blanck's Department Store.
At the northwest corner of NW Third Street and
Miami Avenue, Miami, the store was founded in 1914.
Members of the family and two employees stand in front.
(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)*

well as geographically to Havana than to Tallahassee. Even in the 1950s, waitresses working at Woolworth's felt obliged to serve coffee to dark-skinned customers—if they spoke Spanish. However, no more in Florida than in the Deep South could violence be avoided with bombs going off or intended to go off in Jewish communal institutions in Jacksonville and Miami.¹⁰ But in such communities, rabbinical courage and consciences were not tested as they were elsewhere in the region. Florida was marginal to the crisis of civil rights in the 1960s, a status which has generated such limited scholarly interest that the state is justifiably omitted from *The Quiet Voices*.

Last year two anthologies appeared that update the process of canonization. A coeditor of *The Quiet Voices*, Mark K. Bauman has chosen sixteen articles to be reprinted in *Dixie Diaspora* (2006).¹¹ Half of them address states or local communities; and

once again Florida is presented in biographical terms in the form of Canter Brown, Jr.'s, lively revision of his 1992 article on two brothers, businessmen who had immigrated in their youth from Prussian Poland. Morris Dzialynski served as mayor of Jacksonville; Philip Dzialynski lived in smaller towns such as Madison, Bartow, and Palatka. Brown does a gallant job of setting the lives of these Jewish provincials within a setting at the outer edges of communal life. In these five anthologies, it may neither be accidental that all three chapters incorporating Florida's past are biographical, nor that all are restricted to the nineteenth century as well. They retrieve the lives of individuals, who were, in the formal classification devised by the Harvard social scientist Robert D. Putnam, *machers* rather than *schmoozers*.¹² The three aforementioned articles do not depict Jewry, but instead evoke an era before much of a community existed in the southernmost state of them all. The paradoxical fate of Florida Jewry is that, even when it became a demographic powerhouse, its authenticity and seriousness came to be doubted.

Following very quickly in the wake of *Dixie Diaspora* was *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, coedited by Marcie Cohen Ferris and by a former student of Proctor's, Mark I. Greenberg, who serves as director of the Florida Studies Center and Special Collections Department at the University of South Florida.¹³ Greenberg's own contribution to the anthology, however, is a study on Savannah. *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* highlights no other cities, and only one other contributor focuses upon a single state (South Carolina). Florida is therefore treated no differently than other southern states, and such editorial decisions are neither unfair nor unjustified. The scholarly literature on Florida Jewry that could have been plucked from journals to reprint is meager, and neither Proctor nor any other historian has contributed in any substantial way to an examination of the meaning of the Florida Jewish past. These six anthologies on southern Jewish history signify the liveliness of the field. But a prospective historian of Florida Jewry must feel, in the phrase of Nora Ephron, like a wallflower at the orgy; and these half-dozen volumes deserve mention as reflective of the need to enlarge and enhance the geographic scope of their topic.

The need for revision becomes more pronounced when assessing the work of the most influential contemporary author to have tackled the southern Jewish experience. Eli N. Evans has been a foundation executive based in New York rather than an academic. But no one deserves more credit for persuading historians of American Jewry to resist the temptation to focus on Evans's adopted city. Until the 1973 publication of *The Provincials*, which Evans has revised and updated (most recently in the spring of 2005), too many scholars and writers never got past that last exit to Brooklyn. He put southern Jewry on the map—and not the one that Saul Steinberg drew in 1976 as a *New Yorker* cover (“View of the World from 9th Avenue”) in mocking the provincials who happened to live in Manhattan.

On the other hand, Evans has not exactly encouraged the growing ranks of historians of southern Jewry to venture much below the Suwannee River. For example, by 1997, when an expanded edition of *The Provincials* appeared, the author had ample opportunity to reflect on the staggering growth of Florida, and especially of the gold coast counties (Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach). But while noting that “major centers are growing in northern [*sic*] Florida,” he insisted that “all eyes are on the new Atlanta, the bellwether and the leading edge of the Southern Jewish revival.” An extensive separate chapter in the expanded paperback traces the resurgence of Atlanta,¹⁴ as though South Florida were not integral to the story of *The Provincials* at all.

Even if the highest population estimates are accepted, which is that about 120,000 Jews now live in Atlanta, such demographic growth represents only about a sixth of the Jewish population of the three contiguous counties along the east coast of Florida. Where do Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Jews fit in the continuing saga of southern Jewry? In an interview that appeared on the website of the University of North Carolina Press in 2005, Evans was asked about the future. His reply was upbeat, with special attention to the impressive spike in Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, and at the research triangle of Chapel Hill-Durham-Raleigh. He added that the “Jacksonville-Tampa-Orlando area is also growing dramatically.” As for Jewish life in any community south

of Orlando, he was silent, as though he had just been read his Miranda rights. One need not be a statistician to notice an inconsistency as well. For the purpose of counting Jews, all of Florida gets included—from 382,000, when *The Provincials* was being written, to an estimated 1.2 million in 2004.¹⁵ But when it comes to studying and reflecting upon all the Jews of Florida, suddenly half of southern Jewry vanishes.

In this respect little significant advance has been achieved over the approach taken by Harry Golden, the editor of *The Carolina Israelite*. He was arguably the most prominent Jew to have lived permanently in the postwar South—at least until prize-winning author Isaac Bashevis Singer and mobster Meyer Lansky each decided (independently) to move to Miami Beach. A pamphlet that Golden published in 1955 claimed that his “sociological generalizations” about the Jews of the Carolinas were applicable to the entire region of Dixie, “excepting of course Florida, and probably Louisiana.”¹⁶ In those two states, presumably, the Jews did not go native. The author did not try very hard to test his generalizations, however. In doing the research for his 1974 book on *Our Southern Landsman*, Golden did not bother to travel below Jacksonville (to which four pages are devoted), as though fearful of the old maps that warn: there be monsters here. He thus emulated the travels of the most famous of northern visitors in the antebellum period, Frederick Law Olmsted, whose illuminating account, *The Cotton Kingdom* (1861), gets its author down to Savannah, where he moves west across Georgia and Alabama, and then picks up a steamer in Mobile on his way to New Orleans. In two subsequent trips Olmsted also skipped Florida.¹⁷ To be sure *Our Southern Landsman* does devote two paragraphs to David Levy Yulee, and does briefly mention Miami twice (one in conjunction with the arrival of Cuban Jews after Fidel Castro took power). The inclusion of Miami does suggest, however fleetingly, that it belongs in a book on southern Jewry. But evidently the author did not consider the city important enough to observe directly.¹⁸

Perhaps the most concise account of the Jewish experience in Florida remains the sixteen pages of text serving as the historical

introduction to *Mosaic*, the catalogue to the exhibition that opened in 1991 and then toured the state under the creative leadership of Marcia K. Zerivitz, later the founding executive director of the Jewish Museum of Florida. That introduction does not profess to be interpretive or analytical. But it does succinctly depict the evolution of Florida Jewry.¹⁹ The cover photograph, taken in 1916, nonetheless reflects the elusiveness of this topic. A child is shown with a fake alligator, a prop that places him uniquely in Florida. But no Jewish symbols, objects, or foods are in sight. What is his ethnic identity? His name was Felix Glickstein, who grew up to become my dentist in Jacksonville, where I myself grew up. The ambiguity of the cover photo of the catalogue means that, valuable as it is, *Mosaic* opens rather than settles questions of the meaning of Jewish life in Florida. Not until a decade and a half later did an anthology of essays devoted to the *Jews of South Florida*, edited by Andrea Greenbaum, appear. The dust jacket photo is striking: a Torah is propped on a beach chair in the sand.

Paradigm Lost

Of course, explanations for the neglect that this essay underscores can easily be summoned. Brevity is the signature of the history of the Florida Jewish community. In 1881 a survey found only 772 Jews in the entire state. Paradoxically, much of the scholarship on Florida Jewry has been concentrated on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the demographic base was so tiny and fragile, and when its place among their coreligionists was so negligible. To be sure the dramatic belatedness and compression of communal history can be considered a microcosm of the national experience itself. When a promising young scholar named Eric Foner felt the allure of dedicating himself to the American past, his tutor at Oxford University, a specialist on the English Church of the fourteenth century, was dismissive. "In other words," Foner was warned, "you have ceased to study history."²⁰ Although no city in the U.S. is older than Saint Augustine, the state itself is a latecomer; and the national importance that Florida has exercised has accelerated only in the most recent decades. At the dawn of the twentieth century, perhaps no southern state was

drowsier. Indeed, until the end of the 1960s, even the legislature met in Tallahassee only every other year and for a session of sixty days. Why bother to do more?

Before World War II, no state seemed more remote from the acute challenges that urbanization was posing elsewhere. In 1940 no southern state had fewer residents. Yet before the end of the twentieth century, Florida became the nation's fourth most populous state, and is coming on so fast on the outside track that the prospect of outpacing even New York is no longer unimaginable. (The 2000 census revealed that the Jewish population of New York City dropped below a million for the first time in over a century.) Florida has become so appealing that it became the first state of the former Confederacy where whites born outside the region have constituted a majority. And that is not counting the 70 million tourists who visit annually.²¹

The startling suddenness of this transformation is the way that Jewish life in Florida must look as well. That topic seems so fresh and so recent that it resembles sociology or journalism more than history. Though the first Jewish cemetery in Florida began in 1857, and the first synagogue was built in the centennial year of 1876, Florida provides a supremely twentieth-century paradigm. Miami was incorporated in 1896, only a year after the first Jew arrived there. Though the Jewish community of Los Angeles got bigger, no large American Jewish community that got started later grew faster than Miami. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, only about 2,500 Jews lived in the entire state of Florida. It was soon attractive enough for a wealthy Jewish businessman, the protagonist of Abraham Cahan's novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), to visit there—and to find himself “falling in love with a rich girl.” Even though David Levinsky returns to New York, the demographic momentum of relocation was unstoppable; and by the 1950s, the Jewish population had risen to 70,000.²²

The true historic baseline was the World War II, when the Army Air Corps took over most of the hotels and assigned many northern Jews for training in the Miami area. Thousands of G.I.'s were thereby introduced to its allure—and, lo and behold, it turned out that some liked it hot. According to historian Deborah

Dash Moore, the former servicemen and their families would return to install a distinctive “mixture of glamour and grit, of elegance and *hamishness*, of ostentation and intimacy, of Old World and New.”²³ Not everyone was enthralled. On his way to Havana in 1953, the bohemian poet Allen Ginsberg called Miami a “dream of rich sick Jews.” Visiting Florida for the first time in 1949, the mandarin literary critic Edmund Wilson described Miami in terms of “unimaginable awfulness . . . on an unprecedented scale,” and dismissed Miami Beach as “a great insipid vacuum.”²⁴

To others, however, such emptiness constituted a challenge. Rabbi Leon Kronish, who arrived in 1944, called Miami Beach “the American Negev,” ready to bloom. It also became a playground for the *nouveaux riches*. In New York the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) feared that vulgarity was helping to perpetuate antisemitism and assigned one of its officials to try to regulate Jewish conduct along the following lines: “Dress conservatively. Don’t be loud in public. In Miami Beach don’t wear a mink coat over a bathing suit. . . .”²⁵ The effectiveness of this particular ADL campaign can be doubted.

Two Miami Beach landmarks were born in the 1940s. In 1940 Ben Novack arrived and, in the following decade, would conceive and build the Fontainebleau Hotel, instructing his architect, Morris Lapidus, to make it “the world’s most pretentious.” (The architecture of the Fontainebleau Hotel was famously curved, like Einstein’s universe.) In 1943 Wolfie Cohen arrived and opened up an eponymous sandwich shop on Collins Avenue and Twentieth Street. Wolfie’s whetted the appetites of both tourists and locals for “New York cheesecake” and other delicacies that were deemed even more exotic elsewhere in the South. After the war, the comforts of air-conditioning and the defeat of mosquitoes with DDT represented the conquest of nature—even in what had been advertised as paradise.²⁶ Many northerners and midwesterners found it easier to be enticed because of the interstate highway system that crisscrossed the nation beginning in the 1950s. The decision of once-famous airlines such as Pan American, Eastern, and National to locate their corporate headquarters in Miami also

Wolfe's, Lincoln Road, Miami, c. 1950.

(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)

symbolized the ease and frequency of commercial flights to and from South Florida. Thus were its temptations facilitated.

In the 1980s no Jewish population in the nation grew faster than Broward County. In the next decade no Jewish population grew faster than Palm Beach County. Retirement communities were pivotal to such growth. With 12 percent of South Floridians living in Jewish households, demographer Ira M. Sheskin has conjectured that "only the New York metropolitan area may have a larger percentage of Jewish households than South Florida."²⁷ So conspicuous did they become that the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury has proposed to solve the Middle East imbroglio by establishing a new Jewish homeland in South Florida instead of the national refuge the Zionists created. It is disturbing to quote his addendum: "People think I'm joking when I say that." Perhaps Bradbury did not realize how superfluous such a resettlement would be, since a *moshav* was built in Israel named *Me 'Ammi*.²⁸ The startling and vertiginous growth of South Florida Jewry was reflected in the experience of Debbie Wasserman Schultz,

a 41-year-old U.S. congresswoman representing Florida's 20th District in the House of Representatives. Born on Long Island, she arrived in Gainesville for her freshman year at the University of Florida, where she met a classmate who told Wasserman that she was the first Jew whom she had ever met: "I've seen pictures, but I've never seen a real one before."²⁹

The velocity of the demographic change has therefore posed a challenge to one particular academic fashion, which is to explore what the French historian Pierre Nora defined as the sites of memory. There past and present form a continuous if contentious thread, where remembrance blends with mythology, and where institutional effort at retrieval blurs into imaginative reconstruction and even into invention. Stephen Foster, for instance, never visited Florida. But though his "Old Folks at Home" is the nostalgic state song, Nora's intergenerational project seems a little implausible when *les lieux de mémoire* are supposed to include Boynton Beach or Pembroke Pines or Sunrise, which are now part of the CMSA of Southeast Florida, the sixth largest core Jewish metropolitan population in the world (498,000). The most recent estimate of the total Jewish population of Florida is 653,435.³⁰ So huge and sudden a rise is problematic. Historians are usually less interested in the jump-starts of communal life than in the deeper continuities, and like to trace evolution and growth. Leaving the big bang to the physicists, historians prefer to detect the structural resilience beneath the surface of change. What has happened in South Florida cannot be fit into the paradigm that bewitches some students of southern Jewry.

That paradigm is basically a nineteenth-century saga. The small town is its setting. The mercantile class dominates its social structure. Moderate conservatism defines its political sensibility. Classical Reform Judaism serves as its most authentic religious expression. Germany rather than eastern Europe formed its origins. Ethnic distinctiveness was repudiated and tribalism was an affront, because everyone was supposed to be either black or white. This nineteenth-century paradigm survived through the first half of the twentieth century as well. Our southern *landsman* did not typify those whom Annie Hall's "Grammy" would have

called “real Jews,” but was ersatz, seeking to blend seamlessly into the region. Many did so with such thoroughness that their Jewishness could not have been better concealed than had they participated in a Witness Protection Program. The paradigm worked well enough to make memories of the South tenacious. Adolph S. Ochs spent most of his life in New York fashioning an ornament of the nation’s journalism. But the *Times* publisher still considered Chattanooga to be his home, and he insisted that Tennessee flora decorate his grave site.³¹

The energies that once animated small-town Jewry, however, are now virtually depleted. Take Mississippi, where its overwhelmingly rural Delta has been called “the most Southern place on earth.” Maybe 1,500 Jews call it home. That is the size of the membership roll of a Miami Beach synagogue, such as Temple Beth Sholom, when Leon Kronish served as its rabbi. Three times that number are estimated to have worshipped on the High Holy Days at another Reform synagogue, Temple Israel, which has had to hire the Miami Beach Convention Hall because so many congregants wished to welcome the New Year and to atone for their sins. To paraphrase the title of a 1960 film that is set on the beaches of Fort Lauderdale, Mississippi is basically where the goyim are. For example, in one of its towns, Brookhaven (population twelve thousand), only three Jews remain. Even though one of them, Harold Samuels, who was until recently the mayor (the third Jew in the history of that town to hold that office), could not forestall the inevitable. Small-town southern Jewry is toast.³²

Fewer Jews live in Arkansas (under two thousand) than belong to the largest synagogues in South Florida. (Whether all the worshippers actually pay their dues cannot be verified.) The glum prospects for mythic locales such as the Mississippi Delta are symbolized in the history of what became Stein Mart, which had been based in Greenville. Stein’s Self Service Store was the biggest merchandising emporium in the entire Delta, covering an entire city block, with mouthwatering discounts promised on discards from Manhattan operations such as Saks Fifth Avenue. But in 1984 Jay Stein, the grandson of the founder, moved corporate

headquarters from Greenville to Jacksonville, Florida. By the dawn of the new century, as Stein Mart was racking up \$1.2 billion in sales earned in 260 stores,³³ the Delta origins of the company had receded into the distant past.

One important *lieu de mémoire* of the former Confederacy is Montgomery, where southern independence was declared early in 1861. Only about 1,200 Jews live there now, among perhaps 9,000 in the entire state of Alabama. (In contrast the Jewish population of Fort Myers, Florida, is only slightly smaller.) Little remains of the texture of the paradigmatic southern Jewish experience. In the hamlets that once shaped it, the tumbleweeds blow down the main streets where dry-goods stores and hardware stores always seemed open for business. What is left are decayed mansions, defunct synagogues, cemeteries where an occasional fresh grave has been dug (and maybe the local Chabad house).

Oddly enough the power of the paradigm has ensured that southern Jewry historiography has flourished. This paradox needs to be emphasized. The Southern Jewish Historical Society was revived just early enough to capture what was extant before it would become extinct, as Macy Hart, the president of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, has poignantly phrased it. The academic panels and programs of the society keep expanding, as do the pages of its annual scholarly journal. With this 2007 issue, *Southern Jewish History* will turn ten years old; admittedly its editorial stance is hardly committed to validating the paradigm. Nevertheless, if present rates of growth can be sustained, more scholars might be investigating the Jewry emblematic of the region's small towns than ever actually lived in them.

In this context the geographical anomaly of Florida helps to explain the neglect of its Jews. As though an aberration, Florida is often displaced from the South. Such disarray is peculiar because Florida has exhibited many characteristics that historians have taken to be regional tics. A slave state became a segregationist state and produced its share of politicians who scorned the Constitutional pledge of equal rights. Such officials were generally

representative of their constituents. In the Democratic Party's Senatorial primary in 1950, George Smathers, a graduate of the University of Florida's law school, vowed to provide legal help *pro bono* to cops charged with brutalizing any of the state's black citizens. (Support your local police.) He won the primary and was of course elected to the U.S. Senate, where he joined Spessard Holland, who would later describe himself as a "hopeless reactionary."³⁴

American historians usually peg the 1920s as the apogee of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1927, for example, it was natural for the Klan to provide a float in Miami's Fourth of July parade. The national decline of the KKK began by the end of that decade. But the Invisible Empire hardly vanished in Florida, where members continued serving as poll watchers in close elections, became important donors and supporters of politicians, got appointed as state investigators of racial crimes, and perhaps most significantly belonged to local police forces. In 1952 the KKK's state president—a Grand Dragon—addressed a meeting of the Florida Sheriffs' Association and was applauded for denouncing a civil rights worker who had recently been murdered. Not until the 1970s did police forces seek to eliminate the Klansmen working in their midst. Raymond A. Mohl's monograph on the postwar civil rights struggle in Miami is a reminder of how southern even that city was. Although 20,000 black Baptists managed to hold a convention on Miami Beach in 1953, Jewish hotel owners and restaurateurs who operated there were generally reluctant to lower barriers against black patrons and customers, and did not finally and consistently do so until the 1970s.³⁵ By then some leftist Jewish activists who had moved from the North had worked hard to breathe life into the egalitarian promise that the founders of the Republic had enunciated.

What is southern has been determined by attitudes and not merely by latitudes. The region has been defined not only by geography but also by ideological commitment through the filter of self-consciousness. White southerners are people who identify themselves as such. For them the Stars and Bars is not merely a flag of convenience. The distinctiveness of the region, which

*Klan in Fourth of July Parade, 1927, Miami.
The Klan was a very public presence in Florida,
participating actively in many community events.
(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)*

outsiders so often sense, makes it difficult for South Florida Jews to imagine themselves as southerners. Puzzlement has not been confined to Jews as recorded in the urgent question that the Canadian Shreve McCannon poses as a Harvard undergraduate in the fall of 1909 to his Mississippi roommate, Quentin Compson: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all."³⁶ Among northern Jews the sense of strangeness and even of weirdness has endured. That reputation was most recently encapsulated in a conversation between Bill Clinton and a former *New Yorker* editor, Robert Gottlieb, whom he picked to edit his presidential memoirs. After Clinton submitted a

couple of hundred pages on his Arkansas boyhood, Gottlieb phoned the author to tell him: "I really like this." "Well, you got any questions?" "Just one." "What is it?" "Did you know any *sane* people as a child?" Gottlieb wondered. Clinton replied: "No, but neither did anybody else. I was just paying attention more than most people."³⁷

In what was once the most thoroughly Protestant slice of the Western Hemisphere, difference inevitably stood out. Homogeneity heightened the difficulty of figuring out if Jews were merely white, or whether they were also distinctive in ways that could be not fully absorbed or accepted. The *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (1980), for example, includes the category of White Southerners, but of course the reference work also includes Jews, who could be appreciated and even assimilated. But sometimes their status as a religious minority was accentuated. A group of country songwriters and singers was once gathered at Johnny Cash's home near Nashville, a locale famous for its barbecue. Suddenly Joe Carter (a cousin of Cash's wife June Carter) discerned a certain division among the musicians. He asked Bob Dylan: "You don't eat pork, do you?" The young outsider's reply ("Uh, no, sir, I don't") offered a very faint echo of the divergence among the merchants of early modern Venice,³⁸ as Shylock defines the rules of engagement in his encounter with Bassanio: "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you . . . but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (I:3). I'll jam with you. I'll compose music for you. I'll even sing a duet with you on the *Nashville Skyline* album. But if you insist on wolfing down *chazerai* from the local Pig 'n' Whistle, I won't eat with you. Difference could play out multifariously, however, in South Florida, where the Eden Roc Hotel has featured a kosher Chinese restaurant.³⁹

When civil rights activists directly challenged white supremacy, some Jews in the Deep South felt compelled to become more vociferous in their regional allegiances. For example, a Jewish plumbing contractor in Birmingham named Bernard Lewis was fond of reassuring the city's segregationist mayor, Art Hanes, and his gentile drinking buddies: "It wasn't the Birmingham Jews who

*Coronado Hotel brochure,
(detail), c. 1940.
One of Miami Beach's beachfront
hotels that openly advertised
for a "gentile clientele."
(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum
of Florida, Miami Beach.)*

killed Jesus. It was the Miami Jews."⁴⁰ This eccentric reading of the New Testament did at least suggest the extent to which the Miami Jews could appear alien to the South for much of its twentieth-century history. Birmingham Jews tried hard to fit in to the local environment. Miami Jews *altered* their environment instead. Currently they are among the least likely to jettison religious particularity. They rank near the top, in comparison to others cities, in the proportion that put a mezuzah on the front door, and that claim to keep kosher outside as well as inside the home. Even the intermarriage rate is significantly lower than elsewhere,⁴¹ which makes Miami one of the least southern places on earth.

By the final decade of the twentieth century, only half the residents of Florida were willing to call themselves southerners. By a slight margin, even more Oklahomans were willing to designate themselves as southerners than were Floridians.⁴² It is a safe guess that the proportion of Jews in Florida who call themselves southerners is significantly lower than the state's average of 51 percent, maybe even coming in under radar. It is unlikely that, to themselves, they feel like genuine legatees of the land of cotton; old times there were long forgotten. (The state doesn't even offer sites of major Civil War battles to visit; there were none.) The central institution of nineteenth-century southern Jewry—the general store—could be contrasted with a typical institution of modern Florida Jewry: Century Village. Before there were general stores, there were peddlers. Eli Evans once asked an elderly Jew in a very obscure crossroads town in North Carolina why he had settled there. The answer was probably apocryphal, but here is the reply: "The horse died."⁴³ Contrast the necessary means of transportation in South Florida, where the archetypal joke has two elderly women in a car. "Sadie," one exclaims, "you just ran through a red light!" "But Esther," Sadie replies, "I thought *you* were driving." Small-town southern Jews had to listen to rebel yells; Florida has echoed to the sounds of *oy vey*. Such contrasts need not be infinitely extended.

Culture is the rationale offered by Eli Evans and by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience for omitting South Florida from consideration. That view is shared by Carolyn Lipson-Walker, who is the leading student of southern Jewish folklore. (Scratch that; she's actually the *only* student of southern Jewish folklore.) Her unpublished doctoral dissertation argues that southern Jewry has been marked by "self-perceived unity and a common set of traditions . . . and [a] worldview *not shared by others*." Lipson-Walker warns, however: "I am excluding the Jews of Southern Florida from this study because they have, for the most part, merely transplanted their Northern culture to a warmer climate."⁴⁴ Such an opinion was more generally recorded as early as 1939 in the WPA guide to the state: "Its northern area is strictly southern and its southern area definitely northern."⁴⁵

Some reinforcement of this claim also comes from the coeditor of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, Marcie Cohen Ferris, who is also the associate director of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at Chapel Hill. On southern Jewish foodways, she is the leading authority. (Scratch that; she is actually the *only* authority.) Her recent book, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*, which converts the kitchen into a portal to the southern Jewish past, devotes virtually no attention to Florida. Of those whom she interviewed, only two informants can be identified as Floridians—and one, Paula Shapiro Zielonka, was born and raised in Shreveport before studying at Newcomb College in New Orleans.

The author of *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* describes “the Jewish landscape in the South” as “constantly changing. While some Jewish communities in the Sunbelt are growing, being a Jewish southerner still requires a level of commitment and a consciousness of identity that sets this region apart from others.”⁴⁶ How that self-definition might be determined can be hazy. Nor is it obvious that newcomers to North Carolina’s research triangle, or even Jews residing in Austin, show less of that “level of commitment” than, say, inhabitants of Fort Lauderdale. The continuities as well as the contours of southern identity remain elusive. How evident is the literary lineage that a Texan like “Kinky” Friedman could trace all the way back to the first notable southern Jewish poet, Penina Möise of Charleston? Texas seems different from, say, South Carolina, where a black Jew, Reuben Morris Greenberg, currently serves as the police chief of Charleston. So implausible a top cop raises the question of what still sets the region apart from the rest of America. Or take Houston. Is such a city, which is associated with oil rather than with cotton, supposed to be more southern than, say, Miami, which heavily pivots on tourism but which is even less associated with cotton?

If Miami seems so discontinuous from a past that exalted the desire to live and die in Dixie, that may well be because that nineteenth-century paradigm was so binary. It assumed that the dichotomy between black and white was decisive. Not that contemporary Miami has transcended division. But it is more obviously associated not with race but with class,

with the widening gap between haves and have-nots. That is the split that has mattered. The wealthiest community in the U.S. can be found on Fisher Island, embedded in a city that suffers from the nation's third-worst poverty rate. Throughout the state twice as many children live in poverty as do the elderly. Nor can many students in the Miami-Dade public schools, where the high school graduation rate is 45 percent, expect to afford homes in a metropolitan area that has recently brandished one of the country's highest house prices (a staggering median of \$372,000).⁴⁷

Such have been the repercussions of a civic failure to realize that in dreams begin responsibilities. The glad hand that for a century Florida residents have extended to tourists and to land developers, to senescent retirees and to spring-break hedonists has been so accepted that the consequences have been appalling: dangerous environmental degradation, maddening traffic congestion, and the sort of sprawl that implies a fervent commitment to ugliness. The much-touted attractions of the state—its sublime and tranquil beauty, its glistening beaches and its come-hither climate—have become all too apparent. A stunning growth in population has facilitated not only spectacular prosperity but also resulted in the consequences of uncontrolled growth.

A Plea for Inclusion

However these problems can or might be resolved, and wherever the borders of the South are drawn, the incessant change to which Marcie Cohen Ferris referred means that the former Confederacy has become much less homogenous and cohesive. That is why it is permissible to speculate that *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* may be among the last major scholarly books covering the expanse of southern Jewry that can get away with ignoring Florida. Indeed the combustible heterogeneity of Florida casts some doubt on the very meaning of regionalism, the organizing principle to which many an American historian and social scientist has subscribed. Texas can at least be inserted into the West. But if Florida does not belong to a region that includes, say, Alabama or Arkansas, where does this behemoth fit?

A partial solution has been devised by the social historian responsible for the fullest scholarly account of Miami. Deborah Dash Moore's *To the Golden Cities* makes no effort to place the city within the rest of Florida, much less within the region, but instead twins Miami with Los Angeles. She emphasizes the similarities between the two Jewish communities divided by a continent. What links them is obviously not the geographical propinquity with which regionalists wrestle, but rather the challenges and responses that the Sunbelt generates. Its demographic importance is undeniable. The Sunbelt has reshaped the landscape of American Jewry, as Mort Sahl observed as early as the 1950s when he used a pro-Zionist allusion to remark of Palm Springs: "You've got to admire those people, carving out a nation in the desert."

