

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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# New Jewish Women: Shaping the Future of a “New South” in the Palmetto State

by

Diane C. Vecchio\*

**I**n an address to the clubwomen of South Carolina in 1900, Sarah Visanska of Charleston, president of the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, spoke on “The American Woman of To-day,” proclaiming:

We daughters of the South, as well as our brothers, realize how crowded is the present hour with vast opportunities and grave responsibilities. Each one of us, whose heart throbs responsive to the cause of country and of womanhood, should proudly assume the task to improve the one, and faithfully discharge the other.<sup>1</sup>

Visanska then issued a call for reform, exposing the problems facing women and children in her state.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a handful of Jewish women activists embarked on a series of reforms in the Palmetto State. They were part of a larger movement of female activists in the South and nation following the Civil War who forged new roles for women both within and outside the household.

In this article I examine two lesser-known southern Jewish activists: Rosa Hirschmann Gantt of Spartanburg and Sarah Bentschner Visanska of Charleston. Like their Jewish sisters elsewhere in the state and region, Gantt and Visanska were activists and reformers who sought to improve the communities in which they lived. Like many other activists, they were educated women who were deeply involved in religious organizations, enthusiastic clubwomen, and social reformers.

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Following separate but parallel paths, Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, a practicing physician, and Sarah Bentschner Visanska, a full-time club-woman and social activist, brought Progressive-Era reforms to South Carolina. They shared many commonalities: both were daughters of German Jewish immigrants, both were educated, and their activism was rooted in Jewish societies and values. With Gantt's role as president of the South Carolina Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and Visanska's position as president of the Charleston section of the National Council of Jewish Women, each developed leadership skills and proficiency as public speakers. As clubwomen and social reformers, they were civic activists who worked alongside Christian women. As acculturated Jews who were solidly middle- and upper-middle class, they were welcomed into Christian-dominated organizations. Visanska's election as president of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs is testimony to her acceptance in southern female society.

*Overview of Women and Progressive-Era Reform*

The Progressive movement was a crusade that swept the country beginning in the late nineteenth century. Led by the middle class, it was comprised of men and women, both black and white, who were determined to expand local, state, and federal government to effectively regulate big business, democratize government, and promote social justice. Women were particularly involved in movements to remedy the problems associated with industrialization, urbanization, child labor, education, and public health. Some reformers joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and advocated for the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, and others joined female suffrage organizations to gain the vote. Progressive reform was a complex and varied movement that brought women out of the household and into the public sphere.<sup>2</sup>

However, reformers were often at odds with each other and the people they sought to help because of race, religion, and ethnicity. They organized and pursued reforms based on their race and an understanding of their place in society. While many southern white women sought to uphold the racial divide, African American women struggled for rights of citizenship and inclusion.<sup>3</sup> Protestant women made up the rank and file of the WCTU, whose goal was to evangelize, and thus they alienated Catholics and Jews who, furthermore, did not support their

efforts to prohibit the use of alcohol. Immigrant women, frequently the objects of well-meaning reformers, resisted attempts to alter their ethnic food traditions for “well-balanced American meals” of meat, potatoes, and white bread. In Endicott, New York, Italian and Slavic shoe workers started the North Side Ladies Progressive Society to enact neighborhood improvements without interference from local middle-class activists.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Progressive-Era reform was charged with contradictions and conflicts.

In the South women quietly entered public life, leading them to progressive reform through religious organizations. Anne Firor Scott expounded on the social changes occurring among women in southern states following the Civil War: “It was some time before many people noticed, or reflected upon, what was taking place in the woman’s sphere of southern life.” Scott was one of the first historians to recognize that “the public life of nearly every Southern woman leader . . . began in a church society.”<sup>5</sup> For Jewish women, public life started in a synagogue. Whether Jewish, Protestant, or Catholic, religious associations were the first to welcome women’s talents and activism in a voluntary setting, where women saw to the needs of their congregations and formed their own prayer groups, auxiliaries, and ladies aid societies.

In addition to raising funds by baking, holding rummage sales, selling their needlework at bazaars, and marketing canned and preserved fruits, women in religious associations conducted fundraising drives and used what they raised to purchase stained-glass windows and pews and to restore their churches and synagogues.<sup>6</sup> Mark K. Bauman adds that Jewish “women supervised the religious schools, prepared the facilities for occasions, maintained cemeteries, created foundations, and nurtur[ed] religious observance.”<sup>7</sup>

“Charitable activities were well rooted in Jewish religious tradition,” as Eric L. Goldstein and Deborah R. Weiner maintain in their study of Jews in Baltimore.<sup>8</sup> Jewish women’s involvement in the welfare of their synagogues, and later in community benevolence, was motivated by ethics rooted in Judaism, especially the concept of *tzedakah*.<sup>9</sup> As Leonard Rogoff makes clear, these values emphasized moral conduct, “uplift, leadership, and dedication to principles imbued with the ethics of prophetic Judaism.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, acculturating Jewish women wanted to fashion a more public role for themselves, much like their Christian

counterparts were doing in missionary work, temperance societies, and charitable organizations.<sup>11</sup>

