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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Revisiting Annie T. Wise

by

Arlene G. Rotter

In investigating the life and career of Annie Wise for my article, "Climbing the Crystal Stair: Annie T. Wise's Success as an Immigrant in Atlanta's Public School System (1872-1925)," *Southern Jewish History* 4 (2001), I found many voids in information. Fortunately Henry S. Marks of Huntsville, Alabama, has graciously brought additional documents to my attention, the contents of which I would like to share with the readers.

Wise's Personal Life

Marks uncovered information regarding Annie Teitlebaum's marriage to Sam Wise and about their son, Leonard. Annie's engagement to Sam Wise of Tuscaloosa was announced in the *American Israelite* on February 21, 1889. They married later the same year. Sam Wise appeared in the Tuscaloosa registry for 1889. However, Wise's name is listed neither in the Alabama Soundex nor in the Georgia Soundex for 1900, 1910, or 1920.¹ Even with this new documentation, Annie and Sam Wise's relationship remains virtually a mystery. It is unclear where they resided as husband and wife. However, Marks discovered an obituary for Annie T. Wise, stating that she moved to Birmingham after the death of her husband in Atlanta.² This information leads me to the assumption that Annie and Sam remained married until his death and may have been living with Annie's parents in Atlanta.³

The data Marks uncovered provide a fairly lucid timeline of Leonard Wise's life, that corroborates in part some of my

assumptions regarding Annie's disappearance from the Atlanta Public School system between 1889 and 1891, but does not clear up the reasons for her absence between 1887 and 1888. Shortly after Leonard's birth in Georgia in May 1891, Annie returned to work as an assistant at Atlanta's Night School.⁴ Leonard resided in Atlanta with his maternal grandparents, Morris and Mary Teitlebaum, at least until 1900; however, his name is not listed in the 1910 or 1920 Georgia Soundex.⁵ Leonard Wise appears to have had a long career in pharmaceuticals in Alabama. In 1923 he was employed as a clerk in his Uncle Eugene Jacobs's drug store in Birmingham. A year later Leonard became a manager and continued in this position until his aunt Ethel died in 1934. During the 1940s Wise was a pharmacist in Birmingham for Leo's Cut Rate Drug Store and an assistant manager of Walgreen's Drug Store. Leonard Wise had connections with the Birmingham Jewish community as a member of Temple Emanu-El in the 1930s.⁶ Marks notes that by 1946 Leonard Wise retired, but the circumstances of his death remain a mystery.⁷

Annie Wise's Involvement in Jewish Organizations

I previously wrote that Annie Wise appeared to have been more active in secular rather than in Jewish organizations. However, Henry Marks's new information refutes this assumption. Annie is listed as the eleventh president of the National Council of Jewish Women in Birmingham during the 1920s, following the presidency of Dora Heyman (Mrs. Mervyn) Sterne. The *Jewish Ledger* lists Annie Wise as past president of the Birmingham branch in 1928.⁸ She did not neglect her Jewish connections.

The Elusive Annie T. Wise

I would like to thank Henry Marks for clearing up some of the mysteries surrounding Annie T. Wise's life. He has revealed important information demonstrating Wise's leadership role and active involvement in Jewish organizations. I am encouraged to believe that Annie T. Wise, a Jewish immigrant from Eperies, Hungary, successfully climbed the crystal stair

that led her from Girls' High School to a prominent career in both the secular and Jewish communities of Atlanta and Birmingham.

NOTES

¹ Notes of Henry S. Marks, Huntsville, AL, who researched the 1900, 1910, and 1920 registries for Alabama and Georgia; *American Israelite*, February 21, 1889, and May 1891.

² "Rites for Mrs. Wise," *Birmingham News*, May 14, 1929 (hereafter cited as "Rites").

³ Marks notes, "Son Leonard . . . was enumerated with Annie's father and mother in Atlanta in 1900. At that time, her parents resided on Pulliam Street in Atlanta." 1900 Georgia Soundex, Fulton County, GA.

⁴ Rotter, "Climbing the Crystal Stair," 54.

⁵ "Rites."

⁶ Temple Emanu-El Ledger Books, 1932, Birmingham Public Library.

⁷ Marks found that Leonard Wise was not listed in the 1947, 1948, 1949, 1952, 1956, or 1970 Birmingham Certificate of Deaths. He also was not listed in the Atlanta Death Indexes from 1945-1959.

⁸ Council Roster, 1973; *Jewish Ledger*, September 7, 1928.