But the Sunbelt is too broad a concept, with too much variation within it to be analytically useful. The neo-populist Jim Hightower, who hailed from Denison, Texas, on the banks of the Red River, claimed that "we used to say of Arkansas that God created it so that the Okies would have someone to look down on."⁴⁸ The notion of the Sunbelt ignores such tensions, and also ignores the persistence of regional distinctiveness. Florida should still be stuck, somehow, into the South that was long preceded by the adjective "solid," even though such an emplacement raises the question of how the archetypal features of regional identity are thereby altered – and even rendered suspect.

To make Florida part of the larger story of southern Jewry is to acknowledge the force of historical evolution in defining Dixie, which has long exalted order, stability, and tradition. But opposition to change is truly a lost cause. The South is hardly frozen in the antebellum plantation legend and has come to terms with the actualities of diversity and with the constrictions of homogeneity. Only about a tenth of white southerners own a Confederate flag anyway, and even fewer display it.⁴⁹ The opportunity to include South Florida Jewry in the saga of the southern experience has never been less obstructed. Indeed, already a bit more than half a century ago, a past president of the Southern Historical Association, Dr. Thomas D. Clark of the University of Kentucky, told those convening in Miami: "Here, the Jewish people have

found an hospitable place; and their story is much more now a part of ongoing Southern history than it has ever been in the past."⁵⁰

He was right. By incorporating the dynamism of South Florida into the annals of southern Jewry, historians and other scholars would enhance their understanding of the richness, complexity, and pungency of their subject, and would make students of the South itself more appreciative of the inclusiveness and vitality of their region as well.

Appendix

Editor's Note: Because of the historiographical issues that the author raises in this article, the editor offers the following bibliography of additional works devoted to Florida Jewry.

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NOTES

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³ Allan Nevins, "Message to the Conference," and Charlton W. Tebeau, "On the Sources for Regional History in the South," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writing of Regional History in the South* (New York, 1956), 6, 58.

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²⁴ Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation* (Berkeley, 2004), 117; Edmund Wilson to Elena Wilson, November 26, 1949, in Edmund Wilson, *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912–1972*, ed. Elena Wilson (New York, 1977), 463.

²⁵ Henry A. Green, *Geshet Vakesher, Bridges and Bonds: The Life of Leon Kronish* (Atlanta, 1995), 2, 45, 62, and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, 2006), 71.

²⁶ Moore, “Miami Beach,” in *The Other Promised Land*, 80, 82, 86.

²⁷ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 93, 173, 269; Greenbaum, introduction to *Jews of South Florida*, xv; Ira Sheskin, "Ten Percent of American Jews," in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 3, 6.

²⁸ Rob Kendt, "Torching the Library: Different Year, Same Temperature," *New York Times*, March 19, 2006; Green and Zerivitz, *Mosaic*, 59.

²⁹ Remarks by Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami, May 6, 2007.

³⁰ Sergio Della Pergola, "World Jewish Population, 2005," *American Jewish Year Book 2005*, (New York, 2005), 121; Sheskin and Dashefsky, "Jewish Population in the United States, 2006" in *American Jewish Year Book 2006*, 159.

³¹ Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times* (Boston, 1999), 6–7, 148.

³² Green, *Gesher Vakesher*, xi; Charlton W. Tebeau, *Synagogue in the Central City: Temple Israel of Greater Miami, 1922–1972* (Coral Gables, FL, 1972), 71–73, 101–102; Stuart Rockoff, "The Fall and Rise of the Jewish South," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, ed. Ferris and Greenberg, 300.

³³ Claire Long, "A Brookhaven Portrait," *CIRCA 13* (Fall 2004): 3; David J. Ginzl, *Stein Mart: An American Story of Roots, Family, and Building a Greater Dream* (Tampa, FL, 2004), 57, 112–113, 151–152, 155.

³⁴ Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida* (Gainesville, FL, 2001), 100, 118.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 66, 71–73, 137, 171, 182, 205–206, 214–215; Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 315; Moore, "Miami Beach," in *Other Promised Land*, 89–90.

³⁶ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York, 1972 [orig. pub., 1936]), 174.

³⁷ David Remnick, "The Wanderer," *New Yorker*, September 18, 2006, 56–57.

³⁸ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume I* (New York, 2004), 101–102.

³⁹ Stephen M. Fain, "Images of Miami Beach," in David Scheinbaum, *Miami Beach: Photographs of an American Dream* (Miami, 1990), 2.

⁴⁰ Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama* (New York, 2001), 383.

⁴¹ Sheskin and Dashefsky, "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book 2005*, 145.

⁴² Reed, "South Polls: Where is the South?" *Southern Cultures*, 117.

⁴³ Eli N. Evans, "Southern-Jewish History Alive and Unfolding," in *Turn to the South*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), 160.

⁴⁴ Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "It's All Relative: The Study of Southern Jewish Culture and Identity," *Shofar* 8 (Fall 1989): 3.

⁴⁵ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 6.

⁴⁶ Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*, 261.

⁴⁷ Tim Padgett, "There's Trouble—Lots of It—in Paradise," *Time*, November 27, 2006, 39; Mormino, *Land of Sunshine*, 70, 147, 182, 184.

⁴⁸ Jon Keller, "Rebel Yell," *Boston Phoenix*, January 22, 1993, I, 8.

⁴⁹ Jason Zengerle, "Flag Poll," *New Republic*, November 24, 2003, 14.

⁵⁰ Thomas D. Clark, "Summary," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writing of Regional History*, 153.

A Shtetl in the Sun: Orthodoxy in Southern Florida

by

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Although South Florida's Jewish population is the third largest in the Western Hemisphere, exceeded only by that of New York and southern California, it has been largely ignored by historians of American Jewry.¹ This is particularly true for the area's Orthodox Jews who have been doubly orphaned by historians, first because they live in South Florida and second because they are Orthodox. Less than ten percent of the Jews of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties are Orthodox, but those who are exert disproportionate influence. Orthodox institutions as well as businesses catering to the Orthodox have been established throughout the tri-county area during the past several decades, and few major centers of population lack an Orthodox presence. Particularly during the winter, dozens of lectures, classes, and fundraising events are directed at the Orthodox population. In December, menorahs erected by the Orthodox are on display throughout South Florida, and Lubavitch Hasidim even light a menorah at half-time when the Miami Dolphins football team is playing at home during Hanukkah. Despite their minority status, the Orthodox are among the most dynamic elements within the religious life of South Florida Jewry.²

Approximately fifty thousand Orthodox Jews live full-time in South Florida. In addition, tens of thousands are present part of the winter as snowbirds or tourists. These include over one thousand *haredim*. The *haredi* men, with their black coats, and the *haredi* women, with their long dresses and wigs, add a colorful element

to 41st Street in Miami Beach, where they frequent the kosher restaurants, kosher food stores, and a shop selling wigs. (Another wig store for Orthodox women is in North Miami Beach.) The *haredi* have included Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky, and the spiritual leaders of the Satmar, Bobover, and other Hasidic groups, among the most prominent figures in American right-wing Orthodoxy. Indeed, South Florida has become, next to Jerusalem, the major tourist destination of America's Orthodox. Even Orthodox Jews from Europe, including Moshe Rosen, the late chief rabbi of Romania, have wintered in South Florida.

A high birthrate has increased the area's Orthodox population. This birthrate is one element of demographic vitality within the tri-county area where there are many retirees, and the average age of Jews is far higher than in the rest of the country. Since the 1960s South Florida also has been one of the major American destinations for Jewish immigrants, and today it has the most polyglot Jewish population in the nation. In no other region has immigration played such an important role in the growth of the Jewish population. Beginning in the 1960s, South Florida became a popular destination for immigrants from Latin America, Israel, other Middle Eastern countries, and the former Soviet Union. These immigrants often had little prior experience with other variants of Judaism besides Orthodoxy, and many tended to equate Judaism with Orthodoxy, although generally they were not religiously observant themselves. They were the targets of Orthodox outreach efforts, particularly those of Lubavitch. Consequently, some of the immigrants identified with Orthodoxy only after settling in South Florida.

Orthodox immigrants, along with other newcomers to South Florida, have been attracted by the region's pleasant climate and an economic boom, which has transformed Miami into one of America's major ports as well as an important banking and legal center. South Florida especially appealed to Jews in the Northeast. This was particularly true for veterans of World War II, beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill of Rights, and the children and grandchildren of the immigrant generation. Many of these were professionals who

found employment in law and accounting firms or opened medical and dental practices. These migrations, both foreign and domestic, increased the area's total Jewish population from 9,000 in 1940 to 250,000 by 1975 and to over 600,000 by 2006. Among these newcomers were Orthodox Jews who were attracted to South Florida for the same reasons that enticed others. By the 1980s, however, the Orthodox population of South Florida had itself become a magnet, attracting additional Orthodox Jews who wanted to live where there was a sizable Orthodox presence with viable Orthodox institutions.³

Demographic and Economic Mobility

The Jewish population of South Florida also dispersed. In the 1940s it was concentrated in a few neighborhoods in Miami and Miami Beach in Miami-Dade County. Economic development and the building of numerous retirement communities in Broward and Palm Beach counties pulled the geographic heartland of South Florida Jewry northward. By 2006 there were more than twice as many Jews in Broward County (234,000) and Palm Beach County (256,000) than in Miami-Dade County (113,000). By the 1990s Palm Beach County had by far the highest percentage of Jews of any American county.⁴

Although the center of Orthodoxy in South Florida has remained Miami-Dade County, particularly Miami Beach, settlements have sprung up throughout the area. Many new synagogues were established in the more northerly Broward and Palm Beach counties, and the American Orthodox congregation with the fastest growing membership during the 1990s was the Boca Raton Synagogue in Palm Beach County. Orthodox Jews also moved south of Miami. Prior to the 1960s the region encompassing Kendall-Coral Gables-Homestead largely consisted of citrus, dairy, and horse farms. By 2007 it was densely populated and had five Orthodox synagogues.⁵

American Orthodoxy, both in South Florida and elsewhere, was transformed in the later half of the twentieth century. Although prior to World War II there were Jews in America, primarily immigrants, who were Orthodox both in ideology and

*Beth Jacob, 301 and 311 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach.
The first Jewish congregation founded (1927) on Miami Beach
was Orthodox. It disbanded in 2005. Beth Jacob's first synagogue (left)
was built in 1929. In 1936 Beth Jacob built a larger synagogue (right).
Both historic buildings now house the Jewish Museum of Florida.
(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida.)*

practice, they were conscious of being a beleaguered minority and were pessimistic that their children and grandchildren would remain Orthodox. These true believers were outnumbered by those for whom Orthodoxy simply involved institutional affiliation. The latter belonged to Orthodox synagogues, although their lifestyle and religious observance did not conform to traditional Orthodox practice. As the immigrant generation most familiar with eastern European Orthodoxy passed on, the ranks of the so-called "fellow traveling" Orthodox diminished. They were replaced by "card carrying" true believers, who had been educated in Orthodox schools and identified with Orthodoxy on the levels of both practice and ideology. Fellow-traveling Orthodox Jews remained,

particularly among the elderly, but they were a diminishing minority.

American Orthodoxy also was transformed by the arrival after World War II of tens of thousands of European Orthodox Jews. They came not as immigrants to the United States but as refugees from persecution, and they sought not to acculturate into American society but to re-create the Orthodox world they had known. As they prospered in the United States, they established European-type yeshivot, *kollelim*, and other Orthodox institutions all the while, disdaining the compromises with modernity made by the Orthodoxy that they encountered in America.⁶ They and their descendants, some of whom settled in South Florida, were partially responsible for the much-discussed movement of Orthodoxy to the right during the latter half of the twentieth century. This move was manifested in the hardening of attitudes toward non-Orthodox religious movements, an emphasis on the study of Talmud as the be-all of Jewish learning, the raising of kashrut standards, a pervasive religious one-upmanship, and an incessant divisiveness over what constitutes authentic traditional Judaism. This divisiveness is exhibited in the *Kosher Map and Guide*, which is distributed for free at Jewish gift stores, kosher restaurants, and other places where Orthodox Jews congregate in South Florida. The 2004–2005 edition featured the names of the rabbinic organizations certifying the kashrut of the restaurants listed, as well as a disclaimer from the map's publisher, a rabbi, that the map "cannot assume responsibility for the kashrus of any establishment or product or accuracy of any information contained therein."

Sociological and Historical Paradigms

For much of the twentieth century, the dominant paradigm of sociologists and historians regarding American Orthodoxy was that Orthodoxy was an anachronism destined to disappear with the passing of the immigrant generation and the maturation and acculturation of their children and grandchildren. "As a result of the pressures, the training, and the rewards offered by American society at large," the sociologist Herbert Gans wrote in 1956, "traditional Judaism has ceased to be a living culture for the

second-generation Jew. Parts of it, however, have remained active in the form of habits or emotions; they are now providing the impetus for a new 'symbolic Judaism' still in the process of development."⁷ Scholars predicted that, because of the openness of American society and Orthodoxy's own retrograde character, Orthodoxy would shrink to a small group of religious sectarians located on the lower rungs of the American social and economic ladder. For the rest of American Jews, it would have only "symbolic" value.

This pessimistic view of Orthodoxy was a theme of two of the most important books on American Judaism written by sociologists in the 1950s: Nathan Glazer's *American Judaism* and Marshall Sklare's *Conservative Judaism*. Glazer described Orthodoxy as incompatible with middle-class respectability. Orthodoxy's future lay with those whom he described as a "particularly backward and archaic group of Jews." Sklare said in a much-quoted statement that "Orthodox adherents have succeeded in achieving the goal of institutional perpetuation to only a limited extent; the history of their movement in this country can be written in terms of a case study of institutional decay." For American Jews, Sklare concluded, "Orthodoxy bears the stigma of the 'ghetto.' They feel that Orthodox procedures are out of keeping with the type of behavior expected of the middle class, that Orthodoxy will not raise their status among fellow-Jews of higher social position, and also that Orthodoxy will not help to improve Jewish-Gentile relations." The future of traditional Judaism in America, Sklare concluded, lay not with Orthodoxy but with the more dignified and higher-status Conservative Judaism.⁸

Historians also assumed that Orthodoxy's future was bleak. This is exhibited in the most famous historical analysis of South Florida Jewry, Deborah Dash Moore's 1994 volume, *To the Golden Cities*. This book, as noted on its jacket, purported to tell the story of the creation and growth of fresh and dynamic Jewish communities in the golden cities of Miami and Los Angeles. Here, Moore argued, Jews had supposedly reinvented themselves and created "a new consensus on the boundaries of Jewish life and what it means to be Jewish. . . . Today these sun-soaked, entrepreneurial

communities have become part of a truly American, self-confident style of Judaism." This consensus, however, had no place for Jews less interested in "Pursuing the American Jewish Dream," the subtitle of Moore's book, than in perpetuating traditional Jewish values, practices, and institutions. According to Moore, Jews joined synagogues in the golden cities "not due to the weight of tradition or any collective compulsion," but rather because "each one saw personal meaning in the act." Although *To the Golden Cities* discusses at length politics, Zionism, efforts to combat antisemitism, and Jewish summer camps, it virtually ignores Orthodoxy and Orthodox Jews, even though by the 1990s there were flourishing Orthodox communities in both cities.⁹

The book's chapter on Jewish religious life, "Seeking Religious Roots," discusses three Miami synagogues: Temple Emanuel, a Conservative congregation, also known as the Miami Beach Jewish Center, on Washington Avenue at 17th Street; Temple Beth Sholom, a Reform congregation off 41st Street in Miami Beach; and Temple Israel of Greater Miami, a Reform congregation in Miami proper. All three had enterprising rabbis and innovative programs directed at filling the spiritual and social needs of "The New American Jew," the title of the book's last chapter. The congregations cultivated "the search for personal meaning to be found through experience and an emphasis on an individual's voluntary affirmation," traits which Moore believed characterized the spiritual longings of Miami's Jews. The three Miami rabbis discussed in *To the Golden Cities*, Irving Lehrman of Emanuel, Leon Kronish of Beth Sholom, and Joseph Narot of Temple Israel, "saw the promise of a frontier society—its openness, venturesomeness, and willingness to tolerate innovation." These rabbis "offered a personalized path to Jewish fulfillment to the engaged minority seeking religious roots."¹⁰

Certainly the popularity of Lehrman, Kronish, and Narot indicated that they had correctly gauged the thinking of their congregants. But the "engaged minority" of Jews in South Florida "seeking religious roots" had other options besides these three congregations. Rabbis Phineas A. Weberman and Abraham Korf had settled in Miami Beach three and a half decades before the

publication of *To the Golden Cities* and had been busy building Orthodox institutions since then. For much of this time Weberman, the chaplain of the Miami Beach Police Department, was the leading non-Hasidic Orthodox rabbi in Miami Beach, while Korf directed a growing Lubavitch presence in the area.

For Moore, Orthodoxy, which valued tradition, law, and community, was incongruous in settings where Jews esteemed experimentation, entrepreneurship, and individualism. While *To the Golden Cities* mentions the movement of Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth Sholom away from Orthodoxy, it does not discuss the pre-1994 growth of Orthodoxy including the establishment of literally dozens of Orthodox synagogues and prayer rooms in both cities. The book notes the founding of the Los Angeles branch of the Jewish Theological Seminary, but not the creation in Los Angeles and Miami of a network of Orthodox day schools. It relates the postwar migration of Jews from the Northeast to Miami and from the Middle West to Los Angeles, but not the immigration of traditional Jews from Israel and Latin America to Miami and from Iran to Los Angeles, or that Orthodox texts written in Spanish could be purchased in stores on 41st Street in Miami Beach and their counterparts written in Farsi were available in stores on Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles.

The historian Stephen J. Whitfield, a leading authority on Florida Jewry, also questioned whether Orthodoxy or, for that matter, any other form of Judaism, could flourish in the Sunshine State. Judaism, he said, could not thrive in a culture where “the quest for self-satisfaction” and the “glorification of joy” had been elevated into art forms. Whitfield termed the Judaism of Florida “post-Orthodox,” and noted that the first Orthodox synagogue in the state was not established until the twentieth century. Miami Beach’s first two Orthodox congregations were established in the 1920s, and the first synagogue building housing one of them did not open until the ill-starred year of 1929. Miami’s Jews, Whitfield wrote, attended religious services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but rarely at other times, and they expected their rabbis to be adept at socializing, but not to be scholars or to put many demands on their congregants. These Jews, Whitfield concluded,

*Kosher World supermarket, Miami Beach.
 One of many stores on 41st Street that caters to an
 Orthodox clientele. Nearby is the Sushi Hut Chinese Cuisine,
 Pita Hut Glatt Kosher restaurant,
 Torah Treasures Judaica Store, and Alisa's Wigs.
 (Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)*

“had uprooted themselves to live in south Florida well after the impact of Americanization had been registered, long after the acids of modernization had corroded the integral *Yiddishkeit* of their ancestors.”¹¹

But if the Judaism of Florida was “post-Orthodox,” how can one explain the fourteen Orthodox synagogues in Miami Beach, nine in North Miami Beach, six in Aventura, and three in Hollywood; sixty kosher restaurants in Miami Beach, North Miami, North Miami Beach, Aventura, Broward County, and Boca Raton; and five *mikvaot* in Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, Hollywood, and Kendall listed on the *Kosher Map and Guide*? Admittedly some of these synagogues were simply glorified prayer rooms, and some of these restaurants were holes in the wall. But it is not their

quality but their quantity that is significant. Indeed, the growth of Orthodox Judaism in South Florida has been so rapid that the map has had to be updated regularly, and within a year the statistics on the 2004–2005 map were out-of-date.

By 2006 there were not six Orthodox synagogues in Aventura but eight, and not five *mikvaot* in Miami-Dade County but nine, with another four *mikvaot* in Broward County.¹² Forty-five years earlier there were only two operational *mikvaot* in the entire state, one in Jacksonville and the other in Miami Beach.¹³ Orthodox schools and *eruvim* experienced the same growth.¹⁴ In 1960 there were only two Orthodox schools in Florida, both in Miami Beach. In 2006 there were six Orthodox elementary day schools and seven Orthodox high schools in Miami-Dade County, with another half dozen Orthodox schools in Broward and Palm Beach counties. This growth is perhaps best illustrated by the Bais Yaakov school in North Miami Beach. This right-wing school for girls opened in 1988 with five students. Today it has four hundred, all of whom come from Orthodox families.¹⁵ In 1960 there was no *eruv* in Florida. There are now at least four in Miami-Dade County as well as others in Broward and Palm Beach counties. In 1960 no store in the entire state sold *glatt kosher* meat, and only one sold non-*glatt kosher* meat. Today dozens of stores in South Florida provide *glatt kosher* meat. In 1960 there was no reliable kosher bakery in South Florida, nor was *cholov Israel* milk sold anywhere in Florida. Now there are at least seventeen bakeries in South Florida under reliable kashrut supervision and *cholov LC Israel* milk is readily available throughout the three counties.¹⁶

Pre- and Post-Orthodoxy

“Pre-Orthodox,” not “post-Orthodox,” better describes the Judaism discussed by Whitfield. This state was largely due to the newness of Miami and Miami Beach and of its Jewish communities. Miami had only 170,000 full-time residents in 1940, and Miami Beach, which was incorporated only in 1915, had 35,000. Of these 205,000, about 8,000 were Jews. After World War II, however, the area’s general and Jewish population boomed. By 1960 it

*Examining the eruv
in Miami Beach, 1984.
Rabbi Phineas Weberman,
right, with colleagues check
out the line marking the
eruv on the boardwalk.
(Courtesy of the Jewish
Museum of Florida,
Miami Beach.)*

had 140,000 Jews, and this was the sixth largest concentration of Jews in the nation, just behind Boston.¹⁷

This “pre-Orthodox” condition also explains the success of Lubavitch Hasidim in the region. In contrast to the major cities of the Northeast and Middle West, South Florida did not have an Orthodox community of synagogues, yeshivot, and other institutions dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Lubavitch movement was able to partially fill this religious vacuum, and, in the process, it has become more influential in Florida, particularly in South Florida, than elsewhere in the United States. Its impact has been particularly strong in Palm Beach County, where by 2007 there were ten Lubavitch synagogues. Six decades earlier the city of Palm Beach in

Palm Beach County was an exclusive watering hole for the Protestant ascendancy, and some of its hotels, most notably Henry Flagler's The Breakers, discouraged Jewish patronage. Since 1998 the Lubavitch have held a menorah-lighting ceremony in Palm Beach marking Hanukkah, the holiday symbolizing Jewish resistance to pagan values. This ceremony takes place a short distance from The Breakers and only a few blocks from Worth Avenue, the city's legendary and exclusive shopping mecca.¹⁸

Lubavitch's emphasis on outreach to the nonreligious was well-suited for its missionary work among Jews in what was essentially a religious *tabula rasa*. Since 1960 when Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the head of Lubavitch, sent Abraham Korf to South Florida, Lubavitch has become a pervasive presence. By 2007 it had over 117 schools, synagogues, *mikvaot*, and study centers in the state. These included five elementary day schools, two high schools for girls, two high schools for boys, one rabbinical college, one post-high school seminary for girls, and a *kollel* where for a couple of years young married men study the Talmud and Hasidic texts. Today there are Lubavitch synagogues in Coral Gables, Lauderhill, Jupiter, and Wellington where thirty years ago there were few Jews, much less Orthodox Jews. The Lubavitch, however, comprise only a small minority of the Orthodox of South Florida. More important are the modern Orthodox communities in places such as Hollywood, Miami Beach, and Boca Raton.¹⁹

The development of Orthodoxy in Boca Raton has been particularly noteworthy. In 2005 Rabbi Kenneth Brander of the Boca Raton Synagogue, a centrist Orthodox congregation, recounted the recent history of his community. "Twelve years ago there were no kosher butchers or bakeries up to Orthodox standards. Now there are a plethora of restaurants and their number keeps growing. Twelve years ago, we had a small day school that didn't go through all the elementary grades. Now there are 375 kids in the lower school, 150 teens in the high school, and a new elementary school being started. The growth has been unbelievable."²⁰

Sociological Correlations

The correlation that mid-century sociologists posited between Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and poverty and lower social status, on the other, lost its plausibility with the rapid ascent of the Orthodox in South Florida and elsewhere up the social and economic ladders. This upward Jewish mobility was not, of course, restricted to the Orthodox. Jews in general experienced rapid economic and social ascent. Historians and sociologists differ as to the reasons for this, but they agree that this mobility is one of the great success stories of American history. Orthodox mobility is particularly noteworthy because of the obstacles that an Orthodox lifestyle places before economic success, such as not working on the Sabbath and the cost of parochial education.

While poor Orthodox remain in South Florida, they are not present in great numbers. No longer are the Orthodox Jews of South Florida first-generation and working-class. They are, particularly of the "modern" or "centrist" variety, largely college-educated and professionals. As a result, Orthodox Jews are playing an increasing role in the economic, social, and political life of South Florida. One prominent example is the Rand Eye Institute, one of the most important facilities of its kind in South Florida. It was founded by a member of the Boca Raton Synagogue, and his name adorns the synagogue's main sanctuary. South Florida also has a number of wealthy Orthodox builders and entrepreneurs.

This socioeconomic transformation of South Florida Orthodoxy was reflected in the demise of Miami Beach's kosher hotel business, which catered to tourists from New York and other northern cities. Prior to the 1970s, dozens of hotels on the beach provided three kosher meals daily for their patrons. This business went into decline during the late twentieth century, and then disappeared entirely in the twenty-first with the closing of the last holdouts, the Crown and the Saxony. The newly affluent Orthodox did not want to stay in second-rate accommodations. Many were able to purchase expensive houses and condominiums, often selling for well over a half million dollars, on the ocean in Miami Beach or inland in Hollywood, Boca Raton, and other Orthodox enclaves. With this new market in mind, upscale apartment hous-

es installed Sabbath elevators to attract Orthodox residents. These elevators, which stop automatically on the Sabbath, enable Orthodox residents and their guests to use them without violating the prohibition of pushing electrical buttons. Sabbath elevators are now common in the high-rise apartment buildings of Miami Beach's "millionaires' row." The elevators have a symbiotic relationship to the Orthodox. Orthodox residents insist on Sabbath elevators, and, once in place, the elevators attract more Orthodox residents. When an apartment house has attracted a critical mass of Orthodox residents, the next step is to open a room for daily religious services. There are at least a dozen of such apartment-house synagogues along the ocean from Miami Beach to Hallandale, frequented almost exclusively by Orthodox worshippers.

Paralleling the decline of the kosher hotel business has been the emergence of successful kosher takeout establishments in Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, Aventura, Boca Raton, and elsewhere in the three-county area. The customers of these businesses are mainly Orthodox. The demise of the kosher hotels meant that Orthodox snowbirds were now responsible for their own meals. This provided a clientele for takeout kosher food, particularly for the Sabbath. And, as is true elsewhere, kosher takeout food became more popular in South Florida because of the increasing number of Orthodox women with full-time jobs. Takeout food helps Orthodox women balance their work and home responsibilities.

Another result of the collapse of the kosher hotel business and the large number of Orthodox women working outside the home has been an explosion in the number of kosher restaurants in the three-county area. Fifty years ago these restaurants could have been counted on the fingers of one hand. Today there are at least seventy such establishments, ranging from pizza and falafel joints to luxury restaurants serving meals costing well over seventy dollars each and offering an abundant selection of fine kosher wines and liquors. Some of these eateries provide takeout food as well as offering the sacred South Florida custom of early bird specials. While not all of the customers of the kosher

*Eilat Cafe, 6853 SW 18th St., Boca Raton.
Kosher restaurant with a picturesque setting.
(Courtesy of Jordan Polevoy and Evan Shapiro, Boca Raton, FL.)*

restaurants are Orthodox, it is their patronage that determines their success and failure.

One upscale kosher eatery is Prime Eighteen, one of four kosher restaurants in Aventura within a radius of 120 feet. Prime Eighteen seeks to appeal to a sophisticated, well-traveled, and affluent clientele, who presumably will appreciate its cosmopolitan menu as well as the fact that it is strictly *glatt kosher*. Its menu includes “grilled speragus” [*sic*], teriyaki steak skewers, spaghetti pomodora, sushimi sushi, hamachi scallion sushi roll, and roasted sea bass. A relative of mine who had recently flown to South Florida noted that his airplane ticket on JetBlue had cost less than one of the restaurant’s entrees.²¹ The menu of Grill Time in North Miami Beach is equally varied. It offers Thai beef salad, beer-battered onion bread, sweet and spicy chili chicken, salmon Provencal, grilled Chilean sea bass, Korean steak, Gaza strip steak, Hawaiian

tropical rib eye, Malaysian beef steak, Hungarian goulash, and roasted Asian lamb. Other kosher restaurants in South Florida specialize in Thai, Chinese, French, Italian, Yemenite, and Moroccan cuisine.²²

Such restaurants are indicative of an Orthodox population sufficiently prosperous to afford such food and urbane enough to appreciate it. American-born Orthodox are more attracted to the new kosher cuisines than their immigrant ancestors. These restaurants reflect the extent to which the Orthodox of South Florida have assimilated the mores of American society in which patronizing expensive restaurants has been an important part of urban, upper-class behavior for over a century. Eating out is also a religiously acceptable nighttime activity for Orthodox Jews, who do not belong to country clubs or frequent night clubs where non-kosher food is served and what they perceive as immodest behavior is condoned. Going to restaurants thus fills a social void.