Jewish women's organized benevolence dates to 1819 when Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia helped establish the first Jewish charity in America, the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society. "Soon," according to Dianne Ashton, "women's benevolent societies were among the first organizations created in new American Jewish communities."<sup>12</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, Jewish women, like middle-class women in the United States and Europe, were held to Victorian gender norms that defined women as pure, pious, domestic, and submissive. The historian Barbara Welter characterized those values in American terms as "the cult of true womanhood." Like the Victorian concept of separate spheres, "ideal" women were portrayed as selfless and naturally religious.<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of the century, dramatic changes brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration took place that required radical change. From their exalted position in the domestic sphere, women gradually moved to the public sphere by transferring these "inherent traits" to help solve problems beyond the household.

Women from all religious backgrounds became aware of the poverty and poor health conditions plaguing the poor and helped create hospitals, schools, orphanages, and rescue homes for prostitutes.<sup>14</sup> Donaldina Cameron, for one, was a well-known Presbyterian missionary in San Francisco who rescued Chinese girls from sexual slavery and converted them to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> African American women worked for similar goals, albeit in a segregated environment. Religious organizations helped sustain African American women as they moved from slavery to freedom, and they, too, gained a voice by participating in church organizations and fundraising activities, which empowered them and prepared them for public roles.<sup>16</sup> Rogoff notes that Jewish women's involvement in Hebrew benevolent and ladies aid societies "paralleled the home and missionary societies of Protestant churches but without evangelical intent or outreach."<sup>17</sup> Protestant missionaries also organized Sunday schools for the purpose of evangelization, particularly in urban settings with large immigrant populations. Jewish women attempted to counter these activities through the creation of free kindergarten and social settlement organizations designed to aid and Americanize Jewish immigrants.

Another important step on the road to women's public engagement was the women's club movement. Women's clubs often started as literary societies and could be quite diversified in their aims. They began to appear in the mid-nineteenth century and spread rapidly with hundreds more following throughout the country. In the small town of Union in the South Carolina upcountry, members of one women's club read Shakespeare aloud and corrected each other's pronunciation, while the Ladies Literary Club of Spartanburg veered away from literary endeavors and focused on building a free library for the town.<sup>18</sup> Middle- and upper-class women joined clubs to read literature, study history, nurture friendships, share ideas, and improve their communities. Through these clubs they learned parliamentary procedure and obtained experience speaking, leading, and managing finances. As one club leader explained: "Club experience has been the university in which they [women] have learned about themselves. . . . [T]hey have gained respect for their own opinions, toleration for the opinion of others and the necessity of cooperation for the successful accomplishments of all aims."<sup>19</sup> Whatever their goals, middle-class women became increasingly determined to improve their communities by "extending their domestic responsibilities from home to city."<sup>20</sup>

By 1900 women's clubs had "shifted emphasis from literature and learning to the pressing social and political needs of towns, cities, and states," according to Elizabeth Hayes Turner.<sup>21</sup> Clubwomen became involved in causes such as urban beautification, the need for juvenile courts, education reform, public libraries, reformatories, suffrage, and child labor reform. Bauman demonstrates how Jewish women "moved from denominational concerns to civic uplift and politics" and, simultaneously, moved from working solely with other Jews for the needs of their congregations to working with non-Jewish women for greater social causes at the community, state, and even national levels.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, religious organizations and women's clubs became incubators for middle-class women's activism and reform in the early twentieth century throughout the country. Recent studies of Jewish activist women in the South, including the works of Joan Marie Johnson, Leonard Rogoff, Marjorie Julian Spruill, Amy Thompson McCandless, and Belinda Friedman Gergel, reveal that Jewish women, most of whom

were daughters of European immigrant parents, were at the forefront of reform and activism.<sup>23</sup>

From Spartanburg in the upcountry to Columbia in the midlands and Charleston in the low country, educated Jewish women represented a generation of middle-class activists committed to improving life in South Carolina. In the process, Jewish activists created what Belinda Gergel calls “a new place for women in American Judaism.”<sup>24</sup>

Several excellent published studies highlight Jewish women in South Carolina who were religious activists, clubwomen, reformers, and suffragists.<sup>25</sup> These include works on Irene Goldsmith Kohn of Columbia and the incomparable Pollitzer sisters of Charleston: Carrie, Mabel, and Anita.<sup>26</sup> Anita Pollitzer is especially noteworthy as a suffragist and officer in the National Woman’s Party and trusted aide to NWP founder Alice Paul.<sup>27</sup> Among these South Carolina reformers were Rosa Hirschmann Gantt of Spartanburg and Sarah Bentschner Visanska of Charleston, the subjects of this case study.