The phenomenon of upscale kosher restaurants is, of course, not unique to South Florida. In September 1989, the *New York Times* discussed several such restaurants in an article titled "Kosher Cooking: Goodbye Derma, Hello Sushi." The article quoted Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald of New York City's Lincoln Square Synagogue. "The Orthodox consumer has become a lot more affluent. While they are giving more to charity, they have also acquired a taste and curiosity for the finer things in life." One restaurant mentioned by the *Times* was Levana in New York City. There customers could dine on venison, chicken rolled in pecans with black trumpet mushrooms, and mahi-mahi. Another was the Madras Palace, also in Manhattan. This kosher Indian restaurant served rava masal dosai (wheat crepes filled with potatoes, onions, and nuts) and gobhi masala curry (cauliflower curry). The *Times* also mentioned Giuseppe Goldberg's, a restaurant in Miami Beach's Sans Souci Hotel, which offered Italian dishes such as linguini puttanesca.²³ The February 1997 issue of *Hadassah Magazine* also discussed several upscale kosher restaurants in New York City offering a variety of cuisines besides high cholesterol chopped liver, derma, beef *flancken*, pastrami sandwiches, and brisket. One woman quoted by the magazine said, "For the first

time in my life I can feel like anyone else. I can eat kosher Persian, Indian, Middle Eastern, French, Japanese. Now if we only had a good kosher Mexican restaurant." She could have satisfied this craving in several restaurants in South Florida.²⁴ A decade later the same magazine noted, "Kosher French restaurants established by recent émigrés from France serve everything from cassoulet to feather-light crepes in the shopping centers that line South Florida's boulevards."²⁵

Synagogues and Universities

The Orthodox synagogues of South Florida are as diverse as its kosher restaurants. There is a synagogue for virtually every major ethnic group and for every version of contemporary Orthodoxy. These include four Sephardic synagogues in Aventura attended by immigrants from North Africa and their offspring, a Bukharan synagogue off 41st Street in Miami Beach, and a Russian Lubavitch synagogue in Sunny Isles. Large modern Orthodox congregations in Miami Beach and Boca Raton as well as small *haredi* congregations in Miami Beach and North Miami Beach include synagogues of several other Hasidic groups besides the Lubavitch.

Orthodoxy also now has a presence in higher education in South Florida. In the early twenty-first century, a group of Orthodox benefactors established the Collegiate Learning Experience (CLE), which funded the salary and living expenses of an Orthodox rabbi at the University of Miami. It was modeled on a program instituted by Jewish philanthropists for students at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The responsibilities of the Orthodox rabbi at the University of Miami include providing Sabbath hospitality, organizing religious services, and teaching religious classes. It was hoped these would make Orthodox students feel more at home in Coral Gables. (The Hillel Center at the University of Miami also provides activities for Orthodox students.) The CLE later established a similar program at the Biscayne Bay branch of Florida International University in North Miami Beach, where a significant number of Latin American Jewish students are enrolled. Representatives of Lubavitch also

Boca Raton Synagogue, 7900 Montoya Circle.

BRS, as it is known, is a modern Orthodox congregation with about 600 members.

Besides the sanctuary, the synagogue has a social hall, an education complex, and a mikvah.

(Courtesy of Jordan Polevoy and Evan Shapiro, Boca Raton, FL.)

engage in outreach directed at local college students, often in competition with the CLE.²⁶

Sixty miles north of the University of Miami, the Hillel Center at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, home to almost two thousand Jewish students, sponsors a kosher cafe. "We have some students who actually only eat kosher and they can't eat on campus right now," said a Hillel representative shortly before the cafe opened in January 2007. Stacy Volnick, the director of the university's business services, noted that the eatery was part of an attempt to diversify the campus's food choices. "What we're trying to do is have our food service operation reflect the diversity of our students and this is just the start of that goal."²⁷

In 2006 Touro College, an Orthodox educational conglomerate headquartered in New York City, opened a branch in Miami Beach. For readers of *To the Golden Cities*, it is ironic that the

college rents space in the building housing Temple Emanu-El. Seventy students from South Florida enrolled for that year's fall semester, taking undergraduate courses in business management and administration, psychology, and Judaic studies, and graduate courses in education. Literature for the college did not advertise the fact that it is an Orthodox institution. A college brochure simply states that with the founding of Touro College South, Touro College "continues to realize its vision of intellectual growth under Jewish sponsorship." This is in keeping with the college's mission statement that describes it as "an independent institution of higher and professional education under Jewish sponsorship," that aspires "to strengthen Jewish life and perpetuate the Judaic tradition on the college campus, and to contribute to the building of a better society for all through educational opportunities."²⁸

This growing Orthodox presence did not go unnoticed by the state's politicians, particularly by Republicans who shared the conservative social agenda of the Orthodox. Politicians courted them, and a symbolic Orthodox presence became common at local and state political gatherings, such as inaugurations and dedications. Orthodox political efforts met with mixed success. They were unable to halt the advance of the homosexual rights movement in South Florida, unsurprising considering the many homosexuals living in the Miami area, particularly in South Beach, a part of Miami Beach. Orthodox leaders were more successful regarding gender issues. In the early 1980s, they joined with other groups in defeating a renewed attempt in the state legislature to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.²⁹

The recent experience of Orthodoxy in South Florida, as well as that of Orthodoxy nationally, confirms the unpredictability of history, the difficulty in accurately forecasting social trends, and the need for skepticism when confronted with seemingly plausible sociological and historical paradigms. Few would have predicted in 1960 that a vibrant Orthodox community would emerge in this land of sun and fun. By 1994, however, it was already clear that Orthodoxy was not a fringe and dying phenomenon in South Florida. While Moore stated that the

born-again Jews of Miami were presented with “new possibilities for the American Jewish future,” one of these possibilities was not new at all. Rather, it was the opportunity to create a traditional Jewish life in the midst of the “leisure, freedom and security” of this new garden of *yidn*.³⁰

At first glance there appears to be nothing distinctive in the sociology and history of South Florida to account for this Orthodox revival. Orthodoxy has been sufficiently flexible to adapt to such diverse geographical settings as Vilna, Jerusalem, Casablanca, London, Paris, and Brooklyn. Today there are vibrant Orthodox communities in snowbelt Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago, as well as in Sunbelt Atlanta, Phoenix, and Houston. One could have assumed that Orthodoxy would flourish in South Florida simply because of the critical mass of the area’s Jewish population. On the other hand, one could also have presumed that those inclined to Orthodoxy would have avoided South Florida because of its hedonistic lifestyle. If the story of Orthodoxy in South Florida proves anything, it is that geography is not destiny.

NOTES

¹ The surveys of Jewish population in the United States published annually by the *American Jewish Year Book* have the figures for South Florida and metropolitan Los Angeles running neck-in-neck if Orange County and Long Beach are included in the total for Los Angeles. The data for Orange County is a very rough estimate. The slighting of Florida Jewry by American Jewish historians is reflected in two important recent works on American Judaism: Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York, 1993) and Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, 2004). Florida is not listed in the index to Sarna’s book, and it is mentioned only once in the index to Wertheimer’s volume. This single reference is to a sentence on page 54 where Wertheimer notes the strength of Conservative Judaism among the retired Jews of South Florida.

² For the percentage of Orthodox Jews in South Florida, see Ira M. Sheskin, “Ten Percent of American Jews,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Andrea Greenbaum (Hanover, NH, 2005), 14. The sociologist Samuel C. Heilman recently estimated the Orthodox population of South Florida to be c. 45,000. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of Amer-*

ican Jewish Orthodoxy (Berkeley, CA, 2006), 65, 327. The phenomenon of Orthodox influence disproportionate to their numbers is seen elsewhere. "The number and proportion of Orthodox Jews is quite small," four sociologists recently wrote. However "the denomination may be significant not only for its members, but for the impact it has on the religious patterns and norms of the non-Orthodox community." They also claimed that, based on Jewish population studies, the percentage of Orthodox Jews in the Miami area was smaller than in the metropolitan areas of Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington, D.C. This is difficult to believe. Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Ephraim Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany, NY, 1998), 21, 39–40.

³ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 292. Sheskin, "Ten Percent of American Jewry," 3–7.

⁴ Kimberly Miller, "Kosher Cafe to Open on FAU Campus," *Miami Herald*, January 3, 2007. For the decline of the Jewish population in Miami Beach, see Abby Goodnough, "For Shtetl by the Sea, Only a Few Fading Signs Remain," *New York Times*, April 3, 2007. For the increase of the Jewish population in Boynton Beach in Palm Beach County, see Erika Pesantes, "Boynton Area Top Draw for Jewish Residents," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, April 1, 2007.

⁵ The Real Jewish Directory, Inc., *The Florida Jewish Directory* (Boca Raton, FL, [2007]). This 200-page annual contains advertisements for stores selling items of Jewish interest and lists the names and addresses of the synagogues, *mikvaot*, restaurants, Jewish schools, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish institutions servicing Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties.

⁶ For the important role of the Holocaust generation in American Orthodoxy, see Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, chap. 1.

⁷ Herbert Gans, "American Jewry: Present and Future," *Commentary* 21 (May, 1956): 415.

⁸ Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago, 1st ed. 1957; rev. ed. 1972), 144–147 (pages cited are from 1972 edition). Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, IL, 1st ed. 1955; rev. ed. 1972), 43, 73 (pages cited are from 1972 edition). Both Glazer and Sklare modified their pessimism regarding Orthodoxy in the new editions of their books. Sklare wrote, "Unaccountably, Orthodoxy has refused to assume the role of invalid. Rather, it has transformed itself into a growing force in American Jewish life. It has reasserted its claim of being *the* authentic interpretation of Judaism." (464–466) For a critique of Glazer's analysis of Orthodoxy, see Edward S. Shapiro, "The Missing Element: Nathan Glazer and Modern Orthodoxy," *American Jewish History* 77 (December, 1987): 260–276, reprinted in Edward S. Shapiro, *We Are Many: Reflections on American History and Identity* (Syracuse, NY, 2005), chap. 10. Other statements of Orthodoxy's bleak future include Abraham J. Karp, "The Conservative Rabbi—'Dissatisfied but Not Unhappy,'" *American Jewish Archives* 5 (November, 1983): 255; Howard W. Polsky, "A Study of Orthodoxy in Milwaukee: Social Characteristics, Beliefs, and Observances," in *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York, 1958), 25–35; and Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York, 1964), 262–267. For Orthodoxy's refusal to roll over and die, see Chaim I. Waxman, "From Institutional Decay to Primary Day: American Orthodox Jewry Since World War II,"

American Jewish History 91 (December, 2003): 405–441; M. Herbert Danziger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven, 1989); Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago, 1989); Sarna, *American Judaism*, 290–306, 326–327; Wertheimer, *A People Divided*, 114–136. Waxman spoke of an Orthodox “renaissance” (414) and the “coming of age of Orthodoxy in American society” (419), while Wertheimer’s chapter on Orthodoxy is titled “Orthodoxy: Triumphalism on the Right.” Certainly there has been a revival of Orthodox morale, even though the percentage of American Jews identifying with Orthodoxy declined during the last half of the twentieth century.

⁹ Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York, 1994), 263–266. The book has only two sentences on the growth of Orthodoxy, both of which discuss Los Angeles (265).

¹⁰ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 122, 270. For another view of Kronish, see Henry A. Green, “Leon Kronish: Miami Beach’s Twentieth-Century Prophet,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 162–178; Green, *Gesher Vakesher: Bridges and Bonds: The Life of Leon Kronish* (Atlanta, 1995).

¹¹ Whitfield, “Blood and Sand: The Jewish Community of South Florida,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 46–48. Had it existed when he wrote these words, Whitfield could have pointed to the World Erotic Art Museum on Washington Street in Miami Beach, founded by a woman who had grown up in an Orthodox home in Newark, New Jersey. She waited until her husband died before opening its doors in October 2005.

¹² The eight Orthodox synagogues in Aventura in 2006 are about the same number as were in the entire state of Florida in 1960. Aventura was swampland in 1960.

¹³ For *mikvaot* in Broward County, see Phyllis Steinberg, “Ancient Jewish ‘Mikvahs’ Get New Technology,” *Palm Beach Jewish Journal*, November 28, 2006.

¹⁴ *Eruvim* have become pervasive within Orthodox communities in the United States.

¹⁵ For day schools, see Susan Meimand, “Jewish Education in South Florida,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 192–194.

¹⁶ Phineas A. Weberman interview conducted by author, December 7, 2006; Abraham Korf interview conducted by author, December 7, 2006.

¹⁷ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 25–26.

¹⁸ Larry Luxner, “The Jewish Traveler: Palm Beach,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 2007, 48. The Orthodox Palm Beach Synagogue, which is not a Lubavitch institution, is located two blocks north of The Breakers. As Luxner notes, “Its prominent Star of David seems to mock those early developers who sought to exclude Jews from the city.” *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹ Abraham Korf to author, December 29, 2006.

²⁰ Linda Brockman, “Jews of Boca Raton,” in *The Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 118.

²¹ Prime Eighteen, which opened in 2006, was preceded by another elegant eatery, Prime Grill. The menu of Prime Grill included duck salad appetizer and short ribs empanadas.

²² Rabbi Menashe Klein, in the tenth volume of his responsa collection, *Mishneh Halakhot* (Brooklyn, 1987), 62–64, warned Jews not to eat at such restaurants because it was forbidden to walk in the ways of the gentiles. This included eating non-Jewish foods and at non-Jewish type restaurants, even if they were kosher, because this could lead to assimilation. “In my opinion it is forbidden to enter restaurants that have non-Jewish names and non-Jewish styles of cooking and food which is given non-Jewish names. It is also forbidden to participate in weddings and other affairs where this style of food and drink are served.” Judging by the popularity of such restaurants and the popularity of sushi at weddings and other Jewish celebrations, Klein’s advice has been ignored. The China Bistro, an upscale restaurant in Aventura, not only features such specialty drinks as watermelon martini, lime cosmo, and mai tai, but it also offers its kosher patrons imitation crab wontons, imitation calamari, Asian paella (“A combination of three fish, imitation ‘crab’ and ‘shrimp’ stir-fried with vegetables and a splash of white wine served with a saffron rice”), and imitation shrimp and crab tempura sushi rolls.

²³ Dena Kleinman, “Kosher Cooking: Goodbye Derma, Hello Sushi,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1987. It is suggestive that Lou G. Siegel’s, which was founded in 1917 and was the only traditional kosher restaurant mentioned by Kleinman, folded in the 1990s. “It’s a delicate balance,” an executive at Lou G. Siegel, said. “It’s the ‘boiled beef flanken’ customer that made Siegel’s the tradition it is, and we’re not willing to let that go. Yet at the same time, we want to open our doors to the younger, more food-conscious consumer.” Evidently the restaurant was unsuccessful. For a discussion of Le Marais, a kosher steak house, and Hasikara, a kosher Japanese restaurant, both in Manhattan, see J. Walman, “Sushi and Cigars: Kosher Dining Goes Mainstream,” *Forward*, July 5, 1996.

²⁴ Joan Nathan, “Kosher and Classy,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 1997, 28–32.

²⁵ Sara Liss, “The Jewish State of Florida,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 2007, 27. A photo accompanying this article shows a traditional Cuban Jewish family eating Cuban-style foods in the family sukkah.

²⁶ Professor Jeffrey Shoulson, University of Miami, interview conducted by author, December 26, 2006.

²⁷ Miller, “Kosher Cafe to Open on FAU Campus.”

²⁸ <http://www.touro.edu/general/mission.asp> (accessed December 21, 2006).

²⁹ Phineas A. Weberman interview conducted by author, December 26, 2006.

³⁰ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 275.

“The Law of Life is the Law of Service”:
Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Quest for
Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1926–1963

by

James L. Moses

In 1963, after thirty-seven remarkable years in the pulpit of Little Rock’s Temple B’nai Israel, Rabbi Ira E. Sanders retired. His career spanned the traumas of the Great Depression, World War II, and the wrenching social and racial struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Upon his retirement, the *Arkansas Gazette* stated what Arkansans familiar with Dr. Sanders already knew: “Long before most of us understood even the full meaning of terms such as social justice and human dignity, Rabbi Sanders had begun to translate these ideas into action.”¹ He had a lifelong commitment to social justice in its broadest construction and was particularly committed to African American equality. An agent of change during an era of tremendous change, Sanders brought to Arkansas a desire to make a difference in his community. From the mid-1920s, Sanders emerged as a key figure in the evolution of attitudes and institutions related to social and racial justice in Arkansas, providing key leadership in times of crisis and calm.

The topic of southern Jews and civil rights is a burgeoning field of historical inquiry, and the study of southern rabbis in particular has produced thoughtful and insightful works.² Yet detailed analyses of Ira Sanders are conspicuously absent. He is mentioned often, but never scrutinized.³ This work seeks to redress that oversight. It is my contention that Sanders is one of the more significant figures among southern rabbis in the twentieth century as illustrated by his many contributions. His work for

social and racial justice had a deep and abiding impact on the history of Arkansas.

Early Life

Ira Sanders was born in Rich Hill, Missouri, on May 6, 1894. The town of Rich Hill, Sanders later wrote, was terribly misnamed. Nobody was rich, and there were no hills; "Poor Prairie" was more appropriate.⁴ Influenced by a desire to help others and by his mother, Pauline, a "deeply-religious woman" whose "one aim in life was to have one of her four sons enter the rabbinate," Ira knew by the age of nine that he wanted to be a rabbi.⁵ Indeed, as a child Ira practiced his "sermons" on his younger brother Gus by locking him in their bedroom and forcing him to listen until he had finished his discourse.⁶ After the family moved to Kansas City, Ira's mother tried to facilitate her son's desire to be a rabbi by arranging Hebrew lessons for him with a local Orthodox rabbi who was known to offer them. For some reason, the rabbi scoffed at Ira's ambitions, telling him to forget the rabbinate and become a shoemaker. Pauline related the story to their rabbi, Dr. Harry Mayer, who said, "You go back and tell that rabbi that *he* should be the shoemaker. Ira will be a rabbi."⁷ Mayer had come to Congregation B'nai Jehudah in Kansas City, Missouri, after having served as rabbi of Little Rock's Temple B'nai Israel from 1897 to 1899. Mayer, who confirmed Sanders, arranged lessons for him with a man named Meyer Goldberg, who became something of a mentor to the youngster. Sanders pursued his dream through his years in the Kansas City public schools and in Cincinnati, where he arrived in 1911. He graduated with a B.A. from the University of Cincinnati in 1918, and received rabbinic ordination from the Hebrew Union College the following year. He cited HUC President Kaufmann Kohler, "foremost theologian of his day," among several other instructors and their emphasis on the traditions of prophetic Judaism as great influences on his later life.⁸

After ordination, Sanders took his initial position as rabbi at Congregation Keneseth Israel in Allentown, Pennsylvania. While there, he founded the Jewish Community Center and was very active on behalf of Keren Hayesod, the Palestine Foundation

Rabbi Ira Sanders, c. 1965.

(Courtesy of Ira Sanders Papers/UALR Archives & Spec. Coll. Little Rock.)

Fund, established in 1921 to encourage and support Jewish life in the Holy Land. Sanders considered himself a Zionist who, a close colleague recalls, "early on understood the need for a sanctuary for the European Jews, and he fought for it."⁹

During his tenure in Allentown, Sanders met Selma Loeb, a graduate of Wellesley College who also hailed from Rich Hill, Missouri. It was love at first sight and Ira fell for Selma hard. Recalls Sanders: "I always felt that was just so much foolishness, that nobody could fall in love at first sight, that you have to learn to know a person before you can actually learn to love them."¹⁰ His experience in meeting Selma Loeb proved him wrong. He proposed in June 1921 (she would not allow him to kiss her until he did), and they were married in Philadelphia on March 21, 1922.

Two years later, they left Allentown when Rabbi Sanders assumed the position of associate rabbi at one of New York City's larger Reform synagogues, Temple Israel, then on Ninety-First Street in Manhattan. Rabbi Maurice Harris had invited Sanders to take the position, most likely based on Sanders's role in creating a synagogue center in Allentown. Temple Israel had recently built such a center for study and recreation in Manhattan. Nearly one thousand people attended services for Sanders's installation on September 24, 1924. Sanders's initial sermon was a sign of things to come: "The Law of Life is the Law of Service," in which he exhorted "high-minded men to don the armor of Elijah and wear that mantle of service."¹¹ This sentiment became his credo.

Sanders stayed in New York only two years, but for him it was an active if not altogether satisfying time. He attended Columbia University and earned a master's degree in social work,¹² studying with such luminaries as philosopher and educator John Dewey and working with social work pioneer Lillian Wald, who championed public health nursing and housing reform, among other accomplishments, and who, in 1895, had founded the famed Henry Street Settlement in New York City.¹³

In New York Sanders began developing a style of sermonizing that he used the rest of his life, a style that congregants and listeners either greatly admired or disliked. The *Arkansas Gazette* approvingly termed his speaking voice "persuasively mellow,"

coming in “assured, authoritative tones,” whereas others termed it “over the top,” a very formal, verbose style of speaking, almost like an actor on the Shakespearean stage.¹⁴ Consider this early example: “The Jewish problem in America,” he pronounced during an April 1925 sermon, “can be solved by the corralling of our educational forces. No people is [*sic*] so ignorant of its life-forces as are we Jews; we must re-establish ourselves upon our ancient patrimony-religious education.”¹⁵ As he got older, he improved, but always remained an orator in the classic nineteenth-century sense. His pulpit offerings were well-crafted performances admired by most but occasionally found by some to be off-putting. He spoke precisely, almost too formally, like the intellectual he was, but he had a career-long tendency to overdo it. Although very brave in many ways, there was a measure of insecurity to Ira Sanders.¹⁶ He could be distant, and his stentorian speaking style may have aided in creating an appearance of aloofness that perhaps shielded him somewhat from others. He thought of himself as learned and scholarly, and wanted others to do so as well. To some degree, he wanted to impress his audience. The academic delivery of his sermons, punctuated as they were with big words and formal structure, helped to mold and create that impression on his audiences.

Aside from the work he did in the community, where he “found his greatest source of satisfaction,” Sanders did not like living in New York City. “I felt that I was just a very, very unimportant individual in a very large, surging amalgam of individuals and institutions.”¹⁷ As a somewhat sensitive man who enjoyed attention, he craved a smaller setting where he could make a more significant impact. Dissatisfied with his career at Temple Israel, in 1925 and 1926 Sanders weighed offers from the largest Reform congregation in Arkansas. Temple B’nai Israel was situated in Little Rock, a smaller city more to his liking where his abilities and interests as a social worker could be exercised to their fullest; where his level of educational attainment, academic style, and bearing would set him apart more so than in New York; where, by being the only Reform rabbi in the entire city, he would be “in the center of things,” and where, due to these factors, his

personal insecurities would be ameliorated.¹⁸ Sanders seriously considered a move to Little Rock.¹⁹

Coming to Little Rock

Although the Jewish presence in central Arkansas dates to 1838, Little Rock's Temple B'nai Israel was not established until November 1866, immediately after the Civil War.²⁰ Morris Navra served as its first president, and the sixty-six member congregation retained Samuel Peck as its first rabbi. Lay leaders like Navra, Phillip Pfeifer, and Phillip Ottenheimer, and families including Lasker, Menkus, Kempner, Cohn, Ehrenberg, Levy, and Samuels, whose descendants remain part of Temple B'nai Israel, were critical in its founding.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Rabbi Harry Mayer, who would later confirm young Ira Sanders, left Little Rock for Missouri. Rabbi Louis Wolsey assumed the pulpit in 1899 and remained eight years, to be followed by Louis Witt (1907-1919), James Heller (1920), and Emmanuel Jack (1921-1925). In 1925 Maurice L. Altheimer served as temple president.²¹ At that time, the congregation and its leaders were for the most part business owners and retailers, solidly middle- to upper-middle-class, and respected members of the Little Rock business and retail community. Altheimer, for example, was the president of Twin City Bank in North Little Rock, while Leo Pfeifer owned Pfeifer's Department Store. With the departure of Emmanuel Jack, the board set out to hire a new rabbi.

The Temple board sent Maurice Altheimer and Leo Pfeifer as delegates to New York to see and hear Rabbi Sanders in action. Little Rock knew of Sanders through their former rabbi, Harry Mayer, one of Sanders's mentors in Kansas City. Actually, this was the Little Rock congregation's second attempt to secure Sanders. Altheimer contacted Sanders the previous year inquiring as to his interest in the Little Rock pulpit, but Sanders had not been interested. Another year in New York, however, had altered Sanders's position. Unbeknownst to Sanders, Altheimer and Pfeifer sat attentively in Temple Israel as Sanders, with his usual formality and flourish, delivered a sermon seemingly tailor-made

*Rabbi Harry H. Mayer and Rabbi Louis Wolsey,
mentors to the young Ira Sanders.*

(Photo from Ira E. Sanders and Elijah E. Palnick, eds.,

One Hundred Years: Congregation B'nai Israel [Little Rock, 1966.])

for the southern visitors, titled "Why the North and the South Should Meet." Altheimer and Pfeifer, as well as the rest of the board, wanted Sanders badly, if for no other reason than they were tired of searching for a rabbi to replace Rabbi Jack. Sanders hailed from the general region, and his style, scholarly bearing, and the erudition he seemed to radiate were added bonuses.²² They arranged for Sanders to visit Little Rock in June 1926 to be interviewed by the search committee and deliver a sermon, the same one on sectional reconciliation that Altheimer and Pfeifer had heard and enjoyed on their New York visit. The committee then met and unanimously voted to offer Sanders the position.²³ But Sanders was uncertain of his desire to leave New York. Had he given Temple Israel enough time as its associate rabbi?

The committee sensed his indecision.²⁴ In an attempt to make plain their sincere desire to secure Sanders's services, search committee member Preston Pfeifer sent Sanders a telegram assuring him that "you will be received with much gratification as Little Rock is certainly anxiously awaiting spiritual leadership."²⁵

In addition, after Sanders left Little Rock, the board asked Rabbi Louis Wolsey, a former Little Rock rabbi who was serving as the rabbi at Philadelphia's Congregation Rodeph Shalom, to take on the task of convincing Sanders to accept the offer. Wolsey met Sanders at a Philadelphia restaurant, telling him of the opportunities and challenges that a southern rabbinate and a smaller congregation presented. The opportunity to be an agent of change in Little Rock appealed to Sanders, who relented, agreeing with Wolsey that Little Rock "offered a challenge older communities did not have."²⁶

Sanders returned to Arkansas on September 1, 1926. "I suppose," he later recalled, "[it was] the hottest day I've ever experienced."²⁷ Greeted with oppressive ninety-nine degree heat and humidity, he immediately had buyer's remorse. Staring out the window of his Hotel Lafayette room at the town below, Sanders was singularly unimpressed. "It looks like a prairie," he thought dejectedly. "I've been sold a bill of goods. I'm going home." Persuasive conversations with members of his new congregation as well as pangs from his own conscience convinced him to stay.²⁸ The thirty-two-year-old Sanders preached his inaugural sermon later that month. As in New York, this first sermon signaled to the congregation their new rabbi's priorities: "The Law of Life is the Law of Service."²⁹

Almost immediately one of those challenges of which Wolsey had spoken presented itself in an incident that both outraged and inspired Sanders and, in the process, moved his entire career along its eventual path. Sanders did not own a car when he came to Little Rock so he rode the electric streetcar to the Temple. On one of his first such occasions, he boarded the trolley and moved toward the back. He found the signs designating "colored" section for seating "appalling," but he was more naïve than bold in his choice of seating.³⁰ The conductor watched with a disapproving eye as Sanders took a seat beside an African American gentleman. The conductor immediately came to the rear of the car and told Sanders that he must be new in town. "You know, here in the South the coloreds and the whites do not sit together," said the conductor. "Will you kindly come up to the front?" The rabbi

stared up at the conductor, but he had not set out that morning to commit an act of civil disobedience. Nonetheless this experience, indeed the whole notion of segregated facilities, was an assault on Sanders's sensibilities, his notions of fairness and equality. He did not want to move. "Why do you object to my sitting in the back?" challenged Sanders. "This is a free country—can't a person ride where he pleases?"³¹ Unmoved, the conductor continued pressing the point, making it clear that he would not allow Sanders to keep his seat in the "colored section." Voices were raised, and the situation became heated and confrontational. Sanders, seething with righteous indignation, restrained himself and complied. But the indignity, both to him but particularly to the unknown man sitting next to him, had been done. He scrapped the sermon he had planned for that Friday evening and instead spoke on "The Jim Crow Law." Before his new southern congregation, Sanders scathingly denounced racial discrimination and predicted the demise of Jim Crow within twenty-five years. Such laws, he said, are "obsolete" and would be "almost forgotten" by that time. Any law that robs individuals of their dignity and their freedom had to go.³²

Sanders's sermons on racial and social justice, of which "The Jim Crow Law" was the first of many, met with no real congregational resistance, but rather with general approval.³³ The rabbi and his new congregation struck chords of affinity early on. Like the Little Rock community in general, the congregation was moderate on issues of race, and within the walls of the Temple, they could feel free to nod approvingly at the rabbi's words and voice progressive opinions. Nonetheless, like Jews in other southern communities, publicly most remained cautious because of their standing in the community as businessmen and retail merchants. Sanders was not one to lead marches, but rather to lead by education, example, and influence. The pulpit was his place to persuade and educate, and in his sermons he tended to integrate themes near and dear to him: service to God and community; the basic and essential equality of all people; and engaging the community by being civically involved. His sermons were given additional gravity and authority by his use of language and style

of speaking, which reflected a depth of intellect respected by the congregation.

Ira Sanders was very much a classical Reform rabbi, which was what this classically Reform congregation wanted. There would be no or almost no Hebrew during services, and confirmation replaced bar mitzvah. The congregation was content with Sanders's personal advocacy of Zionism so long as it did not emanate from the pulpit. Zionism was then a point of contention at Temple B'nai Israel, to the point where it was suggested a separate congregation of those opposed to the creation of a Jewish state be established—to which Sanders sternly replied “over my dead body.”³⁴ This was evidently the only point of contention between the congregation and its rabbi. “People left the congregation over that,” recalls Elijah E. Palnick, Sanders's successor.³⁵

Sanders's conception of the ideal rabbi was centered in the classical Reform tradition as reflected in the Pittsburgh Platform, drawn up in 1885 in a conference called by one of his Hebrew Union College mentors, Kaufmann Kohler. The planks of the Pittsburgh Platform became the tenets of modern Reform Judaism in its rejection of outmoded practices and its embrace of “the struggle for truth, justice, and righteousness in modern society.”³⁶ The tenets of modern Judaism conveniently married with the concepts of the social worker in Sanders, making the profession of Reform rabbi an ideal vehicle for him.³⁷

Sanders's deep and abiding interest in racial and social justice had other sources as well. As a boy growing up in the schools of Kansas City and Cincinnati, he (in his words) “had gone to school with all peoples. I also had done graduate work [in New York] with all peoples, and I felt that they were all one.”³⁸ One of the factors that motivated him to become a rabbi in the first place was his interest, even as a child, “in the promotion of good will between peoples.”³⁹ His study of sociology and social work also was motivated in part by his desire to make a difference in the world. He embraced the Jewish concept of *tikun olam*, which teaches that people bear the responsibility for working towards a just and equitable society. Finally, Sanders's study of the biblical prophets, particularly Isaiah, “who railed against the

injustices of his day," also factored into his life of social activism.⁴⁰ He was not alone. Many Reform rabbis of his generation, North and South, also had abiding interests in social and community activism.⁴¹

Little Rock provided fertile ground for Sanders's mission of social justice and racial equality, and he had much to do given its relative dearth of social service institutions. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Arkansas, Sanders became a very active member of civic and other community organizations. He founded the Temple's Men's Club, one of his proudest achievements. The club's first event was a 1930 debate between Sanders and famed attorney and atheist Clarence Darrow on the topic "Is Man Immortal?" The exchange resulted in much positive newspaper coverage for the rabbi as well as respect and admiration from Arkansas's Christian community for his eloquent defense of an afterlife (the local consensus was that the rabbi had badly "beaten" Darrow in the debate, which was held in the packed Central High School auditorium). This was Sanders's first large-scale introduction to Christian Arkansas, and he was a hit. The Men's Club brought such other luminaries to Little Rock as historian Will Durant and broadcaster H. V. Kaltenborn. Sanders also served on the board of the public library, presided over the Council of Social Agencies (1927–1929), served on the board of trustees as well as the executive board of the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association (1927 forward), and from 1926 joined (and frequently addressed) the Little Rock Rotary Club.⁴² He became involved in many different aspects of Little Rock civic life from the beginning, establishing himself as a force for good. His relationship with the Little Rock Christian community would pay dividends in later years when the rabbi championed more controversial causes.

Perhaps his most significant contribution in the first years in Little Rock was his establishment of a school of social work. Sanders "realized how important it was for the community of Little Rock—Arkansas also—to have trained social workers," and so he set forth to create such a school.⁴³ He asked Charles Wickard of the Little Rock Community Chest to proffer funds, and the board "unanimously made an appropriation to start the school." The

Little Rock School of Social Work, operating under the auspices of the University of Arkansas, opened its doors on October 7, 1927 in the YWCA building at Fourth and Scott streets. Sanders served as program director and professor, and corralled key city leaders including school superintendent R. C. Hall and Southern Methodist Bishop H. A. Boaz to serve on the board. Dr. Frank Vinsonhaler, dean of the Arkansas School of Medicine, served as president. The school offered junior and senior level courses such as social psychology, family casework, and social research, some of which Sanders taught. Tuition was ten dollars per year.⁴⁴

The Little Rock School of Social Work opened with an initial enrollment of sixty students, including two African American women. After the inaugural meeting, a contingent of three white students approached the rabbi: "You know, Dr. Sanders, in the South the Negroes and the whites do not go to school together, and we very much object to having any of these [black] women who are with us to be in our school."⁴⁵ Again, Sanders found himself face-to-face with the question of race, segregation, and equal treatment. Somewhat irate, he quietly and determinedly told the group "of course the first lesson we must learn in life is the lesson of understanding, to know how the other person feels before we can do any kind of work in life." Sanders stated that the women had qualifications equal to their own or to any of the others, and certainly as great a need. "If fifty-eight students do not care to attend the school, they certainly are at liberty to leave, but these two women—those two will remain."⁴⁶

Having taken his stand for integration, his concern shifted to the real possibility of having only two students the next morning. To his pleasant surprise, attendance did not discernibly decline. But it was not to be: the University of Arkansas, under whose name and supervision the school operated, intervened by refusing to allow integrated classes, despite the rabbi's wishes. Sanders operated the school until the economic stresses of the Great Depression forced its closure in 1932.⁴⁷ The school graduated an initial class of some forty social workers, all white.

The rabbi found other ways to pursue social justice in Arkansas. In 1931 Sanders helped found the Arkansas Eugenics

Association (AEA), later known as Planned Parenthood of Arkansas, an organization dedicated to providing services and information about birth control and contraception to poor Arkansas women and, as an advocate of family planning, to help combat poverty during the Depression. Many women during the Depression feared sexual intimacy lest a child be born that could not be adequately cared for. Smaller families meant fewer mouths to feed, and birth control information was the key to smaller families.

Margaret Sanger contacted Sanders and Second Presbyterian Church minister Hay Watson Smith, asking for help in organizing the first birth control association in Arkansas.⁴⁸ AEA founders included Sanders, Hilda Cornish, a volunteer social worker and reformer who in 1930 had met and formed a friendship with birth control advocate Sanger, Hay Watson Smith, Darmon A. Rhinehart, president of the Arkansas Medical Society, attorney Graham R. Hall, and Dr. Homer Scott, chief of staff of Arkansas Children's Hospital. The group, recalled Sanders, purposefully avoided the term "birth control" in the name of the organization in order to escape obvious association with Sanger's controversial movement. It supported her ideas and efforts, but those ideas had met with considerable opposition in the local community. "It was suggested," remembers Sanders, "that because the movement might evoke criticism on the part of the rather orthodox and staid community, that we call it the Arkansas Eugenics Association on the grounds that nobody would object to being well-born."⁴⁹ The AEA was successful in providing contraception and advice statewide through medical units for women who could not afford to see private physicians. In 1937 the AEA began providing services and information to black women as well. By 1940 "many medical units across the state included birth control services." Accordingly, the AEA altered its mission and provided only referrals and education. AEA became Arkansas Planned Parenthood in 1942.⁵⁰

In 1932, concurrent with these and other efforts and at the request of Little Rock mayor Horace Knowlton, Sanders organized the Pulaski County Welfare Commission, a local predecessor of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In the absence of

federal aid before the New Deal, this local organization gained national attention for the role it played in helping Pulaski County handle its welfare problems during the Depression. In April 1932 the Little Rock City Council adopted Sanders's proposal that a "voluntary tax" of ten cents per month be added to each electric, gas, telephone, and water utility bill for one calendar year in order to raise relief funds. Sanders estimated the plan would raise about five thousand dollars per month for the year it was collected, and the utilities agreed to collect the tax at no cost to the city.⁵¹ The response from the community was overwhelming, and largely because of Sanders's efforts, relief became available for those in need.

From 1927 through 1934 Sanders also served on the board of the Family Welfare Agency of Little Rock, which provided local poor relief. However, he was bothered by the blatant, racially based inequities of the system. Black families were badly disadvantaged because they received a disproportionately small percentage of the relief funds. Sanders recalled that "they were always giving ten cents on the dollar to the black family and to the white family they'd usually give around ninety percent." He confronted the other members of the board and stated that "the stomachs of the black people were just as important as the stomachs of the white." He saw no reason for the monies to be distributed so inequitably. "They're both human beings," he implored, "and they both deserve fifty cents on the dollar." Moral suasion, however, failed. Sanders followed up with an economic argument: "Do you not realize that if you give the black man the same amount of money you give the white man, your community will benefit economically? The black man will spend as the white man does." This argument seemed more palatable to the board, and through Sanders's effort the payments, though never truly equalized, were made more equitable.⁵² With seemingly boundless energy coupled with a deep desire to make a difference in his adopted community, Sanders also pressed other organizations such as the American Legion into increased service for poor relief.⁵³ Other rabbis in the South were involved in similar activities for racial and social justice, though not to Sanders's degree. Rabbi

Jacob Kaplan of Miami and Rabbi Julius Mark of Nashville, for example, were instrumental in convening the progressive Southern Conference on Human Welfare, which met during November 1938 in Birmingham.⁵⁴

In 1937 Sanders became a founder and president of the Urban League of Greater Little Rock “to fight for the equality of this community’s black citizens” who as a class “were not being given their just due.”⁵⁵ He had difficulty procuring other whites to serve with him on the board, managing to convince only two. The situation remained that way for more than twenty-five years, he recalled, “when it [then] became fashionable for the white citizens of the community to be a part of the board.” His purpose in helping create and promote the Urban League was what he termed “basic: the creation of a climate between the two groups through education and understanding.”⁵⁶

For Sanders, the pursuit of social justice through activities such as those outlined above gave a rabbinate its real meaning. Imbued from childhood with a keen sense of empathy and sense of morality, Sanders believed that the effective rabbi “sees his reward *only* in the changed attitudes and social activism in behalf of just and righteous causes.”⁵⁷ Here lies the key to understanding Rabbi Sanders’s constant activism throughout his tenure in the Little Rock community on behalf of the disadvantaged, the poor, the sick, and those who suffered under segregation and unequal treatment: his deeply-felt belief that impacting his society through changing people’s attitudes and through working for just causes served not merely as a yardstick for success, but *the* yardstick for success—the primary, if not sole, indication that he was fulfilling his rabbinical calling. If, as Sanders believed, the rabbi “sees his reward *ONLY* in changed attitudes” and in the pursuit of social justice, then his work in the community provided him that reward. It fulfilled him and was the source of his professional satisfaction. The law of life, after all, was the law of service.

The quest for social and racial justice in the community and the personal fulfillment he derived from that quest marked all aspects of Sanders’s life. He frequently talked about these issues to his family, his congregation, and to civic and community groups

in numerous settings and situations. When in 1951 the University of Arkansas conferred on him an honorary doctorate, the citation singled out for merit his work in the field of racial justice: "You have worked consistently for the betterment of race relations. You have striven long and hard to better the conditions of all our people and to promote understanding of race relationships."⁵⁸ When three years later, Hebrew Union College bestowed on Sanders an honorary doctor of divinity degree, HUC president Nelson Glueck emphasized Sanders's "dedicated work in the furtherance of better race relations. Your consecrated efforts have made you a symbol of the truth and of the dignity and the nobility of the faith which you have so brilliantly preached."⁵⁹

The local community recognized Sanders's efforts as well. "There is a gentleman," the *Arkansas Gazette* opined in 1950, "whose good works come to our attention ever so often. They come without benefit of a publicity chairman or a photographer—which is unusual in our existence. He is Dr. Ira Sanders. . . . Somehow, his spirit of brotherhood pervades the area of our community with which we have to deal more than any person we can think of at the moment."⁶⁰ In February 1951, in observance of National Brotherhood Week, the Little Rock Rotary Club honored Sanders for his twenty-five years of service and community contributions. When Sanders spoke at the ceremony, he stressed themes of racial equality, couched in non-confrontational and religious terms he believed would find greater acceptance: "All that is non-conformist and all that is *democratic* has gone into the makings of this America," he said. "There is one law for the strong and weak, the rich and poor, alien and citizen, all races and creeds. It is important," he continued, "that we reaffirm the rights of man under God. We are responsible for the welfare of others, although this age seems to reject this principle. Many nations reject brotherhood for a blown-up racial philosophy. . . . In such a world America must reaffirm the principles of brotherhood." He drew a distinction between the concepts of racial tolerance and racial acceptance: "We must not say 'tolerance,' looking down from superior heights. . . . We must remind ourselves that brotherhood means for us to *accept* the wide differences in humanity and ask

*Celebrating his honorary degree with others at Hebrew Union College,
Cincinnati, March 27, 1954. Sanders is third from the right.
(Courtesy of Ira Sanders Papers/UALR Archives & Spec. Coll. Little Rock.)*

ourselves if we are always right and the others are always wrong."⁶¹ Of course, Ira Sanders could not know the future but, on the cusp of the civil rights movement, he was laying the groundwork for the white community to accept the changes to come. His messages of racial equality, suffused with widely accepted Judeo-Christian principles, cloaked in dearly-held traditional democratic ideals, referencing the principles of Americanism cherished by southerners, and delivered with unassailable logic, were designed to change attitudes and to create an atmosphere wherein change could occur peacefully and with general acceptance.

The Civil Rights Movement

Of the many causes for social justice Sanders championed, and of the many fights he quietly or publicly waged on behalf of others, no cause seemed more just and righteous to him than the fight for racial equality that raged across the South and the nation during the mid-twentieth century. His belief in the basic and essential equality of all people was grounded in his upbringing, the tenets of Judaism, and his own empathy for the plight of others. "I have always been a champion of the dignity of man. To me the thing that counts most is your character," Sanders later said. "That's been my philosophy through the years. I've always championed the cause of those who are entitled to the same privileges of living as I am entitled to, and that in the sight of God, and certainly in the sight of our fellow man, we're all equal."⁶² The cause of justice and fair play, he wrote, "flamed in my heart" like "burning fire shut up in [my] bones."⁶³ He dedicated himself to furthering that cause. Indeed, few southern rabbis matched the activism and determination of Ira Sanders in fighting Jim Crow.

Being an outspoken Jew in favor of civil rights carried with it a large measure of risk. The fact that most southern Jews were retail merchants made them particularly sensitive to majority public opinion, more so than other members of the community. Their livelihoods depended in large measure upon community good will. Jews feared community reprisals; that is, if an individual member of the Jewish community held an unpopular opinion, the fear was that the entire Jewish community might be targeted for retribution.⁶⁴

The hostile reaction on the part of many southern whites to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* school desegregation decision created deep-seated concerns for southern Jews, many of whom feared an erosion of their standing and relationship with the white Christian South. Would those white southern Christians who opposed integration see their Jewish neighbors primarily as white, like themselves, or primarily as Jews, like African Americans, a distinct "other" among them?⁶⁵ Anger and resentment about the "Jewish position" on the "race issue" could easily spill over into increased overt acts of antisemitism; and indeed, that is what

occurred. From November 1957 through October 1958, eight southern synagogues were bombed, some in areas of outspoken Jewish support for civil rights, and others in areas where Jews had remained relatively silent.⁶⁶ Southern Jews also frequently feared for themselves when northern Jewish civil rights workers came to their area to work in the movement, potentially endangering the local Jewish community. Locals often implored them to “please, do not endanger us, do not get our synagogue bombed.”⁶⁷

A sharp rise in antisemitic literature in the early fifties sought to draw a link between black civil rights and an imagined Jewish-Communist-Zionist conspiracy. Indeed, many white obstructionists trumpeted just such a connection, viewing the civil rights movement through the lens of cold war paranoia as nothing more than a Communist-directed plot against the United States. The segregationist Capitol Citizen’s Council of Little Rock employed this very tactic against Sanders and Temple B’nai Israel.⁶⁸ Louisiana judge Leander Perez provides a vivid example of the tactic, and is typical of how the antisemitic argument intersected with the segregationist argument. Perez labeled the *Brown* decision “Communist trash” and saw the civil rights movement as a Zionist-Communist conspiracy to force miscegenation in order to “breed an America too lazy and weak” to resist the encroachment of international Communism. American Jews, insisted Judge Perez, were the link between the Kremlin and the movement.⁶⁹ Perez is admittedly an extreme example of a view nevertheless held by many southerners, either as genuine belief, but more likely as an exigency to maintain the racial hierarchy as it existed and halt the advance of black rights by tying the movement to the near-universally dreaded specter of Communism.

Well before the *Brown* decision, Sanders had taken a public stand for racial justice. He did not fear his photo or his comments appearing in the newspapers. His 1951 speech to the Little Rock Rotary Club, which was largely reproduced in the *Arkansas Gazette*, warned that “flouting moral law brings disaster.” No class should dominate another, nor should inequality be manifest in the law. He stressed not toleration, which implies hierarchy, but racial acceptance and equality. Before *Brown*, he was moving minds on

the race issue and inspiring people to action. After *Brown*, which Sanders approvingly said caused "the greatest social upheaval in the 20th century, unquestionably," he redoubled his efforts, arguing that "if we deny human rights, you might as well not live because everybody has a right under the sun." Such rights were "necessary for the preservation of the *human* race."⁷⁰ He spoke before the Rotary Club again in November 1954 in the wake of the uproar over *Brown*, on the topic of race and racial equality. Little Rock school board member Louise McLean commended Sanders on his address, saying she was "particularly conscious at this time of the very few persons courageous enough to speak the truth. I would be very proud," she concluded, "if any spokesman for the church with which I am affiliated had the brains and the fortitude to make such a talk in this, our 'Bible Belt.' Count me in the camp of followers of liberal intelligent leadership like yours."⁷¹

The response of southern Reform rabbis to combating Jim Crow in the post World War II South was fairly uniform across the region, with perhaps greater trepidation in the Deep South, especially in Alabama and Mississippi, than in the Upper South or Midwestern border states such as Arkansas. A rabbi's or a congregation's level of support or non-support for civil rights, though, did not seem to correlate with incidents of antisemitic violence. According to a 1958-1959 study by Albert Vorspan, chair of the Commission on Social Action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the national Reform umbrella organization, almost all southern Reform rabbis took pro-civil rights postures to varying degrees of intensity. Few were constrained by their boards, as "most rabbis will not stand for a controlled pulpit."⁷² However, the acts and threats of violence against Jewish communities, wrote Vorspan, "reveal a crazy-quilt pattern," not at all reflecting the level of Jewish pro-civil rights activity. An outspoken rabbi in Mississippi, for example, was not threatened, but "a synagogue in Jacksonville, Florida, in which there had never even been a discussion of the segregation issue, was ripped by a bomb." Two North Carolina synagogues were bombed, though they "played no role" in desegregation issues, while vocal civil rights advocate Rabbi William Silverman's

Nashville, Tennessee, synagogue was not. The attacks seemed more related to the segregationists' latent antisemitism and the atmosphere of defiance of law that bred violence than to the actions of local Jews.⁷³

Like Sanders, many southern Reform rabbis in the 1950s and early 1960s worked for social and racial justice, advocating different strategies for success and working in sometimes radically different environments: William Silverman of Nashville, Emmet Frank of Alexandria, Perry Nussbaum of Jackson, Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg, Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta, and Sanders of Little Rock, among others, all took similar public stands for civil rights.⁷⁴ In Jackson, Mississippi, Nussbaum faced a much more hostile environment than did Sanders: a "steady diet of viciousness and vituperation" met largely by a local clergy offering either support for segregation or, at best, "silent acquiescence," and a legislature "churning out laws guaranteed to insure the purity of the white race." In such a severe environment, Nussbaum was more publicly cautious than some of his contemporaries, but that did not prevent both Temple Beth Israel as well as his home from being bombed only months apart in 1967 by segregationists. Nussbaum believed southern rabbis needed help in the form of interfaith cooperation: "If there were some public Christian leadership [in Jackson], even toward moderation," he wrote, "this would have been a different report."⁷⁵

Atlanta's Jacob Rothschild also emphasized such cooperation. "I do not believe that the rabbi in today's South will serve any good purpose in leading crusades;" rather, "let him labor alongside others of like mind and dedicated purpose."⁷⁶ Like Sanders, Rothschild spoke in a variety of settings in Atlanta regarding integration and racial justice. Active in a number of civic organizations, he used his skills as a public speaker to great effect.⁷⁷ On October 12, 1958, Rothschild's synagogue was bombed and partially destroyed, the fifth such incident in the South in an eight-month span.⁷⁸

In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Charles Mantinband had difficulties with his congregation board, who told him "in no uncertain terms that they would prefer their rabbi remained silent,

if not neutral, on the segregation issue." Mantinband told the board it was impossible for him to concur. He and his board found it possible to coexist because "we agree in principle, if not in method."⁷⁹

Sanders faced few of these obstacles for several reasons. He lived and worked in a moderate city. He had labored for thirty years to build alliances and establish his presence in the community as a social worker and civic father (as well as rabbi of the largest Arkansas congregation). Sanders had "practically no one in the congregation protesting" his activism.⁸⁰ He had the backing of his congregation board, and he had significant interfaith cooperation and leadership from both Protestant and Catholic clergy. Sanders shared certain traits with another southern colleague, Virginia rabbi Emmet Frank, most widely known for his vociferous assaults on segregation and one of its champions, the powerful Senator Harry Byrd.⁸¹ In 1957 Rabbi Sanders would mount a verbal assault of his own on the politicians of Arkansas.

Sanders's boldest stance for social and racial justice came with the Little Rock Central High School crisis of 1957-1958. The actions at the beginning of that school year garnered international attention, and Sanders provided key, dramatic leadership on behalf of desegregation. In early 1957 the Arkansas state legislature was poised to vote on four proposals designed to frustrate and impede the Supreme Court's desegregation orders handed down in the *Brown* decisions of 1954 and 1955. Introduced by state representative Lucien Rogers, House Bill 322 would allow for the creation of a "state sovereignty commission," ostensibly protecting Arkansas against encroachments by the federal government. House Bill 323 would allow parents to keep their children out of integrated schools. House Bill 324 would force "certain organizations," i.e. the NAACP, to register with the state. The NAACP would therefore be forced to divulge the names and addresses of its membership, making them vulnerable to segregationist retribution. House Bill 325 would provide state legal assistance to any and all Arkansas school districts for the purpose of retaining lawyers to fight the integration order.⁸² These four measures taken together would erect a formidable barrier against desegregation in

*Governor Sidney S. McMath (seated) signing a bill, June 1950.
The governor is flanked by representatives of Little Rock clergy:
Left to Right: Rev. James Workman, Monsignor John Healey,
Rev. Marion Boggs, Rev. William Oglesby,
Rabbi Ira Sanders, Dan Lichtenberger.
(Courtesy of Ira Sanders Papers/UALR Archives & Spec. Coll. Little Rock.)*

Arkansas. The house adopted all four measures without debate and with only one dissenting vote. Public furor over the house's rapid adoption of the bills, particularly among religious groups, forced the state senate to approve, but only by a margin of one vote, a public hearing.⁸³ Sanders determined to speak at that session in opposition to the measures.

The public hearing convened on the evening of February 18, 1957. Sanders was joined by ministers and pastors from Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches from around the state.⁸⁴ Although not necessarily acquainted with each other, the

religious leaders were united in their opposition to the anti-integration bills. Sanders ignored the advice of several friends who asked him not to speak lest his life be in jeopardy. The evening, Sanders recalled, "was so intense. The chambers were jammed with all sorts of people, a tremendous crowd."⁸⁵ In fact, over nine hundred people had packed into the senate chambers to hear the speeches. When his turn came, Sanders took his position behind the rostrum. With eyes fixed on the senators and in bold and resonant voice, the rabbi used all the moral suasion at his command in an attempt to kill the four measures. Hecklers and taunters frequently interrupted his address, but Sanders was determined to make his points. He had crafted a careful yet powerful message tailor-made for the overwhelmingly Christian audience of lawmakers before him. Accordingly, his address stressed three areas: the moral, "Christian" aspect of racial justice; the "pocketbook" issues related to the loss of business and tax revenues should the state be perceived as taking steps backward; and the legal aspects of federalism and state acquiescence to the Supreme Court, and to the Constitution and federal law in general.

"Our nation," he said, "must be based on liberty and justice for all peoples," whose contributions to "the cultural pluralism of our land" have been great. The "dignity of the individual," said Sanders, "must never be destroyed by granting the state those powers which would deny anyone the liberty and the freedom guaranteed by the Constitution." The four anti-integration measures, he stated, were "all concerned with the thought of circumventing the highest legal authority of our land. They will never stand the test of time, for higher than the legal law of the land stands this moral law of God. It operates slowly, but surely, and in the end justice will prevail." Like the prophet Isaiah he had so diligently studied, Sanders portended an ominous future for his fellow Arkansans should the legislature choose this path.

Sanders noted the recent passage of a package of tax and other incentives designed to lure businesses to Arkansas. "If the measures which deny America's traditional guarantees of individual freedom and liberty are allowed to pass, the state you and I

love will lose first an increased economy coming from new industries, and secondly it will be held morally in just opprobrium before the country." Sanders knew that the financial consequences of the loss of investments and tax revenues in Arkansas might register with those unmoved by his moral and legal arguments.

Finally, aware that he was addressing an almost universally Christian audience, Sanders explained, "When Jesus died on the cross he repeated those immortal words 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" Rousing himself to his full oratorical glory, the rabbi then thundered, "Legislators! May future generations reading the statute books of Arkansas NOT be compelled to say these words of you." He then implored the legislature to defeat the measures, and, in doing so, "the God of all men will bless your handiwork."⁸⁶ During the cacophony of applause and cheers mixed with jeers and heckling accompanying his conclusion, Sanders was asked to leave the chambers. The reason, he later stated, was "the fear that somebody might assassinate me."⁸⁷

Courageous though his efforts had been, Sanders's plea fell on deaf ears. On February 26, 1957, Governor Orval Faubus, a previous racial moderate who had cynically used hard-core segregationism as an issue to gain the governor's mansion, signed the four measures into law with little fanfare, stating that "the laws would not jeopardize the rights of anyone." Three of the measures had so-called "emergency clauses" attached to them, making them effective immediately. The fourth, the State Sovereignty Commission, became effective after ninety days.⁸⁸

Sanders's speech elicited many responses. Former governor Sidney S. McMath, a progressive Democrat who served in the statehouse from 1949 to 1953 (and afterward one of the nation's top trial attorneys), commended Sanders's address in opposition to "these means of infringement upon basic constitutional rights."⁸⁹ McMath had won the governorship in 1949 riding a wave of postwar reform in the South, had helped integrate the University of Arkansas medical school, and supported federal antilynching legislation as well as elimination of the Arkansas poll tax. A racial progressive, he was defeated in a bid for a third term

in 1954 by Orval Faubus.⁹⁰ “Your statement was clear, convincing, and courageous,” he wrote Sanders.

The Reverend Charles C. Walker, minister of Little Rock’s First Congregational Church, called the speech “great” and “courageous.” It was “scholarly and truthfully put. Ever since I have been located here,” wrote Walker, “you have been assiduously working toward a more humane approach for all our citizens.” Sanders’s courage and determination to stand publicly for civil rights, Walker told his associate, “has helped me to encourage others to ‘stand up and be counted.’”⁹¹ The rabbi’s stand before the legislature had set an example others would emulate in taking their own stand for equality.

The Central High Crisis

Sanders’s bold speech before the legislature, of course, prevented neither the passage of the anti-integration bills, nor the violence and disruption to come. That violent opposition was in many ways unexpected. On the issue of civil rights, Little Rock was a moderate city unlike Birmingham or Montgomery. It boasted a moderate mayor, a progressive newspaper, the *Gazette*, under the editorship of Harry Ashmore, a moderate congressman in Brooks Hays, and a governor, Orval Faubus, not (yet) known for race-baiting.⁹² The state and its capital city had already made many advances toward integration without major incident, as related proudly by the Little Rock Council on Education’s 1952 report: the University of Arkansas had “opened its doors,” and other campuses were in the process of doing so; the Little Rock public library quietly desegregated, “no segregation was practiced at the opening of the first Little Rock Community Center, all major department stores [many Jewish-owned] have removed drinking fountain segregation signs, and the Rock Island RR has abolished segregation on its trains. All this,” the report concluded, “seems to indicate the increasing understanding of Arkansas for peaceful and gradual solution of the problems of segregation.”⁹³

The passage of the bills, coupled with the key factor—Orval Faubus’s fateful and cynical political calculation that a staunch segregationist stood a better chance of election in 1958 than a

moderate—set the stage for the events of autumn 1957 at Central High School. The story is often told and well chronicled. Nine young people, set to be the first African American students at Little Rock's Central High School, suddenly found themselves at the center of a crisis of international scope. Governor Faubus, making good on his campaign promise to enforce segregation, dispatched the Arkansas National Guard to block the entrance of the nine students into the school in a clear and very public challenge to the authority of the U.S. Supreme Court. President Dwight Eisenhower, himself no advocate of the *Brown* desegregation decision, was forced into action by Faubus's flouting of federal law. Eisenhower met with the governor, who assured him that no escalation of violence would occur. Faubus then removed the guard, leaving the nine children essentially defenseless against an angry, rapidly growing mob that shouted obscenities and hurled racial epithets. It was more than the Little Rock police could handle. National and international press covered the shocking images of September 23, with its scenes of intimidation and violence against black children, reporters, and bystanders alike. Eisenhower, in defense of federalism and Supreme Court authority but also fearing a tarnishing of America's international image in the charged cold war atmosphere of the time, federalized the Arkansas National Guard and sent elements of the 101st Airborne division to Little Rock to protect the children and escort them to classes. It was a question of federal versus state authority, and the outcome was not in doubt. It nevertheless left the Little Rock community badly torn.

Few Jewish children actually attended Central High. Most Jewish teens in the Little Rock community attended Hall High School because they lived in the suburbs, particularly in an area known as the Heights. Only six Jewish students attended Central High out of a total enrollment of around two thousand.⁹⁴ Despite that fact, Little Rock Jews, particularly Jewish women, played a pivotal role in the crisis. Following Governor Faubus's order closing the schools rather than desegregating for the 1958 year, a group of women founded the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC). The committee, consisting of about one thousand women, played a pivotal role in the effort to reopen the

schools on a desegregated basis. Jewish women, including Josephine Menkus, Jane Mendel, Carolyn Tenenbaum, Rosa Lasker, and Alice Back, provided key leadership. Most significant was Irene Samuel, the non-Jewish wife of Dr. John Samuel, a Jewish Little Rock physician who had opened his practice to African Americans and suffered because of it.⁹⁵ Rabbi Sanders's wife, Selma, also played a role in the organization.

President Eisenhower suggested that Little Rock clergy aid in ameliorating the Central High crisis. On October 4, 1957, Rabbi Sanders along with Methodist bishop Paul E. Martin, Congressman Brooks Hays, who was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Marion Boggs of Little Rock's Second Presbyterian Church, Methodist minister Dr. Aubrey Dalton, Dr. Dunbar Ogden, president of the Little Rock Ministerial Alliance (of which Sanders was a member), and Episcopal bishop Robert R. Brown, whom Eisenhower had initially contacted, drew up a proposal for a "ministry of reconciliation" to assist the community in coming together in the wake of the crisis. The group set aside Saturday, October 12, 1957, as a day for meetings, which were held in eighty-five different houses of worship in the Greater Little Rock area. Those in attendance were led by their clergy in common recitation of a six-point prayer for "forgiveness for having left undone the things that ought to have been done; the support and preservation of law and order; the leaders of the community, state, and nation; the youth in the schools of the community; the casting out of rancor and prejudice in favor of understanding and compassion; and resistance against unthinking agitators."⁹⁶

At Temple B'nai Israel, Sanders added specific points about race and equality to the generic common prayer to better hammer home the message: "for that blessed day when all peoples and all races shall live side by side in tranquility and in good will; to remove hatred and malice from the hearts of those who would destroy the right of Thy creatures; and to show them that men of all colors are Thy children, each a pattern to help establish the whole vast fabric of society in which all men shall dwell in unity and accord."⁹⁷ More than eight thousand people attended the eighty-five meetings. Governor Faubus was not among them.

The previous evening, thirty-five independent Baptist ministers hosted a community gathering of about 660 segregationists opposed to the ideals of the “ministry of reconciliation,” offering up prayers for a different kind of solution, imploring the Almighty to “have the Negro pupils go back to the all-Negro high school.”⁹⁸ The fact that liberals and moderates who favored desegregation outnumbered the segregationists at these meetings by better than ten to one offered hope for the situation in Arkansas.

There was remarkable support from Sanders’s congregation and colleagues regarding his activities in the “ministry of reconciliation” and in his activities within the community on behalf of racial justice in general. An indication of that support can be seen in the five hundred mostly Jewish participants of the day’s activities at the Temple, representing substantially more attendees than a typical Friday or Saturday, indeed than at any other time except the High Holy Days. Rabbi Eugene Blachschleger of Montgomery’s Temple Beth Or offered Sanders support, stating that he understood “your position and anxiety” having gone through similar community traumas the previous year.⁹⁹ Of his own congregation, Sanders told the *Jewish Daily Forward* that he “was unaware of any” dissent regarding his civil rights activism; but had there been any, he said, it would not have influenced him. “How can a Jew be a segregationist?” he asked rhetorically. “Didn’t we suffer enough from restrictive measures for the Jews?”¹⁰⁰ Congregational support at least in part allowed Sanders to play the role he did in the quest for racial and social justice.

About 1,400 Jews lived in Little Rock in 1957–1958, constituting about one percent of the city’s overall population. Though small in number, they wielded significant civic and economic influence. Gus Blass owned the largest store in the city; Henry Spitzberg was one of its leading attorneys; Louis Rosen was president of the Rotary Club.¹⁰¹ Some of the most prominent businessmen in Little Rock were Jewish, and four Jewish families in particular—Pfeifer, Blass, Kempner, and Cohn—were “associated with large, prestigious department stores.” Garment manufacturers Gus and Leonard Ottenheimer had built an industrial complex in Little Rock in 1955. Sam Peck was a respected

hotel owner, while Julius Tenenbaum and Sol Alman ran substantial scrap and metal companies.¹⁰²

The Jewish economic presence in Little Rock was substantial, but, as importantly, it was well-integrated into the larger community and had been for decades. Abe Tenenbaum established his company in 1890. The Gus Blass Company originated in 1867. James Kempner, son of company founder Ike Kempner, founded the Little Rock Urban Progress Association as well as "participating in several business and civic organizations."¹⁰³ These are a few of numerous examples. The Jewish community for the most part had deep and substantial roots in the secular community, which offered them a degree of insulation. Nevertheless, Jewish-owned retail businesses suffered as a result of the segregationist Capitol Citizen's Council's boycott of the pro-civil rights *Arkansas Gazette* and all businesses that continued to advertise in it. Newspaper sales fell by over twenty thousand, which translated into fewer readers of department store ads and additional business falloff.¹⁰⁴ Of course, violence did accompany the events of September 1957, but it was localized around the school. Jewish businesses were not targeted, and normalcy for downtown and suburban businesses was quickly restored.¹⁰⁵ All of which is not to state that serious threats were not made specifically against the Jews of Little Rock as a result of Sanders's activism. Like other southern cities with synagogues in the 1950s, the Temple received a bomb threat.

On Thursday, October 16, 1958, the FBI informed Sanders, as well as Rabbi Irwin Groner of Little Rock's Orthodox Congregation Agudath Achim, that a bomb threat had been made by segregationists against both the Temple and the Orthodox synagogue. While Sanders had been very active in civil rights, Groner had not. This made no difference; in Little Rock as in other southern communities, the level of actual engagement of specific rabbis or congregations in civil rights activities did not determine who was and who was not bombed or threatened with bombing. It was, instead, a non-specific targeting of the entire Jewish community as retribution for the actions of certain members of that community.¹⁰⁶

Temple president Henry J. Spitzberg presided over a special meeting of the boards of the Temple and Agudath Achim that convened at noon on Friday, October 17 to discuss the threat. Both rabbis were present. Groner had phoned the Anti-Defamation League for any further information on the threat, and the ADL told Groner of a "threat that the Atlanta Temple was [to be] the last to be bombed unoccupied."¹⁰⁷ After stepping up security at the facilities, the board voted to have Shabbat services as usual that evening, stating "we could not allow any group of fanatics to rout the Jewish people from their places of worship."¹⁰⁸ Board member Selwyn Loeb made the motion that services be held as usual, and Dr. Jerome Levy then called for a second meeting to be held the next day, Saturday, October 18, to consider the question of whether or not to hold Sunday school as usual. Friday night services passed without incident, and Sanders and the board met the next day to decide on several matters pertaining to the Temple's security, which included improving outside lighting, hiring security guards, and establishing a committee to deal exclusively with "future problems or threats."¹⁰⁹ Sunday school went forward as usual with no disruption, although only a few parents braved the threat. No one on the board suggested reining in Sanders, and no one suggested that he lower his community profile regarding civil rights. Henry Spitzberg and the rest of the board exhibited courage and leadership as they stood squarely behind their rabbi throughout the period of the Central High crisis.

On October 21 the board met for a third time to discuss security issues. The board provided for the hiring of a nightly security guard and noted that the Little Rock police were keeping the Temple, located downtown at the corner of Capitol and Broadway, under close, around-the-clock surveillance. Sanders suggested that "a committee of fathers [of religious school children] be constituted to guard the buildings between 9 am and noon each Sunday while Sunday school was in session." The motion passed. The board then agreed that fire drills and other evacuation plans be developed, and the grounds committee proposed that "all shrubbery be thinned out" to deprive potential bombers of cover. The board also acted on the previous meeting's

resolution to establish a security committee by creating an “emergency committee” of board members Myron Lasker, Harry Pfeifer, Jr., Arnold Mayersohn, M. A. Safferstone, and Jerome S. Levy to deal exclusively with those needs. Finally, Sanders proposed that no public mention be made of any of these contingencies for increased security because, as the rabbi put it, “the bleating of the lamb excites the tiger.”¹¹⁰ For that reason, the threats and any mention of the board’s plans were omitted from the Temple’s weekly newsletter, *The Temple Chronicle*.

By the following month, the fear of bombings had waned, and the board rescinded some of the security measures implemented the month before and imposed others. The floodlights that had been erected outside the Temple each night were discontinued, but the board voted to brick up a stairwell on the Capitol Avenue side of the building. The board also agreed to provide security any time meetings were held in the Temple.¹¹¹

As with other contemporary southern rabbis, Sanders’s civil rights activism had frightening and potentially disastrous results. Although, unlike Rabbi Rothschild’s Atlanta Temple, B’nai Israel avoided destruction, it endured more threats both during and after the crisis. In his report to the congregation made during the Temple’s 1959 annual meeting, Sanders praised his congregation for its support during the Central High crisis and through the threats of bombings. The members “conducted themselves with calmness, resoluteness, and courage in a most laudatory manner. Despite threats to our Temple by sinister forces from without,” Sanders reported with pride, “we conducted all of our activities with unsuspected fervor and dignity.” He praised those in the congregation “who joined with the right-thinking leaders of our community to restore stability and normalcy,” and noted that his congregation, made of “sturdier stuff than to let intimidation or fear frighten us,” had persevered by defiantly holding services and other events “several times under the threat of bombs.”¹¹²

Even given the threats made by extremists, Sanders and his colleague Rabbi Groner of Congregation Agudath Achim agreed that the overall relationship between Little Rock Jews and non-Jews during and immediately following the Central High crisis

*Temple B'nai Israel, at Capitol and Broadway c. 1900.
The congregation's third house of worship was dedicated May 9, 1897.
The congregation moved out in 1975. The building has been demolished.
(Courtesy of National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia.)*

“could not conceivably be better or friendlier,” a sentiment shared by many local Jewish businessmen as well.¹¹³ By 1957 Sanders was so well-established as a community leader that in some ways his Jewishness was secondary in the public mind to his civic-mindedness. He was, and had been since 1926, an established, respected, and well-liked community leader in the same vein as high-profile Protestant or Catholic religious leaders in the city. The threats by extremists, rather than marginalizing or silencing the local Jewish community, had the effect of drawing the congregation more tightly around its rabbi and making the community more intolerant of antisemitic or racist extremism lest their municipal image be further tarnished. Ironically, the radical antisemitic threats of a few lessened whatever softer antisemitism may have existed in the community as a whole, as Arkansas liberals and moderates effectively “circled the wagons” to maintain the state’s relatively moderate position on civil rights.

Although the Jews of Little Rock never adopted any official Jewish position on school integration, Sanders, as “one of the leading figures in the campaign to adhere to and enforce the law of the land,”¹¹⁴ was seen as the *de facto* Jewish spokesman on these issues. Because his position did not appreciably differ from any number of other religious liberals or moderates, because his style of leadership was to provide an example of working for racial justice from within the system through established (or by establishing) civic and community organizations like the Rotarians or the Urban League, because he sought to educate from the already-established position of moral and religious community leader (rather than lead street demonstrations or employ other kinds of confrontational direct action tactics), and finally because Little Rock was—despite the momentous exception of Faubus and the Central High debacle—a moderate environment for civil rights quite different from Birmingham or Montgomery or even Atlanta, Sanders was not seen as an interloper, and therefore the Jewish community did not suffer appreciable consequences as a result of his activism.

Making a Difference, 1959–1963 and Beyond

During the events of 1957–1958, Sanders's work on behalf of social justice was a source of pride for Reform Jews and Jewish organizations, and he received encouragement from colleagues around the country. Such organizations as the UAHC offered key support. Chairman Cyrus Gordon, on behalf of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, commended Sanders's "strong leadership" in the community, calling it "the only bright spot in the Little Rock situation." He asked Sanders to forward his views on desegregation "for the benefit of those [southern rabbis] who will be confronting similar situations."¹¹⁵ Gordon wanted to hold Sanders's work out as an example for others to emulate.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the American Jewish Congress (AJCong), and the New York Association of Reform Rabbis (ARR-NY) also offered support and encouragement. "The Jewish community," wrote AJCong regional director Richard Cohen, "should be proud of the public position you took in your testimony on the four bills and in the essentially moral position you took." Likewise, the ARR-NY leadership rallied behind Sanders, "confident that you will bring to this problem the ethical and moral insights of Judaism and that you will labor zealously for its just and moral solution."¹¹⁶

Perhaps the most significant message came from Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, the president of the UAHC. Eisendrath wired Sanders shortly after the start of the 1957 school year congratulating him on "your splendid leadership in mobilizing the religious community of Little Rock to take concerted moves towards the removal of strife." Eisendrath told Sanders that he intended to hold the Little Rock rabbi up as a role model, an example for the entire UAHC membership to emulate in order "to urge efforts similar to yours in communities throughout the nation, both North and South." Eisendrath thanked Sanders on behalf of the UAHC member congregations for "your vivid demonstration of the need to apply today's mandates to [the] realm of social action."¹¹⁷ Clearly, Sanders's work in Little Rock was having a national as well as local impact.

Through the remaining five years of his Little Rock rabbinate, Sanders continued making the case for racial and social justice. He seldom missed an opportunity to interject messages of equality and fairness in any of his public addresses and frequently made them the centerpiece of his sermons. In November 1961, for example, Sanders offered an invocation at the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone for the new federal building in downtown Little Rock. "As we meet to lay the cornerstone," he prayed it would be built upon the foundations of "justice and freedom under law. May we never forget that when our human statutes fail to implement Thy divine rule of liberty and equality for all, we cannot find favor in Thy sight."¹¹⁸

Ira Sanders retired on August 31, 1963, after forty years as a rabbi, thirty-seven of which were in Arkansas. His retirement was cause for reflection in Little Rock as the *Arkansas Gazette* pondered the retirement of this "moving force in community affairs." Although retired, the *Gazette* opined, "It is good to know that Little Rock is not going to lose the benefits of his keen and lively mind and his social vision."¹¹⁹ He remained an active advocate for social justice. He served on the boards of the Arkansas Association for Mental Health, the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind (Sanders was blind the last five years of his life), and a trustee for the Little Rock Public Library, the first local organization with which he became involved when he arrived in September 1926.¹²⁰

In February 1968 the Arkansas region of the National Conference of Christians and Jews announced the selection of the rabbi as the recipient of its Brotherhood and Humanitarian Award. The award was presented in Little Rock at a May 27 dinner attended by more than one thousand people of all religious and social backgrounds, in recognition of all Sanders had done in Arkansas for the cause of brotherhood.¹²¹ "I have great hope for the future of the world" even in the midst of the turmoil of 1968, he said. Social and racial justice remained the key. "The future of the nations rests not in black power or white power, but on cultural pluralism." Governor Winthrop Rockefeller added his congratulations for Sanders's "43 years of unremitting work for social reform in Little Rock."¹²²

Still the community activist at age seventy-three, Sanders was unhappy with the nation's priorities: "I want to see less money spent on going to the moon and on the senseless Vietnam War and more being spent for the eradication of poverty, crime, and other maladjustments of society which produce an Oswald who kills a president of the United States."¹²³ The Presbyterian minister who closed the gathering offered the simplest of benedictions, summing up the feelings of many as he "gave thanks to God for seeing to it that Dr. Sanders had come to Arkansas to live."¹²⁴

In 1963 Rabbi Sanders was succeeded in the Temple B'nai Israel pulpit by 28-year-old Rabbi Elijah E. "Zeke" Palnick. A civil rights activist in his own right, Palnick had played a role in the desegregation of the University of Alabama and continued, indeed, expanded on, Sanders's tradition of community activism, leading and participating in direct action campaigns and marches.¹²⁵ "Ira fought for the things he believed in," and Palnick built on that tradition, using the pulpit to persuade on the issue of civil rights, "probably too much," he later recalled. Palnick loved and admired Sanders, who remained in the Temple as rabbi emeritus. He saw himself very much in the Sanders mode, and although Zeke Palnick was forty years Sanders's junior, "I don't think," he said, "there was an iota of difference in the way we thought about the great social issues"¹²⁶ Palnick reflects a generational shift in southern Jewish civil rights leadership toward more direct action campaigns, a shift that mirrors the overall evolution of the civil rights movement in general.

Sanders died on April 8, 1985, at the age of ninety. As a testament to his remarkable life, in 1986 the *Arkansas Democrat* honored him as a part of the Arkansas sesquicentennial celebration known as Project Pride, which celebrated the accomplishments of Arkansans who had made significant community, state, or national contributions over the state's 150-year history. The article, indeed, his legacy, was simply headlined "Rabbi Sanders Sought Rights for Minorities."¹²⁷ It was a fitting tribute for a rabbi who in 1977 had summed up his career thusly: "The part of my ministry which has appealed to me the most, of course, has been my stand on integration."¹²⁸

There is no better summation of Rabbi Ira Sanders's philosophy than the following excerpt from one of his most eloquent sermons. It was delivered to his congregation in the immediate aftermath of the Central High affair.

In the Jewish tradition man is called the co-worker and partner of God in the creation of a better world. Judaism insists that we must apply constantly the sharp, ethical insights of the Prophets to the specific social problems of our generation. We do this through social action. We must battle against those conditions of inequality that deny any man his inalienable rights of free opportunity to education or economic security or civil liberties. We must fight those infringements of civil rights that deny *any* citizen of this land due regard for his civil liberties. We must carry on the battle for FEPC, for fair employment practices, for the opportunity of a man to get a job without preference or discrimination shown because of race or color or creed. We must carry on the torch that has been lighted by the United States Supreme Court for desegregation. We must stand firm for legal rights and see to it that there is no second-class citizenship in the United States.

Such a program translates our faith into concrete social action. . . . Such a program of social action works for the economic welfare of the entire country. Such a program seeks to avoid those tensions in areas of social distress that breed anti-Semitism. Such a program of social action upholds and defends and furthers democracy. Jewish religious bodies, and certainly members of Reform temples, have a deep responsibility to seek to strengthen democracy and the ideals of justice. . . . We must bridge the gap between concession and commitment, between word and deed, by working for the establishment of a greater share of social justice to all.¹²⁹

NOTES

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¹ "Rabbi Sanders' Service," [Little Rock] *Arkansas Gazette*, June 9, 1963.

² See for example Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001); Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, 1997); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006); Cheryl L. Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, 2006); V. P. Franklin, et al, eds., *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict* (Columbia, SC, 1998); Seth Forman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being Jewish: Desegregation in the South and the Crisis of Jewish Liberalism," *American Jewish History* 85 (1997): 121-142; Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1973); Dinnerstein, "Southern Jewry and the Desegregation Crisis, 1954-1970," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (March 1973): 231-241; P. Allen Krause, "Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South, 1954-1967," *American Jewish Archives* 21 (April 1969): 20-47; on Jews in Arkansas, see Carolyn LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s to 1990s* (Fayetteville, AR, 1994).

³ LeMaster, Webb, Bauman, and others do address Sanders's work, but only as a small part of larger studies.

⁴ Late in life, Sanders began, but never finished, a memoir, "The Journal of a Southern Rabbi," Temple B'nai Israel archives, box 1, Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter cited as Sanders Journal), quote on p. 12; see also Ira E. Sanders and Elijah E. Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years: Congregation B'nai Israel* (Little Rock, 1966), 67-68, for vital statistics regarding Sanders's early life and career.

⁵ Sanders Journal, 17. Sanders later said, "I especially became interested [as a child] in the promotion of good will between peoples and felt I could serve better in that capacity as a rabbi." Ira Sanders Oral History transcript, interview conducted January 18, 1978, University of Arkansas, Little Rock (UALR) archives, Oral History Collection, Little Rock, Arkansas [hereafter ISOH transcript (1978)], 15.

⁶ Sanders Journal, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁹ Rabbi Elijah E. "Zeke" Palnick, interview conducted by the author, November 16, 2004, Little Rock. Palnick, who died in 2005, succeeded Sanders at Temple B'nai Israel in Little Rock, serving from 1963 to 1986. During almost all that time, Sanders served as Rabbi

Emeritus and had an office alongside Palnick's. Palnick considered Sanders a mentor and dear friend.

¹⁰ Ira Sanders Oral History transcript, interview conducted December 5, 1977, UALR archives, Oral History Collection, Little Rock, Arkansas [hereafter ISOH transcript (1977)], 3.

¹¹ Sanders, "The Law of Life is the Law of Service," sermon, September 24, 1924, reprinted in Sanders Journal, 40-40A. (Sanders added his New York sermons to the journal as inserts, which he labeled alphabetically following page 40.)

¹² Sanders had begun his work at Columbia while still in Allentown, traveling to New York once a week for classes.

¹³ See "Women of Valor," Jewish Women's Archive, <http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/lwbio.html> (accessed: May 11, 2007).

¹⁴ Carroll McGaughey, "Rabbi Ira Sanders—Logic and Persuasion," *Arkansas Gazette*, February 21, 1954; Flora Sanders interview conducted by the author, May 22, 2007, Little Rock.

¹⁵ Sanders, "Haman Alive," sermon, April 2, 1925, reprinted in Sanders Journal, 40CC. The journal itself is an example of Rabbi Sanders's penchant for overly formal language, making it essentially unpublishable, sometimes ponderous, and often difficult to read.

¹⁶ Flora Sanders interview, May 22, 2007.

¹⁷ ISOH transcript (1977), 5-6.

¹⁸ Flora Sanders telephone interview conducted by the author, November 6, 2004; Flora Sanders interview, May 22, 2007.

¹⁹ Flora Sanders interview, May 22, 2007. Another big factor in Sanders's decision regarding Little Rock was the fact that Selma Sanders disliked living in New York, decrying its "lack of community warmth." See Erwin McDonald, "When the Rabbi Came, He Came to Stay," [Little Rock] *Arkansas Democrat*, May 11, 1974.

²⁰ See Carolyn LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*.

²¹ Temple B'nai Israel's history is outlined in Sanders and Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years*, 17-50.

²² McDonald, "He Came to Stay."

²³ ISOH transcript (1977), 6.

²⁴ Sanders Journal, 34.

²⁵ Preston Pfeifer telegram to Ira Sanders, June 12, 1926, Rabbi Ira E. Sanders Papers, Ottenheimer Library Archives and Special Collections, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, box 1, file 1—General Correspondence (hereafter cited as Sanders Papers, UALR).

²⁶ *Arkansas Gazette*, June 8, 1963.

²⁷ ISOH transcript (1977), 6.

²⁸ ISOH transcript (1978), 10; Sanders and Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years*, 67; *Arkansas Gazette*, June 21, 1951; McGaughey, "Rabbi Sanders—Logic and Persuasion." Flora Sanders also commented on her father's initial belief that coming to Little Rock "was a big mistake."

²⁹ McDonald, "He Came to Stay."

³⁰ Flora Sanders telephone interview conducted by the author, October 27, 2006.

³¹ ISOH transcript (1977), 12-13.

³² Ibid.; see also *Arkansas Gazette*, May 11, 1974.

³³ The author has not found any significant dissent from or controversy regarding the rabbi's progressivism on race from within the congregation—nothing brought up during board meetings, nor anything found in private correspondence. If such dissent was occurring, it seems to have been on the part of relatively few and kept private.

³⁴ LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 64.

³⁵ Palnick interview.

³⁶ Full text of the platform is in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Pittsburgh Platform," cited in Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York, 1987), 370.

³⁷ The Pittsburgh Platform called also for the rejection of Zionism, a tenet Sanders did not embrace. He remained a Zionist his entire life.

³⁸ ISOH transcript (1977), 17.

³⁹ ISOH transcript (1978), 15.

⁴⁰ Sanders's quote in *Arkansas Gazette*, June 8, 1963.

⁴¹ Rabbi David Marx of Atlanta is a good example and provides a nice comparison. See Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 2 (Spring 1983): 51–68; George R. Wilkes, "Rabbi Dr. David Marx and the Unity Club: Organized Jewish-Christian Dialogue, Liberalism, and Religious Diversity in Early Twentieth-Century Atlanta," *Southern Jewish History* 9 (2006): 35–68.

⁴² Sanders and Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years*, 67.

⁴³ ISOH transcript (1977), 7–8.

⁴⁴ Flyer announcing the opening of the Little Rock School of Social Work, Rabbi Ira Sanders Papers, box 1, Temple B'nai Israel Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter cited as Sanders Papers, Temple); Sanders Journal, 38.

⁴⁵ ISOH transcript (1977), 10; McGaughey, "Rabbi Ira Sanders—Logic and Persuasion;" LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 64.

⁴⁶ ISOH transcript (1977), 10; *Arkansas Democrat*, May 11, 1974.

⁴⁷ Sanders, speech before the annual meeting of the Arkansas chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, March 21, 1964, Little Rock, Arkansas, in Sanders Papers, Temple, box 2, "Sermons and Addresses"; McGaughey, "Rabbi Ira Sanders—Logic and Persuasion." In his unpublished memoir, written (and dictated once he lost his eyesight) at the end of his long life, Sanders relates a happier, if also fictional ending. His proud recollection in the journal is that the two African American women stayed, and that he therefore operated the first integrated school in Arkansas. He did, but only for one day.

⁴⁸ ISOH transcript (1978), 1–2.

⁴⁹ See Marianne Leung, *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, s.v. "Hilda Cornish," <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1625> (accessed: November 8, 2006.) Early twentieth century "eugenics" was also ominously involved in limiting the births of "undesirables" through forced sterilizations and surgical sterilizations performed on poor and black women without their knowledge or consent. The AEA was

not part of this, borrowing the name “eugenics” only to make their organization palatable to the community.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Unidentified newspaper clipping, “10-Cent Utility Bill Tax Voted for Relief,” reporting an Associated Press story, dateline May 1, 1932, Sanders Papers, Temple, box 1.

⁵² ISOH transcript (1977), 15–16; Sanders Journal, 40.

⁵³ For example, see *Arkansas Gazette*, December 14, 1934.

⁵⁴ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York, 1994), 187–188.

⁵⁵ Sanders Journal, 58–59.

⁵⁶ *Arkansas Democrat*, February 19, 1986; Sanders Journal, 58–59.

⁵⁷ Sanders Journal, 59 (emphasis added).

⁵⁸ Reprinted in Sanders and Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years*, 68.

⁵⁹ Nelson Glueck to Ira Sanders, February 22, 1954, Sanders Papers, Temple, box 1.

⁶⁰ “Brotherhood,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 28, 1950, in Sanders Papers, UALR, box 2.

⁶¹ “Live by Moral Principles for Brotherhood, Rabbi Advises,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 23, 1951.

⁶² ISOH transcript (1977), 13.

⁶³ Sanders Journal, 58.

⁶⁴ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry and the Desegregation Crisis, 233.

⁶⁵ The fact that “Jewish ‘otherness’ might easily become an issue” was a fear for many southern Jews. Mary Stanton, “At One with the Majority,” *Southern Jewish History* 9 (2006): 176. Stanton’s article discusses the Jews of Montgomery, Alabama, as an example.

⁶⁶ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry,” 234.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 235.

⁶⁸ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 153.

⁶⁹ The best analysis of this phenomenon is Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948–1968* (Baton Rouge, 2004), quote on p. 56; for more on Perez, see Glen Jeansonne, *Leander Perez: Boss of the Delta* (Lafayette, LA, 1995), esp. 226–228.

⁷⁰ ISOH transcript (1978), 13–14.

⁷¹ Louise McLean to Ira Sanders, November 19, 1954, in the private files of Carolyn LeMaster, “LR—Sanders,” Little Rock, Arkansas (hereafter LeMaster files). My sincere thanks to LeMaster for lending me her entire file collection of newspaper clippings, private correspondence, and other documents related to Sanders.

⁷² Albert Vorspan, “The Dilemma of the Southern Jew,” *The Reconstructionist* 24 (January 9, 1959): 6–9.

⁷³ Vorspan, “Dilemma,” 7–8. For the 1958 Atlanta Temple bombing see Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (Reading, MA, 1996).

⁷⁴ The essential work is Bauman and Kalin, eds., *Quiet Voices*, which contains studies of Sanders’s contemporaries, including rabbis Mantinband, Nussbaum, and Rothschild as

well as Morris Newfield and Milton Grafman of Birmingham, David Jacobson of San Antonio, Sidney Wolf of Corpus Christi, and James Wax of Memphis, among others.

⁷⁵ Perry E. Nussbaum, Charles Mantinband, and Jacob M. Rothschild, "The Southern Rabbi Faces the Problem of Desegregation," *CCAR Journal* 3 (June 1956): 1; Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 185–188. See also Gary Phillip Zola, "What Price, Amos? Perry Nussbaum's Career in Jackson, Mississippi," in *Quiet Voices*, ed. Bauman and Kalin, 230–257.

⁷⁶ Nussbaum, et al, "Southern Rabbi Faces Desegregation," 6.

⁷⁷ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 182.

⁷⁸ Krause, "Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South," 371–374; also see Greene, *The Temple Bombing*.

⁷⁹ Nussbaum, et al, "Southern Rabbi Faces Desegregation," 4; Clive Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town: Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg, Mississippi," in *Quiet Voices*, ed. Bauman and Kalin, 223–224.

⁸⁰ Rabbi Sanders quoted in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 198.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 182–183.

⁸² *Arkansas Gazette*, February 27, 1957; Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 174; Ben F. Johnson, *Arkansas in Modern America, 1930–1999* (Fayetteville, 2000), 136–137.

⁸³ LeMaster, "The Arkansas Story," in *Quiet Voices*, ed. Bauman and Kalin, 106.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ ISOH transcript (1977), 18.

⁸⁶ Sanders's speech before the Arkansas state legislature, February 18, 1957, Little Rock, Arkansas, in Sanders Papers, Temple, box 1; see also Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 175.

⁸⁷ ISOH transcript (1977), 18.

⁸⁸ *Arkansas Gazette*, February 27, 1957.

⁸⁹ Sidney S. McMath to Ira Sanders, February 19, 1957, LeMaster files, "LR—Rabbi Sanders, Integration Crisis."

⁹⁰ Sidney S. McMath, *Promises Kept* (Fayetteville, 2003); C. Fred Williams, *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, s.v. "Sidney S. McMath," http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entry_ID=51 (accessed: May 6, 2007). In 1954, Faubus was still considered a moderate. He adopted an obstructionist pose for the 1958 reelection campaign in order to tap into growing segregationist resistance.

⁹¹ Charles C. Walker to Ira Sanders, February 27, 1957, LeMaster files, "LR—Rabbi Sanders, Integration Crisis."

⁹² Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1992* (rev. ed., New York, 1993), 28–29.

⁹³ Little Rock Council on Education Report, 1952, in *A Documentary History of Arkansas*, ed. C. Fred Williams et al (Fayetteville, AR, 1984), 238–239.

⁹⁴ Shimon Weber, "How has the School Conflict Affected the Jews of Little Rock?" *Jewish Daily Forward*, October 19, 1957.

⁹⁵ LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 376–377. For the work of this group see Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock's Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our*

Schools, 1958–1963 (Fayetteville, AR, 1997); Lorraine Gates, "Power from the Pedestal: The Women's Emergency Committee and the Little Rock School Crisis," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996): 26–57.

⁹⁶ "Little Rock Asks Divine Aid on Bias," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 13, 1957; "5000 Pray Over Crisis," *Arkansas Democrat*, October 13, 1957.

⁹⁷ "Little Rock Asks Divine Aid," *New York Herald Tribune*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* In 1958, Little Rock had over two hundred houses of worship and a population of about 110,000, twenty-five percent of whom were African American. Sixty churches in the Little Rock area were all-black, twenty of which participated in the "ministry of reconciliation."

⁹⁹ Eugene Blachschleger to Sanders, October 2, 1957, LeMaster files, "LR—Rabbi Sanders."

¹⁰⁰ Weber, *Jewish Daily Forward*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry*, 379–380, 394.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹⁰⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 151–152, 155.

¹⁰⁵ Weber, *Jewish Daily Forward*.

¹⁰⁶ Little Rock is an excellent example of the point made by Dinnerstein ("Southern Jewry," 234) that actual Jewish involvement in civil rights activities did not necessarily correlate with synagogue bombings or bomb threats. Threatening synagogues was a way to send a general message to the Jewish community.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes, Temple B'nai Israel Board of Trustees, "Special Called Meeting," October 17, 1958, Board Meeting minutes 1958, Temple Archives.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Board meeting minutes, October 21, 1958, Temple Archives.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1958.

¹¹² Ira Sanders, "1959 Annual Report," January 25, 1960, Sanders Papers, Temple, box 2, "Services and Addresses."

¹¹³ Weber, *Jewish Daily Forward*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ I. Cyrus Gordon to Ira Sanders, October 27, 1957, LeMaster files, "LR—Rabbi Sanders, Integration Crisis."

¹¹⁶ Richard Cohen to Ira Sanders, September 25, 1957; Jacob K. Shankman, President, ARR-NY, to Sanders, October 11, 1957, both LeMaster files, "LR—Rabbi Sanders, Integration Crisis."

¹¹⁷ Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath telegram to Ira Sanders, October 4, 1957, Sanders Papers, Temple, box 2. The UAHC has since been renamed the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ).

¹¹⁸ Sanders Papers, UALR, box 1, file 3 "Sermons and Addresses."

¹¹⁹ "Rabbi Sanders' Service," *Arkansas Gazette*, June 9, 1963.

¹²⁰ Sanders and Palnick, eds., *One Hundred Years*, 67.

¹²¹ *Arkansas Gazette*, February 18, 1968; May 28, 1968.

¹²² Winthrop Rockefeller telegram to Ira Sanders, May 24, 1968, LeMaster files, "Correspondence."

¹²³ *Arkansas Gazette*, May 28, 1968.

¹²⁴ "The Influential Rabbi," *Arkansas Democrat*, May 29, 1968, Sanders Papers, Temple, box 1.

¹²⁵ LeMaster, "The Arkansas Story," in *Quiet Voices*, ed. Bauman and Kalin, 112-117 (although Palnick was not a "quiet voice"). Palnick's tenure, like this article, will be part of the larger study.

¹²⁶ Palnick interview.

¹²⁷ "Rabbi Sanders Sought Rights for Minorities," *Arkansas Democrat*, February 19, 1986.

¹²⁸ ISOH transcript (1977), 17.

¹²⁹ Sanders, sermon of January 10, 1959, Sanders Papers, UALR, box 1 file 3, "Sermons and Addresses."

THE UNUSUAL AND BIZARRE

Barney and Clyde:
A Tale of Murder and Madness

by

Jean Roseman

In 1884 a brutal murder occurred in Nashville. The story of the murder unfolds as a tangled web of murder-for-hire, brotherly betrayal, stepsibling adultery, blackmail, spousal abuse, bribery, vote fixing, and insanity. There are two versions of the story: one that is distilled from newspaper accounts and documents and another that is contained in a bizarre book, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles, and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers*.¹

The Document Account

On Saturday April 12, 1884, shortly after 9 PM, Meyer Friedman, a twenty-four-year-old notions and dry goods peddler, was assaulted with a hatchet and literally carved from head to foot. Home from the peddling circuit for his usual Saturday evening stay over with his wife and two small children, the peddler descended the dark stairs of his tenement home to fetch some lemons that his wife had requested, so she could make tea Russian style. The neighborhood store was open late that night as usual. Although contiguous to the notorious Black Bottom district, the area was reasonably safe. Meyer Friedman should have had nothing to fear. It was only a quick errand to fetch some lemons.

Suddenly Rosa Friedman heard a clamor and her husband shriek, "My God, I am done." She screamed, "Murder!" and "Merciful God!" in the Russian language. Neighbors and shopkeepers rushed to the scene, but the door to the hallway was blocked and could not be budged. When two policemen gained

*Cover page of the book Jean
Roseman came upon at the
Tennessee State Library and
Archives, Nashville.
All illustrations in this
article are from this book.
(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)*

entry through a back door, they found the unfortunate man weltering in his own blood, the victim of a savage hatchet attack. Barricading the front door were two enormous boulders that the first responders soon dislodged allowing the rapidly assembling crowd entry. On the wall was the imprint of a bloody left hand and on the floor a bloody footprint.²

Several in the crowd carried the unconscious man to his upstairs dwelling and set him in his bed. A doctor was summoned and assessed the wounds. Six in number, the first was a triangular ten-inch wound to the head; the second, a wound to the left side which cut one of the ribs in two and slashed the lung; the third, a three-inch shoulder gash which severed a main artery; the fourth wound to the left hand severed the artery to the thumb; the fifth wound to the right shoulder bared the bone; and the last wound, a gash over the left eye flanked by a contusion, was "as large as a hen's egg."³

It did not look good for the victim. Meyer Friedman had been in America for only two years, but in that time he had established a robust peddling route. He was said to not have an enemy in the world and was known not to carry more than five or ten dollars on his person, the result of his week's sales. At the time of the assault, he had sixty cents in his pocket. Friedman hung on but could give no clues as to his assassins.⁴

The next day, Sunday, April 13, in an outhouse nearby, a policeman discovered a hatchet encrusted with blood and hair with part of the blade broken. Speculation and rumor ran rife. Had Friedman been mistaken for the landlord who had been collecting rents in the neighborhood shortly before? Was he the victim of some nihilistic organization he had offended in his Russian Polish homeland?⁵ The attempted assassination of Meyer Friedman was the general topic of conversation in the city.⁶

Nine days after the assault, the peddler died. The clues began to mount:

- The hatchet belonged to one Meyer Moskowitz, Jr., who used it in his dry goods and secondhand clothing store.⁷
- Moskowitz had recently accompanied Friedman to the American Legion of Honor and encouraged him to buy a life insurance policy for five thousand dollars. Friedman argued with Moskowitz that he could not afford the payments but eventually bought a policy for two thousand dollars with his wife as beneficiary. Several days later Friedman went back and changed it to be divided equally between his wife and their two children.⁸
- A man identified by the press as black told police that Moskowitz had offered him fifteen dollars to do the deed. Moskowitz had given as his reasons, Friedman's abuse of his wife and Moskowitz's love for her. When the man refused to do the deed, Moskowitz upped the ante and assured the potential assailant that he would provide the man a safe haven.⁹
- Moskowitz, who was a stepbrother to Friedman's wife, had been involved in an adulterous relationship with her.

Moskovitz, however, had an alibi. At the time of the murder he was working in his store, five doors north of the murder scene. Witnesses corroborated his story.¹⁰

The police uncovered the complicity of two black men. One, Zeke White, a "roustabout on the Nashville steamboats," had remained in Nashville and was arrested with Moskovitz. The other, Tom Owens, had fled but was eventually caught in Louisiana and returned to Nashville for trial.¹¹

The story gets increasingly complicated with confounding names. Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., was the stepson of Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., and the son of Esther Morris Moskovitz. Her first husband, the father of Meyer, had the surname Morris. That husband had died of cholera in Russia while in the Russian Army. Mr. Moskovitz and Mrs. Morris had known each other in the Russian Polish village of Makowa. By the time they came to the United States, each had been widowed. They married in New York and then moved to Nashville. Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., had two daughters, Leah and Rosa. The younger daughter, Rosa, had stayed behind in Russia where she married Meyer Friedman. She eventually traveled to Nashville to be with her father. Her father later brought his son-in-law, Meyer Friedman, to Nashville. Mrs. Morris-Moskovitz had two sons, Meyer and Moses, thus making Rosa and Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., stepsiblings.¹²

Members of this blended family—Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., and Esther Morris Moskovitz, along with Leah, Meyer, and Moses—arrived in Nashville about 1875. A newspaper account notes Meyer Moskovitz, Sr., came to Nashville “a very poor man and by strict attention to business and hard work has accumulated a small fortune.”¹³ Well schooled in Hebrew and Judaic traditions, he soon became one of the leaders among the city’s Orthodox Jews. Leah married a Nashville merchant named Barney Lubin.

The funeral for peddler Meyer Friedman took place at the Jewish cemetery in North Nashville. Directly thereafter Rosa Friedman, his widow, was arrested, interrogated, and then released. Of interest is the prejudicial description of her in the newspaper: “The wife of the deceased man is about 22 years of age, of average good looks, and a face expressive of rather a negative character.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, other “negative” suspects and informants were being rounded up. A black wood-sawyer gave the following statement to the police:

It was on the Saturday before Thanksgiving that Meyer Moskovitz, Jr. came to me and said he had been intimate with Meyer Friedman’s wife and wanted to get him out of the way. He offered me \$15 and a pistol if I would kill Meyer Friedman for him. . . . I refused to do the job . . . then he came to see me again and offered me \$20 and a hatchet. . . . Meyer told me [he] wanted her husband killed because Friedman had treated her bad and she didn’t want to have anything to do with anybody but him.¹⁵

That informant mentioned the name of a black accomplice whom Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., had assured him he could rely on to help carry out the crime. The informant then confessed to blackmailing Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., to conceal the information.¹⁶

The informant’s clue led to the “notorious Black Bottom thug and law breaker Tom Owens.”¹⁷ But Tom Owens had absconded and was in Cairo, Illinois. His whereabouts were known because of a letter that was mistakenly delivered into the wrong hands. A Mrs. G. Moskovitz (ostensibly no relation to the Meyer Moskovitz family but indicative of the confusing name similarity that threads

through this story) received the letter. She could not read English so she went to the saloon next door and asked the saloonkeeper to read it:

Friend Meyer: How is our friend Meyer who was cut. Telegraph at once. T. O.¹⁸

The word was out. A further clue came when Charles Sulzbacher, a leader in the Jewish community, offered a reward for solving the crime. He received an anonymous letter threatening him that unless he rescinded the reward, he would be "killed like the other Jew." Police found the same writing paper and envelopes at the store of Meyer Moskovitz, Jr.¹⁹

Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., was arrested and incarcerated in the city jail. Some in the outraged community seeking their own brand of justice gathered around the jail wanting to lynch him, but police staved this off. Rosa was again arrested and separated from her lover. Zeke White, suspected of being Owens's accomplice, was also in jail. Almost a month later, they were in court "charging Meyer Moskovitz, alias Meyer Morris, Rosa Friedman and Zeke White, colored, with having on the 12th day of April, 1884, unlawfully, feloniously, willfully, deliberately, premeditatedly and maliciously murdered Meyer Friedman."²⁰

An order of indictment came down:

It is therefore ordered by the Court that the Atty Geil file an indictment officially, against the said Meyer Moskovitz alias Morris, Rosa Friedman, Zeke White and Thomas Owens charging them with the crime of murder in the first degree.²¹

About this time the press made several Jewish-specific references. First, Rosa was viewed as being very exotic and very Jewish:

She is a short, stout and good-looking woman. Her hair is of that dark nut-brown color for which Oriental woman are so famed. Her eyes are black and almond-shaped, so much so as to make them the remarkable feature of her face. Her features are prominent, but well formed, after the Jewish type, and her hands and feet small and shapely.²²

Rosa Friedman.

"The wife of Mayer Friedman, the murdered man." It is not known whether this is truly a picture of Rosa Friedman. Many pictures in the book were undoubtedly staged. (Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

Second, her father made a haunting reference to the land they had departed: "I am sorry she has to go to jail, but the law is supreme and she knows that. Russians know that the law must be obeyed."²³

The suspects, excluding Rosa, who posted bail of \$2,500 with the help of an unnamed Jewish sympathizer, remained in jail but not without generating more publicity, even far removed from Nashville. In distant Lima, Ohio, a newspaper ran an article that Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., had received a heavy, bulky package in the mail. The suspicious jailer opened the package and found a dynamite cartridge of a "Nihilistic" make.²⁴

The arraignment followed with several court appearances, all with continuances through most of July. A jury had been duly impaneled, and on July 20, 1884, it found defendant Zeke White not guilty, but the jury was unable to agree on the verdict for

defendant Meyer Moskovitz, Jr., thus resulting in a mistrial for him.²⁵

The new trial that began on September 1, 1884, ended with a verdict on September 16, 1884, that Moskovitz, Jr., was an accessory before the fact. His lawyer immediately challenged this verdict and requested an "arrest of judgment" and a new trial arguing that no perpetrator had been physically presented to the court, therefore Moskovitz could not be an accessory to an unknown and unestablished principal.²⁶

This motion was overruled the next day. The judge asked the defendant to stand and receive sentence: "You have been found guilty as accessory before the fact to Thomas Owens, colored, of murder in the first degree. The law fixes your punishment to confinement at hard labor in the State penitentiary during the period of your life."²⁷

Eighteen months after the murder, Tom Owens was captured and tried. Initially he was found guilty, but the case was appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court.²⁸ The Supreme Court reversed the decision of the local criminal court "on exceptions to some incompetent evidence."²⁹ The case was sent back to the local court for retrial. Tom Owens was acquitted by a jury of white men.

The dynamics of the entire murder case generated interesting observations far and wide but none as curious as the acquittal of Tom Owens, a black person, and the imprisonment for life of an accessory *before the fact* when the two perpetrators had been exonerated, thus effectively impugning the fact of murder itself.

Following the acquittal of Owens, sympathy for the imprisoned Moskovitz mounted. Over 120 highly regarded civic leaders in Nashville signed a petition for his release. Twenty-one of the most prominent and financially successful leaders in the Jewish community supported the petition. In short, their twelve-page petition supported by numerous examples of case law boiled down to the simple statement that the conviction of Moskovitz was "a logical monstrosity, to say that no man could help another do a thing, which the other did not do."³⁰

Indeed, Governor Robert Love Taylor agreed and in the waning minutes of his administration granted pardon. Meyer Moskowitz, Jr., alias Morris, was released on January 11, 1891. Noted on the release record were his marital status as single, his nativity as Poland, his occupation as merchant, his literate skills as fair, and his religion as Israelite.³¹

Meyer Moskowitz, Jr., reestablished himself in society and married two years later. On the marriage certificate the penned name of Moskowitz is crossed out. Penciled in is the name Morris.³² Federal Census returns for ensuing decades show Meyer married to Jennie (Schonberger) Morris who had emigrated from Austria-Hungary. The couple had two sons, Marvin and Aron.³³ Marvin does not seem to have ever married, but Aron has descendants who are prominent and honored in the Nashville community today.

During the span of the murder and the release of Moskowitz, two effects on others in the Jewish community are documented. The first involved a family with the same name. They filed a petition for a name change:

Petition—Rachel MOSKOVITZ & Daniel MOSKOVITZ

Rachel Moskowitz is a widow & besides Daniel, who is of full age, has four minor children: Laura MOSKOVITZ, Joseph MOSKOVITZ, Isadore MOSKOVITZ & Isaac MOSKOVITZ. - petition name change from MOSKOVITZ to MORSE - 19 Feb. 1889. Name 'Moskovitz' foreign and difficult for American people, with whom they associate, to write or pronounce . . . also Meyer MOSKOVITZ, no relation of theirs, has been sentenced to the penitentiary for murder.³⁴

Their petition for the name change to Morse was granted in February 1889.

The second matter may or may not be directly tied to the incarceration of Meyer Moskowitz, Jr. It involved a bill filed in Chancery Court by K. K. Adath Israel congregation against M. Moskowitz, presumably the stepfather, and H. Frank. Under the laws of the congregation, the defendant Frank had been elected official reader of the congregation for the holidays that

Robert Love Taylor.

*“Our Bob’ Governor of Tennessee, who
signed my brother’s pardon and set him free.”*

This is an actual photograph of the governor.

(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

were ongoing at the time of the filing. At the same time, two assistants were chosen. They then passed a resolution that no others except Frank and the two designated readers should perform the service. The complainants charged in their bill that Frank independently assigned Moskovitz to read. The bill alleged that many

of the congregants were opposed to having Moskowitz read "because they believe . . . that Moskowitz is not a member clean in life as a Hebrew."³⁵ A search of records reveals that Chancery Court was on a six-week break at the time, and there is no accessible resolution to the complaint. It is, however, interesting to speculate whether M. Moskowitz was unacceptable as a reader because of his stepson or for another reason.

The Setting

A short study of the dynamics of the Jewish community of Nashville and the relationship between blacks and Jews at that time offers background to better understand this tale. Jewish presence in Nashville was first noted in 1795 when a transient Jewish family recorded the birth of a daughter. Through the next half century, other Jews came, many also on their way to other destinations. A few, however, stayed and offered their services and goods to the transients. Some came from Cincinnati, known as the Queen City, to set up stores or to peddle in the region. Nashville's advantageous position on a river made it a natural starting point for the further dissemination of goods by foot or by wagon. Andrew Jackson's popularity also added an attractive element of romantic intrigue to the city.

By 1848 numbers were sufficient and the need manifest enough that the first minyan of resident Jews gathered. Shortly thereafter in 1851, a burial ground was secured marking the beginning of the organization that later became the Temple. During the remainder of the 1850s, a significant influx of Jews, mainly of German stock, established residence. As Jews of Polish, Russian, and Hungarian heritage thereafter made their way to Nashville, a clash ensued over which *minhag* should be used for worship. This quickly evolved into a number of different factions ultimately resulting in several variant, short-lived congregations. By the time this story unfolds in 1884, Nashville's quarrelsome Jews had divided themselves into three congregations: the Reform Vine Street Temple; the essentially Orthodox Aduath Israel, which eventually became the Conservative Gay Street Synagogue and ultimately the West End Synagogue; and the Hungarian Benevolent Society,

which would become the Orthodox Fifth Avenue Synagogue, later Sherith Israel. This trifurcation continued in Nashville for almost a century.

Because of fierce loyalties to the religious practices of their origins, early Nashville Jews obviously had problems relating to fellow Jews over religious matters. However when it came to civic matters, there seemed to be general agreement that they wanted to blend in and subscribe to the prevailing mores and public sentiment. This is particularly true during the period of the Civil War. Like their neighbors, the majority of Nashville Jews supported and even fought for the Confederacy. A number of them risked their lives and some suffered imprisonment as a result of smuggling supplies, especially quinine, to Confederate troops.

The Jewish relationship to blacks followed the white model, albeit with modification. While living compactly near blacks in downtown quarters and serving a black clientele in many of their businesses, the minority Jewish population did not mix beyond that with blacks. In reality, they did not mix beyond that with whites, either. They found their strength and support in their own ethnic enclave.

Jews were caught in an interesting position. They were literally "strangers in a strange land." Many lived in an area that was predominantly black. Fisk University historian Reavis Mitchel argues that the area of Black Bottom by the waterfront was essentially under black dominance and that "Blacks ran the area." If a crime occurred of black against black, then it was handled, or not handled, as the case might have been, within the black community. When a situation involved someone white, however, it became the province of the white policemen.³⁶ That is what transpired in the murder of Meyer Friedman.

An interesting aspect of post-Civil War Nashville history is that the city experienced a significant rise in the resident black population. In 1860 Nashville blacks numbered only 3,945. A decade later, their ranks swelled to 9,709.³⁷ Blacks tended to settle in the Fourth, Sixth, Eighth, and Tenth Wards in the core of the downtown area. These wards were also where Jewish shopkeepers lived with their families above or behind their businesses.

Streetcar transportation and the automobile had not yet made possible the westward movement which characterized Jewish residential patterns through the next century.

The Sixth Ward contained Black Bottom, the setting of this story. The name relates to the dark silt that covered the area resulting from the frequent flooding of the Cumberland River and not for the black population who settled there after the Civil War. These African Americans replaced the Irish immigrants who earlier provided the muscle to haul the goods brought into the riverside docks but then moved on into other neighborhoods. The newcomer influx created a demand for housing, much of which was substandard, consisting of lean-tos and shanties. Crime, prostitution, and drunkenness thrived. Probably no more scathing description of the area exists than this, which appeared about twenty years after the Friedman murder in the *Nashville American* showing that the area had not cleaned itself up in that time:³⁸

No city in America or Europe can present a more disgraceful or sickening aspect of modern civilization than that part of Fourth Avenue that runs through the hideous heart of Black Bottom. If a conglomeration of dives, brothels, pawnshops, second-hand clothing stores, filthy habitations and the like accompanied by the daily display of lewdness and drunkenness on the sidewalks and redolent with the stench of every vile odor-- can make a 'hell-hole' then Black Bottom is that place.

In the midst of this odiferous tumult lived many Jewish shopkeepers and their families. The blended Moskovitz family was one of these. They ran a secondhand clothing store at 117 South Cherry. (Cherry Street became Fourth Avenue in 1903 when the city legislated to do away with its homegrown street names and number them like many larger American cities.)

An obscure book that reposes long forgotten in psychiatric and legal libraries offers another perspective concerning the murder. This account was written by Moses David Morris, the brother three years younger than Meyer Moskovitz, Jr. In a tale that escalates to near Faulknerian heights, Moses recounts

his version of the murder in a book replete with startling and sometimes comic photographs, posed for a decade and a half after the crime.

The Book Account

The tale retold from Moses Morris's perspective begins like that of many other immigrants. In his book, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers*, Moses Morris recounts that he was born in "Russian Poland" where his father died of cholera while serving in the Russian Army. He tells that his widowed mother immigrated to New York, kept a stall selling trinkets and notions, and married a cap maker who had friends in Nashville. The family then moved to Nashville. They left Nashville for St. Louis, but returned after deciding Nashville was more to their liking. Moses's stepfather ran a secondhand clothing store and opened a Hebrew school that catered to prominent Jewish businessmen.

Having little formal education, Moses learned, as he says, in the "school of experience." He sold newspapers and worked in a dry goods store for a dollar a week while saving money until he had four hundred dollars and bought out a secondhand clothing store. During his first year in business, he earned over two thousand dollars and started investing in Nashville real estate. Profits accrued, and he ultimately established a drug business, purveying herbs and medicinal plants. From his account, Moses was on the ascent and might have risen to become one of Nashville's foremost Jewish figures had other matters not intervened.

Without citing legal formalities, Moses eventually anglicized his name to Clyde, and his brother Meyer anglicized his to Barney. They both used the surname Morris. Clyde's successful rise suffered a setback during a financial panic that he indicates occurred in 1879. Clyde tells of the "troublous" times and his loss of "about fifteen thousand dollars." According to his account, he successfully weathered the crisis and rebuilt his business.

A second misfortune tested him more sorely. The details are in keeping with the newspaper accounts. The embellishments are

not. On a hot, sultry night in April 1884, Clyde's stepbrother-in-law, Meyer Friedman, was murdered in his home. The peddler, who lived with his family over a fish market, was not a man of money. He had returned home, as was his custom, on a Saturday evening. His wife wanted some lemons. He was exiting the dwelling through a dark passageway that led to the street when he was attacked with a hatchet and bludgeoned to a slow death. His assailants fled but not before barricading the door so no one could come to the victim's aid. One must have slipped in the peddler's blood because a bloody handprint and footprint were the only clues. After lingering near death for nine days, the peddler died unable to identify his assailants.

The peddler's widow was the daughter of Barney and Clyde's stepfather. Clyde's brother and business partner, Barney, was arrested for the crime. A love triangle emerged: Barney was the peddler's wife's lover. It was discovered that Barney had hired two black men to do the deed. Barney was convicted of being an accessory before the fact and given a life sentence.

But the tale did not end there. According to Clyde's account, Barney actually prospered in prison. The warden allowed him to have a stand and sell small articles to the prisoners. Clyde, who presents himself as the long-suffering, ever-faithful brother, visited him regularly, presumably providing the inventory. Barney also was an astute gambler and won frequently from fellow inmates.

After six years a pardon was granted based on the argument that Barney was an accessory before the fact to a murder that had no proven perpetrator. In other words, he could not be an accessory to a murder that did not have a convicted murderer. The real murderer, Tom Owens, had been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged. In an irony of justice, he was granted a new trial and acquitted. Public sympathy was aroused when the presumed murderer was set free and the accessory was sentenced to life imprisonment. Clyde presents himself as his brother's most loyal advocate in seeking a pardon. In the last half hour before he left office, the governor reprieved Barney's sentence.

Ever the good brother, Clyde brought Barney back into his clothing business. The brothers continued to do well, so well that Clyde decided to invest in another business, a drug store, but this time without Barney as a partner. Clyde's pharmaceutical business quickly became very lucrative.

Successes continued to mount for Clyde, or so they did according to his rendition. Imagining himself an exemplary citizen, Clyde decided to run for the city council, representing his ward. He was met with opposition particularly from local politicians who had an "expert gambler" controlling the voting boxes. The election with three candidates—a Protestant, a Catholic, and a Jew—turned downright dirty with great enmity between the Protestant and the Catholic and their respective supporters. Both wanted Clyde to quit the election so the votes he would receive would go to them. Fearing mayhem, which he captures in a photo posed for many years later, Clyde did withdraw. Not surprisingly in Nashville the Protestant prevailed. Clyde was crushed by his forced ouster.

Barney, meanwhile, was increasingly jealous that he was not part of the profitable drug business. Based on the exertions and disappointment of the recently failed political campaign, Clyde admitted he had become "very nervous." Barney took it a step further. He managed to have Clyde arrested as a "dangerous lunatic." Clyde remained in jail pending a trial. When it looked like a doctor would declare Clyde sane, Barney withdrew his warrant and Clyde was released.

Fraternal bonds were more important to Clyde, and so he forgave Barney for his treachery. Rosa Friedman, the murdered peddler's widow, was no longer a player in this drama. She had been replaced by a very pretty immigrant girl from Austria-Hungary whom Barney married. The day after the wedding Barney made the following proposal to Clyde: since he himself was suffering from lead poisoning contracted while he had worked in the prison paint shop, and since Clyde was suffering from nervousness, would it not be advisable that they go together to a sanitarium for rest and treatment?

Barney prevailed and suggested they first enjoy a restful hunting expedition to Reelfoot Lake in West Tennessee and then relax in a sanitarium near there for the "nervous prostration" that Clyde was suffering. At the same time Barney should get treatment for his lung malady. The sanitarium, in reality the State Asylum for the Insane, was at Bolivar, Tennessee. There, to no surprise, Clyde was declared insane.

Of morbid interest are Clyde's obsessive descriptions of the lunatics in this facility. Fellow inmates included a former prominent lawyer who, having lost an important case, always kept his fingers in his mouth and muttered the same inexplicable syllables, "per die, per die, ti, ti;" a former Baptist preacher/lawyer who every fifteen minutes ordered someone to "Shoot him down, shoot him down;" a jolly Irishman who had been educated for the priesthood but could on a whim turn into a violent and raging lunatic; a lesbian murderess; a doctor considered insane because he was a drunkard; and a former Confederate general given to "spells" that required occasional restraint in a strait jacket. Such were the inmates incarcerated in what amounted to a self-sufficient miniature city. There was over a mile of tunnels under the buildings large enough for men to walk six abreast. The facility had its own reservoir, dairy house, provision storerooms, and steam laundry.

After a month's confinement, Clyde made a bold and calculated escape. On a cold and rainy December night, he sloshed for hours in stormy weather through mud and overflowing creeks until he found he had gone in a circle and was back at the front gate of the asylum. Fearing capture, Clyde pushed himself on until he found refuge in the woods with a kindhearted black man. When his host gave him hog's ribs, Clyde, although famished, remained true to his Jewish origins and would not partake of the meat. He gave it to the dogs. From this refuge in the woods, Clyde made his way to Kentucky and Ohio and on to adventures that grew even more bizarre, leaving the reader to wonder if indeed this is the diary of a madman.

Somehow the writer came back to Nashville where he challenged his entire family about his business assets, over which his

Moses Morris in the asylum.

“My second day . . . at Bolivar, with the insane, sweeping the ward.” One of many scenes in the book depicting the outrageous adventures of Moses Morris and his brother. Even though this picture appears staged, the man in the middle may have been Morris. He appears as Morris throughout the book.
(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

mother, presumably under the control of his stepfather and his brother Barney, had assumed legal control. Meanwhile, Clyde, more often “Moses” now, met a girl at Glendale Park, an amusement center just a trolley ride outside of downtown Nashville. After a short courtship, the young immigrant girl consented to marry him. Within a year, they had a daughter. Life seemed to be normalizing for Clyde if one can consider his postponed bridal trip normal. After two years of marriage Clyde took his wife on a honeymoon trip over the very escape route through the brush and

ditches he had taken from the Bolivar State Insane Asylum in West Tennessee!

From all appearances, Clyde did seem to be back on track. He had a small family. He was back in business in Nashville. He even had reconstituted his fraternal relationship with Barney. But there were those in the community who remembered. When the two brothers attempted to secure life insurance policies from a secret benevolent society for three thousand dollars each, they were at first accepted but later their insurance and membership were rejected because Barney had been incarcerated and because Clyde had been in a lunatic asylum.

Disappointed, distressed, and at a breaking point, the fragile Clyde moved to New York where his wife's brother lived. Thereafter he ceased to refer to his wife and daughter suggesting a marital estrangement, a matter he never acknowledged in his book. His circumstances declined and he soon found himself "penniless in Gotham." There he related adventures in pawnshops, experiences in exotic Chinatown, and encounters in the Bowery. He even took a brief stint as a conductor on the Broadway streetcar line. Clyde's interest veered, however, in the direction of "unfortunates." Fascinated by mental aberrations, he began a systematic study of the insane, particularly "feeble-minded youths" in institutions.³⁹

Censuses show that Clyde returned to Nashville as "Moses" and even lived with Barney's family. There is no record of what might have happened to his wife and daughter. Property records show that mother Esther Moskovitz transferred property on Cherry Street, (Fourth Avenue), to Meyer in 1913. Note that she did not transfer it to both sons equally.⁴⁰

Clyde had started his perplexing book immediately after being ousted from Nashville's council election in 1893. Six years later, in 1900, he published it with professional posed-for photographs. Long forgotten, the rare book is entombed in a few select libraries. It can, however, be accessed in online law libraries because of the classic outcome of the legal case.⁴¹ One of the most astounding features of the book is the endorsement in the preface given by venerable members of the Nashville community in 1900.

The last picture in the book.

“‘Barney’ and ‘Clyde,’ they shake hands in the last act.”

(Courtesy of Jean Roseman.)

Among those notables are nine successful Jewish merchants and nearly fifty gentile supporters including then-governor Benton McMillan of Tennessee, all of whom give credence to this curious tale with the statement: “This book illustrates the adage that ‘truth is stranger than fiction.’”

The endorsers gave unquestionable support to Clyde’s tale:

We, the undersigned citizens of Nashville, Tennessee, hereby certify that we have known Mr. Moses D. Morris, for a number of years, and that we know him to be honest, upright, truthful and trustworthy in all of his business dealings. We take pleasure in recommending him to the public.⁴²

Barney meanwhile seemed to have fallen back into being “Meyer” and attaining a measure of success in Nashville. He continued in the loan and secondhand clothing businesses.

With an undated photograph, Clyde suggested reconciliation occurred between the brothers when they posed in front of Barney's store.

Observations

Among the unusual aspects of the murder was that African Americans were involved but did not bear the brunt of blame. Blacks and Jews interacted within what might be considered almost a separate universe so long as the interaction did not directly or overtly impact on black/Christian relationships. In this and other ways Jews were an in-between group, considered and behaving neither totally white nor black but obtaining benefits as well as some limitations of each.

The brutal murder of Meyer Friedman must have caused great consternation in the local Jewish community. A murder of Jew against Jew, something that rarely happens, did indeed happen in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1884. The Jewish community dynamic is noteworthy. A number of distinguished Jewish citizens stepped forward and supported their own. There is no doubt the community knew that Moses, or Clyde, was of fragile mental health. When he escaped from the West Tennessee insane asylum, the *Nashville Banner* reported, "Moses D. Moskovitz, who escaped from the West Tennessee Hospital for the Insane last Friday has not been recaptured, and his relatives here are quite uneasy about him."⁴³

Between 1850 and 1900 Jews were on the ascent in Nashville. The first generation was getting established in the merchant trades, but their children were being educated in the local school system and some were graduating from Vanderbilt University as lawyers, doctors, and teachers. The grisly murder of Meyer Friedman did not seem to interrupt or hamper that rise. There is an old Jewish joke about what the difference is between a tailor and a doctor. The answer is "a generation." In this case, the murder and attendant publicity did not seem to hurt Jews in the Nashville community as they crossed that generation bridge, prospered, and put the memories of the incident behind them. Moreover these incidents did little to alter the successful rise of

Moskovitz family members within both Jewish and secular Nashville.

This bizarre tale has all the ingredients and potential of a compelling movie, which just might have been called *Barney and Clyde*. Yet now there is no mention in the collective memory of the Nashville Jewish community of these events, or of the family members involved. One centenarian and several near centenarian residents seem to know nothing. There is no information archived in the local Jewish Federation Archives. The story would not be known if it were not for the author's chance discovery of a small book sitting unobtrusively on a bottom shelf of the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

NOTES

¹ Moses David Morris, *Fighting Against Fate or The Trials, Struggles, and Remarkable Adventures of Two Brothers* (New York, 1900).

² *Nashville Daily American*, April 13, 1884.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Meyer Friedman was born in Makowa, Poland, which at the time of his birth was in the Russian Empire.

⁶ *Nashville Daily American*, April 14, 1884.

⁷ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1884.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, April 23, 1884.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1884.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1884.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1884.

²¹ Davidson County Criminal Court Minutes, May 14, 1884, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, a division of the Public Library of Nashville and Davidson County.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Lima* [OH] *Democratic Times*, May 31, 1884. An article about the case also appeared in 1884 in the far more distant Russian Hebrew periodical *Hameliz*. The translation of the *Hameliz* article presents an account that differs from the other sources in several significant details, including the day of the murder (Sunday, not Saturday) and the part that large stones may have played in the crime. These differences may be the fault of the translation. Jewish Federation Archives of Nashville, Gordon Jewish Community Center.

²⁵ Davidson County Criminal Court Minutes, July 20, 1884.

²⁶ *Nashville Daily American*, September 17, 1884.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1884.

²⁸ [Decatur, IL] *Daily Republican*, October 5, 1885.

²⁹ *Nashville Daily American*, February 26, 1887.

³⁰ Governor Robert Love Taylor Papers, 1887–1891, GP28, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³¹ Prison Records of the State of Tennessee, 1831–1992, RG 25, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³² Davidson County Marriage Records, October 14, 1893, Nashville Public Library.

³³ The 1920 census shows Jennie Morris as head of household with sons Marvin, 24, and Aron, 14, resident with her along with Ester Moskovitz, 75, her mother-in-law, and Moses D. Morris, 49, her brother-in-law. Meyer reappears in the 1930 census grouped with Jennie and son Marvin who is 37 at this time. Esther and Moses are no longer in the household. Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Davidson County, Tennessee; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Davidson County, Tennessee; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Davidson County, Tennessee.

³⁴ Mary Sue Smith, *Davidson County, Tennessee Naturalization Record, 1803–1906* (Nashville, 1997), 122–123.

³⁵ *Nashville Banner*, September 15, 1888.

³⁶ Reavis Mitchel, Fisk University, telephone interview conducted by author, May 25, 2007.

³⁷ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Ninth Census* (1870) (Washington, DC, 1870), 262.

³⁸ *Nashville American*, June 30, 1905

³⁹ Morris, *Fighting Against Fate*, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Davidson County Warranty Deed Reference Book 445, 570. Register of Deeds, Nashville, Tennessee

⁴¹ Only four print copies of Morris's *Fighting Against Fate* have been located through the World Catalogue: they are at the Tennessee State Library and Archives; Harvard University Law School Library; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and College of Physicians of Philadelphia According to Sara Byrd, Reference Librarian, Central Library,

Vanderbilt University, forty-three libraries have the book on microfilm and sixty-seven libraries have access to the online version through the Gale database; <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F105948892&srchtp=a&ste=14> (accessed 7-26-07) and <http://www.worldcat.org/> (accessed by Sara Byrd on July 30, 2007).

⁴² Morris, *Fighting Against Fate*, preface.

⁴³ *Nashville Banner*, December 20, 1893.

REVIEW ESSAY

More than Plantations and Pastrami:
Southern Jewish History Comes of Age

by

Kirsten Fermaglich

Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History. Edited by Mark K. Bauman. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006. 480 pages.

Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History. Edited by Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2006. 368 pages.

“**W**hen I told my father you were coming for dinner, I let him know you were Jewish. And he asked me ‘What’s a Jewish?’” My parents have never failed to delight in telling this story, recounted to them by a medical school classmate at the University of Kentucky in the 1960s. True or apocryphal, it symbolized for my parents, who grew up in the Bronx, both their distance from the southern culture in which they were living, as well as their acceptance by native Kentuckians, whose warm friendships and dry wit still nourish them today.

That tension between distance and acceptance has shaped much of the historical literature on southern Jewish life. At least since the publication of Eli Evans’s *The Provincials* in 1973, historians have been probing the myriad ways that Jews have integrated themselves into southern life, through politics, through commerce, through religion and through racial ideology, while at the same time navigating their distance from a culture that has

traditionally been religiously Christian and ethnically homogeneous (within the white population).

Despite the proliferation of recent historical works on southern Jewish life, however, Jewish men and women who have lived below the Mason-Dixon Line are still on the margins of American Jewish history and of the history of the South. The publication of two thought-provoking edited volumes on southern Jewish history in 2006 does indicate, though, that a cultural moment for the study of southern Jews may have arrived. Allowing southern Jews to take center stage, the essays in these volumes illuminate a significant historiographical debate over the nature of southern Jewish identity, while also painting a portrait of a southern Jewish community that is rapidly changing and filled with diverse experiences.

The essays in Mark K. Bauman's volume, *Dixie Diaspora*, reflect to some extent Bauman's argument in an earlier work, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style*, that there is not much that can be called a distinctive southern Jewish identity. Instead, he argues in *Dixie Diaspora*, northern and southern Jewish communities featured very similar adaptive strategies, and much that has been identified as southern Jewish identity can in fact be found among Jews throughout the United States. "Jews benefited from the South and responded to regional peculiarities, but adaptation reflected a broadly-defined Jewishkeit" (355). Bauman has marshaled a good number of essays in his volume—all of them previously published elsewhere—that reflect this position. Leonard Rogoff's essay on Jews and whiteness, for example, traces ties between southern racism and racism in the North and throughout the world at the turn of the twentieth century: "Jews were not exclusively regional in their racial thinking anymore than other Americans," he notes (412). Through a description of the rising fortunes of the families of financiers Joseph Seligman and Henry Lehman, Elliott Ashkenazi describes the interrelated economic lives of Jews in the South and North, even during the Civil War and Reconstruction era. And Lee Shai Weissbach's description of the immigration of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to southern small towns challenges the dominant image of

southern Jews as Reform, acculturated, German Jews, instead pointing out fundamental similarities between northern and southern Jewish communities.

In *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, on the other hand, editors Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg explicitly argue against Bauman's portrait of a southern Jewry fundamentally similar to that of the North: "To dismiss the impact of region on Jewish identity is to underestimate the power of place." (18). And as in the case of Bauman, the editors have compiled essays—a few published elsewhere, others written solely for this book—that attest to this perspective. Articles by Eric Goldstein and Clive Webb, for example, emphasize the ways that Jews imbibed the racial mores of southern culture and tried to distance themselves from northern Jewish organizations and civil rights activists in order to preserve their own communities and their self-definitions as "white." Although both Goldstein and Webb complicate this distinctive southern racism—noting the existence of racism among northern Jews, as well as the exceptional Jews in the South who fought segregation—ultimately both of these authors paint a portrait of Jews in the South "who conformed to prevailing racial mores much more diligently than in any other region of the country." (150) Authors in *Jewish Roots* also point to religion as a distinctive component of southern Jewish identity: Reform Judaism flourished in the states of the former Confederacy in a way that was unparalleled in the North, West, or Midwest. Gary Zola's essay, in particular, offers a useful comparison between the three northern and three southern synagogues in the original British colonies, noting that by the twentieth century, the three southern institutions had become Reform synagogues, while the three northern synagogues maintained their traditional Sephardic liturgies and styles of worship.

Despite this substantial argument over distinctiveness, it is important to note that these two edited volumes share many similarities, indeed perhaps more similarities than differences. The historiographical debate over distinctiveness is a significant factor that divides the texts, but it does not define these works, just as it does not define southern Jewish history. For one thing, both texts

feature essays that explicitly argue against their editors' positions in the debate. *Dixie Diaspora*, for example, features an essay by Steven Whitfield on the "braided identity of Southern Jewry" that argues that "the very distinctiveness of Dixie, its singularity in comparison to the rest of America, also meant the accentuation of certain differences with Yiddishkeit elsewhere" (428). At the same time, an essay on peddlers by Hasia Diner in *Jewish Roots* powerfully suggests that "by looking at immigrant Jewish peddlers, the American South, long conceptualized by its own residents and by outsiders as unique, becomes like other parts of the United States and the modern world" (87). Indeed, the two volumes share five contributors, with one essay (Mark Greenberg's) substantially reprinted in both, and the volumes also publish articles that explore other common themes in southern Jewish history, suggesting that the debate over distinctiveness does not—and should not—dominate the historical discussion of southern Jewry.

Authors represented in both books, for example, work to complicate the static labels "Jewish," and "southern," by introducing readers to the diversity of people who fit those categories, and to the changing meaning of those categories over time. Greenberg, for example, in both volumes, notes the ways that Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews in Savannah before the war clashed over issues of religious ritual, as well as divergent historical pasts. Both volumes also publish essays (by Ira Sheskin in *Dixie Diaspora* and by Stuart Rockoff in *Jewish Roots*) that attest to the changing nature of the southern Jewish population in the 21st century, as the shift to a post-industrial economy and suburbanization has pushed Jews out of southern small towns and drawn northern Jews to southern urban centers like Atlanta and Houston. Each volume features one article about Jewish women, suggesting the ways that gender complicates the static labels of "Jewish" and "southern." In *Jewish Roots*, Jennifer Stollman describes the ways that southern Jewish women in the antebellum era defended the Jewish community from antisemitism, while in *Dixie Diaspora*, Deborah Weiner portrays the Jewish women of Appalachian coal towns as the sustaining core of their Jewish communities. And both books also offer fascinating portraits of

southern Jews who skirted or crossed the boundaries of the traditional Jewish community. *Dixie Diaspora* features an essay by Joshua Rothman about a Jewish merchant who established an interracial family with a free woman of color in antebellum Virginia, and in *Jewish Roots*, Emily Bingham describes the members of the Mordecai family who traveled in and out of affiliation with Judaism, as some married Christians and converted, while others redoubled their passion for the Jewish religion. The authors of all these essays share in a consensus, then, that southern Jewishness is rapidly changing and that there is no one archetypal “southern Jew.”

Then, too, the volumes also share similar lacunae. Each book features only one article specifically about Jewish women, and few other articles that employ gendered analysis, a shame when discussing a region where gender forms such an important part of identity. Moreover, other than one essay on the modern civil rights movement in each volume, the twentieth century is relatively absent from both books, at least as a specific subject of study (thematic articles in both books do address the twentieth century as part of a broader scope of change that they describe). Again, when discussing a region that encountered such profound change throughout the twentieth century, its absence rings loudly. Conversely, neither volume addresses very much the subject of race before the Civil War—Rothman’s article in *Dixie Diaspora* is a notable and intriguing exception, although one that does not probe Jewishness as much as it could. Recent work on Jews and race in the early modern world, particularly in port cities like Charleston, could have deepened and enriched both of these volumes.*

The publication of both of these admirable works, *Dixie Diaspora* and *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, in one year does indeed suggest, as Ferris and Greenberg write, that “[t]he study of Southern Jewish history has now come of age” (20). Certainly the demographic changes that these volumes describe—the growth of Jewish studies programs in southern universities, the migration of Jewish academics to the South, and the growth of museums dedicated to preserving the history of the Jewish experience in the South—help us to understand why the study of southern Jewish

history has proliferated and grown more sophisticated in recent years. The “coming of age” of southern Jewish history seems also to reflect a broader trend in Jewish history in general: that the study of marginal Jews, of people who seem to lurk on the edges of established, traditional, “normal” Jewish life, are coming to the center of academic study and helping us to rewrite the history of American Jews in general.

The publication of two such valuable works in the same year also suggests that the study of southern Jewish history will continue to grow. The argument over distinctiveness may not be as central as a comparison between these two works might suggest, although it is a productive and provocative debate, and one well worth introducing to both graduate and undergraduate students. Instead, it is these works’ attention to the fluid and rapidly changing nature of southern Jewish identity, as well as to the diversity of southern Jewish experiences, that makes both these books well worth reading, and that suggests the direction that the field will take in the future.

NOTE

* See, for example, Jonathan Schorsch, “Portmanteau Jews: Sephardim and Race in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” *Jewish Culture and History* 4 (Winter 2001): 59-74; Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2004); Gemma Romain, “Ethnicity, Identity and ‘Race’: The Port Jews of Nineteenth Century Charleston,” *Jewish Culture and History* 7 (2004): 123-140.

REVIEW ESSAY

Measuring Julius Rosenwald's Legacy

by

Stuart Rockoff

Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South. By Peter Ascoli. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. 453 pages.

The Rosenwald Schools of the American South. By Mary S. Hoffschwelle. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. 401 pages.

As two new books reveal, the Jew who had the greatest impact on life in the South never lived in the region. Julius Rosenwald is a name familiar to many students of southern and American Jewish history. The longtime president of Sears, Roebuck, Rosenwald became the great benefactor of black education in the South. From his home in Chicago, Illinois, Rosenwald helped transform the physical and educational landscape of the South through his financial support of the construction of black schools.

In the biography *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*, the subject's grandson, historian Peter Ascoli, presents an engaging account of Rosenwald's business career and wide-ranging philanthropy. The school building project was just a relatively small part of Rosenwald's giving, which also focused on the University of Chicago and several Jewish causes. Rosenwald was one of the country's most prominent funders of Jewish charities, donating \$1 million to an American Jewish Committee campaign to help European Jews during World War I. An anti-Zionist, Rosenwald pledged \$5 million to an ill-conceived plan to create Jewish agricultural colonies in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

Since his death in 1932, Rosenwald has been remembered mainly for his support of black school construction in the South. In *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, historian Mary S. Hoffschwelle gives a nuts and bolts description of how the school program worked and offers a compelling argument of how it transformed black communities in the region. Hoffschwelle divides her book into three sections, each focusing on a key component of the project. The first looks at Rosenwald and his foundation; the second examines the work of state and county officials, usually white, who worked with the Rosenwald Fund to build schools for blacks; the final section looks at local black communities who organized and raised money to win matching funds from the Rosenwald project. This multi-tiered approach offers a more comprehensive, if less readable, description of the project than Ascoli's focus on Rosenwald and the fund's administrators.

Rosenwald was drawn into the area of black education by Booker T. Washington, who convinced the successful businessman to join the board of his Tuskegee Institute. Rosenwald had been profoundly affected by reading Washington's memoir, *Up From Slavery*, and followed Washington's suggestion that he support a school building program in the rural counties around Tuskegee. From this small pilot project grew the major initiative of the Rosenwald Fund, which helped build over five thousand schools for African Americans in the South. At the time of the program's end in 1932, about one-third of the South's black schoolchildren attended a Rosenwald School. Washington and Rosenwald were committed to the idea that local communities and governments be invested partners in this project, requiring each to raise matching funds to pay for the schools. No Rosenwald funds were released until the match had been raised.

During his lifetime, Rosenwald largely avoided significant criticism of his work, which, after all, consisted of building segregated schools. While W. E. B. DuBois frequently criticized Booker T. Washington for accommodating segregation, the editor of the *Crisis* praised Rosenwald after his death as a "subtle stinging critic of our racial democracy." Rosenwald was also a modest financial

supporter of the NAACP. Later, after the civil rights movement ended de jure school segregation, scholars suggested that Rosenwald's school project only supported the status quo and allowed white officials to further short-change black education. Black communities had to pay twice, in a sense, for their schools: their taxes were used to build white schools, and they had to raise additional money themselves to get a Rosenwald school.

Ascoli defends his grandfather from these charges, though sometimes he overlooks important issues. A major turning point occurred when Rosenwald pulled the project from Tuskegee's administration and created the Rosenwald Fund to run it. Ascoli defends this decision as a reasonable response to poor management by Tuskegee officials, which it likely was. Yet, Hoffschwelle digs deeper to explore the implications of removing black management and replacing it with an exclusively white staff. She stresses the essential paternalism of the project, from its white leadership to its insistence on manual, "industrial education."

By focusing exclusively on Rosenwald and the managers of his charities, Ascoli also misses the most crucial ways in which the Rosenwald schools undermined white supremacy. Hoffschwelle extensively examines the architecture of the schools, which were seen as models of modern Progressive ideas about education and environment. In many cases, their designs were more advanced than local white schools. According to Hoffschwelle, Rosenwald schools were an "implicit visual challenge to white supremacy" (246). More importantly, the local matching funds required by the Rosenwald Fund served to empower local black communities and give them a strong sense of ownership in these schools, which gained far greater significance than just a place of instruction. She writes that local people were the essential component in the success of the project and that "a Rosenwald school was a recognizable African American space of pride and achievement" (4).

In many ways, this sense of pride and ownership was the most important legacy of the Rosenwald Fund. Although most of the schools were abandoned after integration and left as a faded remnant of Jim Crow, in recent years, African American groups

have sought to reclaim their Rosenwald schools, hoping that restoring these buildings will help bring their communities together. As Ascoli notes, Rosenwald was a strong believer that foundations should not be permanent, and that future philanthropists should be the ones to deal with the problems of the future. Because of this, Rosenwald's impact has been largely confined to history. Yet as these restoration efforts reveal, the meaning and symbolism of these structures continue to resonate in the twenty-first century.

Book Reviews

Jews of South Florida. Edited by Andrea Greenbaum. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2005. 236 pages.

If every Jewish community deserves its history, the third largest group of Jews outside of Israel certainly deserves theirs. In this anthology, Andrea Greenbaum brings together authors with a wide divergence of interests, backgrounds, and historical approaches to fashion an eclectic book on the Jews of South Florida.

Justification for the study comes in Greenbaum's introduction. "Several features distinguish South Florida Jews from other Jewish communities in the United States," she writes (xiii), including high numbers of northeastern and midwestern migrants, retirees, Holocaust survivors, and Hispanic and Middle Eastern Jews. In all, according to Ira Sheskin, about 10 percent of American Jews lived in South Florida c. 2000, defined as Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. Sheskin's demographic history (1940–2000) reveals a dramatic Jewish migration northward from Miami-Dade and southward from the Northeast and Midwest to Broward and Palm Beach Counties. His analysis of "spatial variations in key indicators of demography, geography, and 'Jewishness'" (3) include common census categories plus intermarriage rates, JCC membership, even whether a person participates in a Passover seder, lights Sabbath candles, has a mezuzah on the front door, or has donated to a Jewish charity. In the end, Sheskin finds a Jewish community unlike any other in history.

South Florida Jewry's cultural heritage receives treatment from one of America's most astute cultural historians. In a splendid piece of prose and analysis that explores the "enfeeblement" of Jewish legal codes and ethical ideals under the influence of

unbridled individualism, Stephen Whitfield cites the Talmud, Book of Genesis, Sigmund Freud, Tacitus, and professional football player Jim Brown. He weaves marvelously crafted phrases with biting sarcasm: “Before the city [Miami] could cater to the nation’s dope fiends, it would attract hope fiends, optimists, and high rollers yearning for a big score” (41). South Florida’s ability to “help another generation to discover for itself the buried treasure of its heritage” may require the rejection of “a lavish commitment to the pursuit of happiness” and a return to Judaic tradition (48-49).

The high quality of Whitfield’s study is evident again in “*Yiddishkeit* on South Beach.” A skilled ethnographer, Joel Saxe documents how South Beach’s Jewish widows and widowers collectively used speech and song to craft their own version of a short-lived Yiddish “utopia” in the 1960s and 1970s. Gary Monroe’s evocative photographs, relegated to a separate chapter, ably echo Saxe’s themes.

Several other essays deserve attention for their scholarship and contributions to American Jewish and Florida history—least of all because they include citations and/or a bibliography. Henry Abramson addresses antisemitism in South Florida and finds a powerful strain most commonly seen in the urban Northeast. He argues for the significant role that the tourism industry initially played to produce a silent marginalization of Jews from resorts and hotels, and he notes the region’s dubious distinction as home to the first (but by no means only) Internet hate site.

Jack Moore presents an excellent biographical sketch of Meyer Lansky, “the Jewish criminal most associated with Miami and South Florida history and myth” (148). Fully versed in his subject, Moore ably places Lansky within South Florida’s criminal underworld and separates fact from fiction in the many oft-told Lansky tales. “Meyer Lansky was a real person and criminal, but also a creature fabulated in the public imagination through insistent presentation in the media. . . . Fac-toids—nonfacts generally accepted and parading as facts—reinforced one another and became accepted gospel” (156). From Moore’s nuanced interpretation, readers might even lament

Israel's refusal to grant the elderly "wise-guy" the Right of Return in the early 1970s.

Henry Green's piece on Miami Beach rabbi Leon Kronish rounds out the anthology's significant chapters. As spiritual leader of the Conservative Beth Sholom Center and then the Reform Temple Beth Sholom from 1944 until 1984, Kronish played an important role in supporting racial integration, nuclear disarmament, the separation of church and state, the centrality of Israel in American Jewish life, and religious pluralism in Israel.

With its iconic cover photograph of a tallit-draped Torah perched on a seaside beach chair, *Jews of South Florida* will surely capture attention on bookstore shelves. The image speaks to South Florida Jewry's uniqueness and to the importance of place in Jewish history, themes explored in this anthology.

Mark I. Greenberg

University of South Florida, Tampa

Two Covenants: Representations of Southern Jewishness. By Eliza R. L. McGraw. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005. 194 pages.

"Everyone's memory is tricky," the playwright Lillian Hellman confessed, "and mine's a little trickier than most." Indeed, Hellman was criticized for the inaccuracy of her memoirs, but as Eliza McGraw reminds us, factuality is not the most important element of personal narrative. The "trickiness" of Hellman's memory "also indicates a complicated version of self-representation" as she imaginatively reshapes the contours of her own southern Jewish experience (38). As a compendium of historical facts about her life Hellman's memoirs may be unreliable, but as narratives they open a window onto a creative mind at work in the field of identity construction. Similarly, McGraw notes the frequent appearance in southern narratives of an iconic story: Jewish shopkeepers assert power over bigotry by

identifying hooded Klansmen, often by the shoes or sheets they sold them. This story, which recurs in fictional and nonfictional works by Jewish and non-Jewish writers, resonates far beyond the simple historical explanation that it probably happened a lot. "The reformulation and recouching of this image," McGraw writes, "demonstrates a central narrative at work. There is a southern Jewish story" (36-37). This is an important insight that straight historical analysis could not attain, and it justifies McGraw's "studies" method, her interdisciplinary analysis of "cultural moments" created through a variety of texts (9).

McGraw outlines this central narrative in an insightful and inventive collection of essays about how southern Jewishness has appeared in fiction, memoir, journalism, film, and other genres. In her best and most original chapters, she examines how Jewishness and antisemitism played a role in determining the ownership of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello; how Southern Baptists shaped a self-serving understanding of Jews in their effort to proselytize them; and how reviewers have misinterpreted *Driving Miss Daisy* by viewing it as a facile story about race without adequately considering its Jewish complexity. McGraw wants to show that Jewishness is not a footnote to southern life, nor simply "an opposition (i.e., not northern and not non-Jewish)," but an integral part of identity in the South. She seeks to reveal southern Jewishness as a "hybridized identity in which the existence of more than one culture within one individual . . . becomes productive of identity" and which "contend[s] with the problems and inconsistencies of the identities that it attempts to enumerate" (2).

McGraw's close textual analysis can be numbing, as can her reliance on postmodern jargon, and her conclusions are often lost in the welter of examples. In her survey of what must be *every* representation of southern Jews in *every* literary work, she seems more anxious to be exhaustive than penetrating. Still, she has done valuable research in locating a southern Jewish presence both in familiar works (*Gone with the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and unfamiliar ones (the journalism of David Cohn and the fiction of Louis Rubin), and in giving classic writers in the field like Eli Evans and Alfred Uhry the close critical attention they deserve.

She also has uncovered Jewish themes in works by African-American writers including W. E. B. DuBois, Charles Chesnutt, and Alice Walker. McGraw's perceptive analysis reveals deep and provocative links between southern black and southern Jewish experience, including a sense of social alienation, the complicated self-awareness DuBois called "double-consciousness," and the temptation to "pass" out of one's own culture into the mainstream. McGraw sometimes squeezes too much meaning out of minor references, but her chapter on black writers presents many compelling ideas.

Two Covenants fails, however, to achieve its most ambitious goal for southern Jewishness, to prove that "this so-called footnote is in fact integral to an understanding of difference within the twentieth-century South" and to show "how present and ingrained Jewishness has been in the South" (4, 9). McGraw's title, after all, advances a distinction rather than a totality, as does a chapter arrangement that segregates works by Jews from those by non-Jews. And there are telling absences in the essays. McGraw's review of southern novelists who have written about Jews, for example, includes some prominent names (Walker Percy, William Styron, Harper Lee) but neglects others (William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty) who seem not to have noticed the "present and ingrained" Jews among them. Representations of southern Jews, furthermore, seem to occur either in minor works by major writers (Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*) or in major works by minor writers (Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*), but never in major works by major writers. Southern Jews make notable appearances, to be sure, but only at the peripheries. For all her comprehensiveness, then, McGraw still plays around the margins of something important without quite striking it. Her interdisciplinary method points toward a potential new area of inquiry "putatively called Southern Jewish Studies" (9), but more work like this is needed—if in fact there are any more texts to discover—before we can announce its arrival.

Bryan Edward Stone

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The Hand of Esau: Montgomery's Jewish Community and the Bus Boycott. By Mary Stanton. Montgomery: River City Publishing, 2006. 194 pages.

Mary Stanton's study of Montgomery's Jewish community continues her fine work chronicling the relatively unexamined figures of the civil rights movement in Alabama. As her previous books on Viola Liuzzo, Bill Moore, and Juliette Hampton Morgan have demonstrated, Stanton tells a wonderful story. So it is with *The Hand of Esau*. Her interest in Montgomery's Jewish community originated from her research on Morgan, a white gentile librarian who had dated a member of Temple Beth-Or, the city's Reform congregation. The product of this interest is a study that illustrates not only the rich and diverse heritage of Montgomery's Jews, but also the integral role that they played in Montgomery's history and how they responded to the acute social upheaval produced by the bus boycott.

Readers of *Southern Jewish History* will find the story familiar. Much of *The Hand of Esau* appeared in her article, "At One with the Majority," in 2006. With the exception of the depth to which Stanton explores early Montgomery, vividly illustrated with anecdotes and photographs, there is little that *The Hand of Esau* adds to her argument that Montgomery's Jewish minority differed little from the white gentile majority in response to black civil rights. For those who have not read "At One with the Majority," the book offers a fascinating look into a thriving and vibrant Jewish community in the Deep South, and how that community navigated the strictures of Jim Crow society.

Although Stanton's focus is on the Bus Boycott of 1955-1956, much of *The Hand of Esau* details the history of the diverse Jewish community in Montgomery. Her story begins with the small German Jewish settlement in the mid-nineteenth century, marked by the arrival of two families, the Weils and the Lehman, who thrived in the antebellum cotton economy. The growing German Jewish community also thrived, dominating retail sales on Dexter

Avenue, the main boulevard downtown. In 1849, they established Kahl Montgomery, renamed Beth-Or in 1874 when the congregation adopted the Reform ritual. By the 1880s, Eastern European Jews began to arrive in the Capital City, setting up shop as grocers or dry goods vendors, largely catering to African Americans on Monroe Avenue, the black retail district of old Montgomery. In 1906, they established an Orthodox synagogue, Agudath Israel. That same year, Ralph Cohen arrived, leading a Sephardic influx into the city. They established a third synagogue, Etz Ahayem, in 1912. This diverse Jewish community coexisted and cooperated peacefully with one another, and they played an important role in the growth and prosperity of Montgomery. Despite the close cooperation between the congregations, class distinctions were apparent as the German Jewish families remained the most successful and the most prominent. As one wry wit observed, "one was either a Weil, a Greil, or a Schlemiel" (91).

Turning to civil rights, Stanton uses the career of Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein of Temple Beth-Or to illustrate the danger Montgomery's Jews, or any white liberal, faced in speaking out against Jim Crow. In the 1930s, Goldstein supported the Scottsboro Boys' defense and was the only white clergy to visit them at Kilby Prison. His position on the Scottsboro case and his zealous advocacy on issues of racial justice resulted in his removal from Beth-Or's pulpit in 1933. Stanton, who briefly touches on the participation of attorney Samuel Liebowitz and the communist International Labor Defense (ILD), does not address the intense antisemitism that "outsiders," northern Jews such as Liebowitz, produced in Alabama at the time (although she does address northern Jewish agitation during the Bus Boycott). Moreover, Stanton's assertion that "progressives were considered radical by this time" is just not so (70). Grover Hall, Sr., the editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser* who urged the swift conviction of the Scottsboro defendants, was considered Alabama's leading liberal by none other than the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Nevertheless, Goldstein's radical actions threatened the racial status quo and impinged upon the time-worn custom of segregation. It was a lesson that many would not forget.

Stanton moves quickly from the 1930s to the civil rights struggle in the 1950s, and in the process she ignores the impact World War II and the Holocaust had on the Jewish community and on civil rights. With the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the Bus Boycott in 1955, Montgomery became a hotbed of racial intolerance. The White Citizens' Council led the charge against integration and civil rights, and "dissension became dangerous" (99). The city's Jewish community responded with silence, with only a few exceptions. At Agudath Israel, Rabbi Seymour Atlas, a native southerner, had befriended Martin Luther King, Jr., and urged support of the boycott. His outspoken position incurred the wrath of the trustees who voted Atlas out of the pulpit. His friend and colleague, Beth-Or's Rabbi Eugene Blachsclager, who had replaced Goldstein in 1933 and subsequently embraced a gradualist position on race and integration, thought Atlas to be hurting the Jewish community and refused to publically support him. Such silence by Montgomery's Jews surprised King. Shortly before his death, King stated 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 their way to consort with the perpetrators of the status quo," and specifically cited Montgomery as an example (166).

In the aftermath of the boycott, anti-black and antisemitic rhetoric spewed from the likes of Admiral John Crommelin, causing anxiety and fear amongst many in the Jewish community. Interestingly, Crommelin explained to one of Etz Ahayem's members that his rhetoric about "Jews conspiring with communists and blacks" was directed at northern Jews, not southern Jews. Nevertheless, such social discomfort caused a few, including Etz Ahayem's Rabbi Solomon Acrish, to leave Montgomery. In *The Hand of Esau*, there is little to define Montgomery Jews as profoundly different from the white gentile majority. With the exception of a few, Montgomery's Jews either openly supported Jim Crow segregation, tacitly agreed with it, or refused to raise a voice against injustice. In this sense, they were indeed "at one with the majority viewpoint" (108).

The Hand of Esau is popular history; it is a narrative rather than an analytical study. The lack of sources will undoubtedly irritate academics, although probably not the general reader. It is a captivating read, but at roughly 150 pages, it is only a brief examination of Montgomery's Jewish history, and Stanton acknowledges this limitation. There are, however, questions that are left unanswered.

In summarizing the plight of Montgomery's Jewish community in the aftermath of the Bus Boycott, Stanton argues that "In the end, how Jews reacted or failed to react to preserving segregation made little difference in how they were treated. Apoplectic segregationists who'd been unable to break the Boycott demanded scapegoats. Jews suffered, even in Montgomery, where they had worked productively with gentiles for over 150 years" (158-159). Yet, Stanton does not address how they suffered. Apart from Rabbi Atlas, Victor and Ann Kerns, or Rabbi Acrish, who faced expulsion or ostracism, Stanton uses the examples of Olive Andrews, a gentile, and Majorie Levi Smith, originally of Beth-Or but a converted Episcopalian, to illustrate the repercussions from white supremacists. What of the larger Jewish community? What of the Weils or Greils? Was the exclusion of Jews from the Montgomery Country Club one of the only concrete examples of antisemitism in the city, or was this more of a perception than a real threat? In the end, did not Atlas, the Kerns, or Acrish face the same pressure or discrimination that liberal white gentiles faced? The answers, unfortunately, are not clear.

Stanton also missed the opportunity to explain the critical role that World War II and the Holocaust played in regard to both the Jewish community and civil rights. In her Introduction, Stanton recounts how southern Jewish attitudes toward white supremacy frustrated northern Jews, "who warned that such accommodation had encouraged the Nazis" (21). Nazi persecution and the mass killings of Jews in Europe affected southern Jews just as it did northern Jews. Why did Montgomery's Jews not make the same connection?

Despite the shortcomings, Stanton has written an enjoyable and informative history of the Montgomery Jewish community.

The Hand of Esau is a valuable contribution to local and state history, as well as to an important chapter in the civil rights movement. Stanton's book is highly recommended.

Dan J. Puckett

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Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History. By Deborah R. Weiner. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. 234 pages.

In her meticulously researched and well-written book, *Coalfield Jews: an Appalachian History*, research historian and scholar Deborah R. Weiner addresses the question of regionalism among those Jews who settled in Appalachia between the 1880s and the 1930s. Beginning first with the age-old question, "there are Jews in Appalachia?" and ending with the conclusion that the Jews who resided in the Appalachian coal mining towns derived from their experiences uniquely defined identities that made them *both* Appalachian (a distinct mountain identity) and Jewish, Weiner's remarkable text is accented by vignettes that shed light on the qualitative and personal experiences of Jews living in these environs.

The story is the classic tale of upward Jewish mobility couched in socio-historical terminology that enables the reader to trace clearly shifts in socio-economic status, questions of assimilation and acculturation, relationships with white Christians, adaptation to a southern mentality, and, most of all, issues of adaptability and flexibility as many of the experiences that Weiner deftly notes mirror those of shtetl life in eastern Europe. Thus, Weiner's volume is a true complement to Lee Shai Weissbach's, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: a History*, an impressive study that draws together the fragmented histories of triple-digit Jewish communities in the United States. Whereas Weissbach depicted national trends, Weiner offers an original case study that provides direct insight into a group of southern Jews who are not thought

about often: those in the Appalachian coalfields. How did Jews happen upon the Appalachian coalfields? Could Jewish life flourish in the region? Could Jewish culture and identity persist in such a different and challenging environment?

Weiner begins her five chapter book with an extensive history of the migration of eastern European Jews to Appalachia and notes the similarities between shtetl life and the agrarian lifestyle found in the coalfields. In this first chapter, Weiner lays the groundwork beautifully for how the Jews were able to make the initial transition not to city life following immigration to the United States, but to life in the small coal mining towns of rural Appalachia. As Weiner depicts the history behind Jewish immigration to Appalachia, her text is accented nicely with anecdotes documenting the experiences of individuals and families as they were transitioning to life in the region. These historical anecdotes drive home the important socio-historical distinctions relating to migration patterns, economics, and religious and socio-cultural pressures that Weiner highlights with her overview of the history of Appalachian Jewish life.

The real "meat" of Weiner's argument is highlighted in the second, third, and fourth chapters. Here she forges new ground by focusing on the intricate middleman minority status of the Appalachian Jew and the relationship between such a designation for the Jewish population and the delicate Appalachian economy. Weiner denotes how, after acclimating to the region, the Jews were so integrated that they moved from salespeople to proprietors, often going where the business would be best and competing with company stores by, following these coalfield institutions, offering customers lines of credit. Weiner demonstrates the Jewish merchants' flexibility in dealing with rough and occasionally uncertain economic times, as the mountainous region was rife with environmental (fires and floods) and economic problems based on the boom and bust nature of coal mining. Thus, "Jewish owned businesses linked the coalfields to a different set of distribution networks, increased the range of shopping choices, served as an alternative source of consumer credit (especially meaningful during strikes), and hampered the ability of coal companies to engage

in monopolistic practices such as price gouging" (89). Weiner continues, therefore, that "despite the peculiarities of the coal economy, the economic and demographic trajectory of coalfield Jews conformed to trends in small-town American Jewry" (90).

The question and issue of how Jews assimilated and acculturated into Appalachian culture is an interesting one. Weiner notes in the beginning of her third chapter that those characteristics that once "otherized" the Jew in the old country "did not have the same effect in the coalfields" (91). Weiner capitalizes her argument about how Jews came to be active participants in Appalachian life. She notes that the Jews did not abandon or forget their religious, cultural, or even ethnic distinctiveness, but rather adapted (as most Jews did upon their integration into American society) and assimilated into the secular pursuits of their communities. Indeed, as Weiner notes, their religious distinctiveness was not even called into question, as the prevailing sense in the region has been (and still is) that attending a church, any church (even a Jewish "church") was acceptable. What mattered most was the belief in a divine power, but the distinctiveness relating to whether one is Jewish or Presbyterian was less consequential to coalfield life. In addition, Weiner points to Jewish flexibility once again by maintaining that in order for the coalfield Jews to "fit in," they often had to modify kosher laws, work on Saturdays, and interact with Christian culture. Instead of resisting, coalfield Jews embraced this diversity of experience and integrated their experiences into the totality of their being "coalfield Jews." The final two chapters document how successful the Jews of Appalachia were at maintaining Jewish identity. Occasionally, this identity had to "bend and sway" with the times and experiences of the group, and the Jews of Appalachia were not immune to the trends facing Jews across America. Previously Orthodox Jews made the switch to Reform Judaism because it was more attractive and financially necessary for economic survival. Kosher laws were adapted and then ultimately abandoned. Small (but notable) congregations were established (three of which had staff rabbis, and the others benefited from itinerant student rabbis from Hebrew Union College), and Jewish life flourished in the coal-

fields as the Jewish residents aptly navigated their identities as both Appalachian and Jewish.

Overall, only one criticism bears mentioning; that is, many of the historical facts are often stated and restated in such a way that the reader can get bogged down in the repetition. Such a criticism, however, is minute in comparison to the huge contribution that this book makes to the field of American Jewish history. It is highly and enthusiastically recommended.

Dana M. Greene

North Carolina Central University

Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas. Edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England in association with the Texas Jewish Historical Society, 2007. 308 pages.

This is a BIG book, not in the sense of being long or weighty with closely argued scholarship, but because of its oversized 8½ x 11 inch format, sporting a cover with a pair of handcrafted Justin boots emblazoned with stars of David and lions of Judah. All of this conveys the immediacy of the Texas myth Jewish-style. The expanded page size allows for some very good historical illustrative material large enough to examine, including photographs, documents, letters, and wonderful maps. One map designed by Jewish surveyor Jacob De Cordova, three years after Texas achieved statehood in 1846, has been reproduced in both black-and-white and within a center signature of color photographs. Graphics designer Gary Hartman created several topic-specific maps for this volume, which illustrate the essence of particular essays—a thoughtful addition in a well-designed book aimed at a broad readership.

The subtitle, *The Jews of Texas*, leads one to expect a comprehensive overview of the Texas Jewish experience. The editors have organized the twenty-one essays into three sections: The

Formative Years: Forging a Dual Identity; The Entrepreneurial Era: Leaving their Mark; and Current Events: Changing the Texas Landscape, and within these nearly parallel divisions, the essays follow a more-or-less chronological arrangement. In the introduction, Hollace A. Weiner observes that “studying the evolution of Texas Jewish communities can lead to analysis of patterns common not only to Jews but also among other ethnic groups drawn to the frontier or to boomtowns, small towns, and early industries that followed the frontier epic” (5). In this anthology, however, one finds little “analysis of patterns.” *Lone Stars of David* is more like a family photo album of essays that comprise snapshots of Jewish life in a larger-than-life state that is as much a state of mind as a geographical and political entity. Like Texas longhorns on the open range, the individual essays also ramble over many years and a great deal of territory; hence, the “snapshot” nature of the volume. Weiner acknowledges this apparent randomness in the introduction, quoting her coeditor’s talk at the Texas Jewish History Symposium, when he mentioned that *Lone Stars of David* “attempts to examine the main themes of the development of Texas Jewry by choosing individual examples to illustrate richer and broader realities . . . [because] a complete and comprehensive history will never be possible” (15).

The upside of this approach gives the reader a sense of the variety and vastness of the Texas landscape and the Jews who have peopled it, from those who came during the 1840s to those who arrived much more recently. Several intriguing essays give the reader a sense of the chutzpa of a portion of the state’s Jewish pioneers whose vision and actions transformed aspects of the frontier, like Alsatian-born cattleman Mayer Halff who controlled miles of ranch country that crossed state lines; Russian-born M. B. Zale, whose original credit jewelry store in Wichita Falls spawned the world’s largest jewelry chain; and the Bavarian-born Sanger brothers, whose retail outlets expanded as the railroad expanded. These individuals had an eye on the main chance and the drive and determination to realize their ambitions. Texas presented them with an irresistible canvas on which to unleash their entrepreneurial creativity, and these stories provide essayists Patrick

Dearen, Lauraine Miller, and Gary P. Whitfield, respectively, great material from which to forge compelling narratives. Although these three essays are not in the same division, they and several others in the same vein reveal a strong sense of the resiliency and adaptability of businessmen who succeeded in a rough-and-ready environment.

Stuart Rockoff and Ken Roseman offer us different kinds of insights. Rockoff's "Deep in the Heart of Palestine: Zionism in Early Texas," analyzes the complexities of forging support for a Jewish state. He argues persuasively that the greatest impact of Zionist organizations was in creating "a community in which Jews could feel comfort and pride in their Jewishness even as they became Texans" (93). Likewise, Ken Roseman's "Six Tenths of a Percent of Texas" is a succinct analysis of the demographic shifts as Texas's many once-vital small-town Jewish communities declined and its metropolitan centers burgeoned. While the Jewish populations of both Houston and San Antonio expanded greatly in the past two decades, those of Austin and Dallas have more than doubled. This shift reflects both larger regional and national trends, with such massive transformations ultimately changing the entire character of growing up Jewish in the state.

The downside to the collection is that it lacks a coherent thematic vision, leaving one's appetite for getting at the nature of the Texas Jewish experience only partially sated. Whether "a complete and comprehensive history" is or is not ultimately achievable remains an open question, but this volume underscores the need for more in-depth historical analysis to give us a more coherent understanding of the challenges of forging a Jewish identity in the hinterlands.

Bobbie Malone

Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison

Glossary

Bar mitzvah ~ traditional coming-of-age ritual for Jewish males usually reaching age of thirteen

Challah ~ braided bread eaten on Shabbat and on most Jewish holidays

Chazerai ~ junk food or junk anything else; worthless, or cheap

Cholov Israel ~ milk or dairy products that have been under constant rabbinic supervision from the time of milking the cows until the completion of production and packaging with certification conveying a higher standard than milk merely certified kosher

Chutzpa ~ gall, effrontery, brazen nerve, presumptuous arrogance

Dayenu ~ literally, "it would have been enough"; popular song from the Seder, which recounts God's many miracles, each with the declaration "Dayenu"

Eruv (plural: **eruvim**) ~ a boundary line, usually a wire, enclosing an area within which carrying and pushing carriages is permissible on the Sabbath

Farbrente ~ Yiddish for passionate, zealous

Flanken ~ a particular cut of beef that is usually boiled or stewed

Frommer, frum ~ pious

Glatt kosher ~ *glatt* means "smooth" (referring to the unblemished lungs of the slaughtered animal); is a stringent version

of kosher meat; *glatt kosher* often refers not only to meat, but also to any food, food store, or restaurant that meets the strictest kashrut standards

Goy (plural: **goyim**) ~ gentiles, people who are not Jewish

Hanukkah ~ variants include Chanukah, Hanukah ~ Feast of Lights, eight-day holiday commemorating victory of the Maccabees over Syrian rulers, 167 BCE

Hared (plural: **Haredim**; adjective: **haredi**) ~ highly observant Orthodox

Hazan ~ cantor; religious leader leading prayers/chants during religious services

High Holy Days ~ Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the two most important holidays on the Jewish calendar

Hamish; hamishness ~ homey or cozy; hominess or coziness

Jewishkeit ~ Jewish culture

Judenrein ~ a German word from *Juden* (Jews) and *rein* (eradication of an impurity), usually associated with the Holocaust; loosely means “free of Jews”

Kashrut/kosher ~ Jewish laws governing food

Kollel (plural: **kollelim**) ~ Adult education center for study that may include Torah, Talmud, and Jewish law

Landsman (plural: **landsleit**) ~ a fellow countryman; someone from the same area in Europe

Macher ~ a mover and shaker; important man

Mensch ~ upright, honorable, decent human being

Mezuzah (plural: **mezuzot**) ~ Literally, “doorpost”; a decorative case or tube holding a scroll inscribed with verses from the Torah and hung on the doorway to mark a Jewish home.

Mikvah (plural: **mikvaot**) ~ ritual bath

Minhag ~ form of Jewish ritual

Minyan ~ quorum of ten men (now sometimes women) traditionally required to conduct religious services

Moshav ~ a cooperative settlement of individual farms in Israel

Matzo ~ unleavened bread eaten primarily during Pesach

Oy vey ~ Yiddish expression: “oh no;” “oh my gosh”

Pesach ~ Hebrew for Passover, spring holiday commemorating the deliverance of the ancient Hebrews from Egyptian bondage

Responsa ~ Opinions or interpretations on religious subjects

Schmoozer ~ Someone who engages in friendly, informal conversation

Shavuot (also **Shavuos**) ~ literally, “weeks,” spring harvest celebrated fifty days after Pesach on the anniversary of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments

Shabbat (also **shabbes**, **shabbos**) ~ Jewish Sabbath; Friday night to Saturday night at the appearance of the first stars

Shokhet ~ ritual/kosher butcher

Shtetl ~ small town or village in eastern Europe associated with Jewish residence

Shul ~ synagogue

Sukkah ~ temporary open-air structure used for the festival of Sukkot

Tallit (also tallis) ~ prayer shawl

Talmud ~ collection of post-biblical ancient teachings justifying and explaining halacha or Jewish law; compilation of *Mishna* (code of Jewish religious and legal norms) and *Gemara* (discussions and explanations of *Mishna*)

Tefillin ~ phylacteries; small boxes enclosing Jewish prayers attached with leather straps to forehead and forearm in a prescribed manner, referred to as “laying tefillin”

Tikun Olam ~ literally, “repairing the world;” the Jewish ideal that each individual acts in partnership with God in behalf of social justice to improve the world

Torah ~ Five Books of Moses; first five books of the Bible

Yarmulke ~ skull cap

Yeshiva (plural: **yeshivot** [also **yeshivas**]) ~ schools for Jewish learning, rabbinical seminaries

Yid (plural: **Yidn**) ~ Jew

Yiddishkeit ~ Yiddish culture

Note on Authors

Janice Rothschild Blumberg is an independent scholar whose articles have appeared in various publications including the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, the *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, and previous volumes of this journal. She is the author of four books, three of which deal with Southern Jewish history, and she is a past president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. An Atlanta native now living in Washington, D.C., she received a B.F.A. degree from the University of Georgia in 1942, and since that time has studied Jewish history while experiencing it, often at close range, as the wife-now widow-of two prominent Jewish leaders.

Eli N. Evans was born in Durham, North Carolina, and is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Yale Law School. He is the author of *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South*; *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*; and *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*. He is president emeritus of the Charles H. Revson Foundation and chairman of the advisory board of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Kirsten Fermaglich is associate professor of history and Jewish studies at Michigan State University. Her book, *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-1965*, was published by Brandeis University Press (2006). She is now working on a new project on Jews and name-changing.

Eric L. Goldstein is associate professor of history and Jewish studies at Emory University. He is the winner of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society's Theodore Saloutos Prize and co-winner of the American Jewish Historical Society's Saul Viener Prize for his book, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2006). Goldstein is also the editor of the quarterly scholarly journal, *American Jewish History*.

Mark I. Greenberg is director of the Special Collections Department and Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida Tampa Library. He is the co-editor, with Marcie Cohen Ferris, of *Jewish*

Roots in Southern Soil: A New History, published by Brandeis University Press (2006).

Dana M. Greene is assistant professor of sociology at North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina. She specializes in Judaic sociology, racial and ethnic relations, sociology of religion, and the sociology of disaster relief. Her research interests include Jewish communities in the American South, and racial, ethnic, and religious inequalities in disaster zones. She serves as Book Review Editor and member of the Editorial Board of *Southern Jewish History*.

Bobbie Malone authored *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860-1929*, several articles, and many book reviews on Southern Jewish history. She holds a doctorate in American history from Tulane University and has served as director of the Office of School Services at the Wisconsin Historical Society since 1995. She is the co-author of the forthcoming textbook *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*, and has authored and edited many other student books and teacher's guides on Wisconsin history for the state's classrooms.

James L. Moses (Ph.D., Tulane University, 1997) is associate professor of modern United States history at Arkansas Tech University, and is most recently the author of "An Interesting Game of Poker: Franklin D. Roosevelt, William O. Douglas, and the 1944 Vice Presidential Nomination," in Stephen K. Shaw and William D. Pederson, eds., *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of the Supreme Court* (2004). He has published articles in journals such as *The Historian*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, and *Journalism History*, and is currently researching and writing a book on rabbis Ira Sanders and Elijah E. "Zeke" Palnick of Little Rock's Temple B'nai Israel and the role they played on behalf of social and racial justice in the mid-twentieth century South.

Dan J. Puckett, assistant professor of history at Troy University in Montgomery, received his Ph.D. in history from Mississippi State University. His interests include Alabama Jewish history and the impact that Nazism and the Holocaust had on the state's Jewish community. He is currently working on a book, *The Jim Crow of All the Ages: Adolf Hitler, Race, and Civil Rights in the Heart of Dixie, 1933-1948*, for the University of Alabama Press.

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Jean Roseman has a B.A. degree from Acadia University in Nova Scotia, a M. Ed. from Boston State College, and an Ed. D. from Tennessee State University. She is retired from teaching German in high school in Nashville, Tennessee. She also developed and taught the curriculum for the first Holocaust history course which was approved by the State of Tennessee in 1978. In addition to numerous professional articles, Roseman is the author of *From Y to J: The Hundred Year History of Nashville's Jewish Community Center* (2004). She is currently at work on a history of Nashville Jewry.

Rabbi Saul Jacob Rubin is an honors graduate of Drew University. He received his BHL, MAHL, and DD from the Hebrew Union College in 1958. A passion for American Jewish history led him to serve Beth Ahabah (Richmond, VA) the sixth congregation founded in America, and Temple Mickve Israel, the third congregation and first in the South. He was appointed a curator of the Georgia Historical Society and between 1979-1983 served as chairman of the board and president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. The Georgia Legislature selected him general chairman of the religious observances commission for Georgia's 250th anniversary. He co-edited *The Religious Heritage of Historic Savannah, A Bicentennial Monograph* (1976). For the U.S. Bicentennial, he led a delegation of rabbis to the White House to meet with President Ford. He presented several papers at Southern Jewish Historical Society conferences and contributed to *Moment Magazine*, *The Reconstructionist Journal*, and *CCAR Journal*. In 1983, in observance of the 250th anniversary of Temple Mickve Israel, his *Third to None: The Saga of Savannah Jewry* was published, the first comprehensive history of Georgia's earliest Jewish settlement. Since retirement in 1986, he divides his time between Savannah and Georgia's Golden Isles (St. Simons).

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Bryan Edward Stone is an assistant professor of history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. His book manuscript, "Rope Walkers: a History of Texas Jews, 1590-2000," is under advance contract with the University of Texas Press. He published two previous articles on Texas Jewry in *Southern Jewish History* and contributed a chapter to *Lone Stars of David* (2007), edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth Roseman.

Bernard Wax received degrees from the University of Chicago, served as field services supervisor of the Illinois State Historical Library 1959-1966, director of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1966-1991, director of special projects from 1991-1993, and director of the Wyner Center of the AJHS from 2002-2004. Wax is a founding member of the Southern Jewish Historical Society and its treasurer.

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