*Dr. L. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt.  
(Courtesy of the Waring Historical  
Library, MUSC, Charleston.)*

*"With Strength of Purpose, Foresight, and Undaunted Courage":  
L. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, M.D.*

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, economic developments transformed the upcountry from a cotton-producing economy to the site of major textile manufacturing. By the early 1900s, Spartanburg County boasted forty textile mills and a drastically changed landscape, bringing hundreds of new jobs and a host of social problems associated with mill villages.

L. Rosa Hirschmann was born in Camden, South Carolina, in 1874.<sup>28</sup> Her mother, Lena Nachman Hirschmann, a German Jew, and her father, a Jew from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, immigrated to the United States in 1870.<sup>29</sup> Solomon Hirschmann started peddling in the countryside of Williamsburg County, located in the outer coastal plain and in the southern tip of South Carolina's Pee Dee region, until he accumulated sufficient savings to open a general store in Cades. Because no high schools existed in these rustic regions of the state in the late nineteenth century, Hirschmann moved his family to Charleston so that his five children could attend secondary schools. There he opened a wholesale grocery and provisions store on King Street.<sup>30</sup>

Relocating from the small, rural village of Cades to Charleston with its large Jewish population enhanced opportunities for the entire Hirschmann family. Solomon's store was located in the heart of Charleston's Jewish business sector. In this historic and well-established city, the family had access to synagogues and an active Jewish community. As a young woman, Rosa was exposed to the activities of Jewish clubwomen, sisterhood members, and community reformers.

When she was fourteen years old, Rosa lost her mother to cancer, and she stepped in to take care of her father and younger siblings. Her numerous responsibilities, however, did not deter her from excelling in her studies. After completing school in Charleston, Rosa aspired to a career as a doctor and did what few women ventured at the turn of the century: she enrolled in medical school. She graduated from what is now the Medical University of South Carolina in 1901, one of the first two women to obtain a medical degree from that institution.<sup>31</sup>

She and the other female student endured gender discrimination from their male colleagues as William Chapman Herbert described years

*Solomon Hirschmann, seated right, with son Henry, seated left, and  
Henry's sons Lionel, Victor, Joseph M., Jerold, and Edgar, c. 1912.*

*(Courtesy of the Jewish Heritage Collection,  
College of Charleston.)*

*S. Hirschmann & Sons store, photograph by Melcher Studio, 1924.*

*(Pinckney-Means Family Papers, courtesy of the  
South Carolina Historical Society.)*

later: "How those two must have suffered the teasing and the torments of the male medical students of the class, for women were not acknowledged as being capable of becoming physicians."<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, the women responded to the contempt of their male peers in the most satisfying of ways, by earning their medical degrees and pursuing successful careers.

Since no accredited internship opportunities existed for female physicians in South Carolina in the early 1900s, Hirschmann moved to New York for postgraduate training at the Aural and Ophthalmic Institute and the New York Ear and Eye Hospital. At the completion of her training, she was appointed resident physician at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, a school that trained women teachers.<sup>33</sup>

In 1905 she married Spartanburg attorney Robert Gantt, a writer, poet, and political polemicist, moved to Spartanburg, and established a practice as an ear, nose, and throat specialist.<sup>34</sup> Based on her treatment of patients with rare disorders, Gantt wrote several studies in medical journals such as, "Report of a Case of Angio-Myxo-Sarcoma of Larynx with Expulsion of Large Tumor," published in the *Laryngoscope*, an international monthly journal devoted to diseases of the nose, throat, and ear, and "Congenital Cataract-Hereditary Influences," published in the *Southern Medical Journal*.<sup>35</sup>

In later years, other female practitioners joined Gantt, notably Dr. Hilla Sheriff, who became a close friend after she moved to Spartanburg in 1929 and started a pediatrics practice. Gantt mentored Sheriff, and together they pursued public health initiatives.<sup>36</sup> Thus in her training and career, Gantt broke gender barriers and served as a pioneer.

#### *Sisterhood President and Clubwoman*

Rosa Gantt was active in women's organizations and fundraising events at Temple B'nai Israel in Spartanburg. As an educated, professional woman, she readily assumed leadership positions including winning election as the first president of the Women's Auxiliary of Temple B'nai Israel. Gantt became deeply involved with the temple and led efforts to meet the needs of the small Jewish community that had recently organized in her city. She led fundraising activities for the stained-glass windows and seating in the newly constructed temple in downtown Spartanburg.<sup>37</sup>

Gantt traveled to Charleston with other elected delegates to consider the advisability of establishing a state federation of temple sisterhoods. The federation was created with the Spartanburg sisterhood among the four charter members, along with those of Charleston, Columbia, and Camden.<sup>38</sup> In 1919, Gantt was elected president of the South Carolina Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. In 1924, in a somewhat unusual role for a woman, Gantt negotiated with Oakwood Cemetery for a Jewish section, thereby making Jewish burials possible locally. Before this, Jewish funerals were held in Columbia or elsewhere in the state.<sup>39</sup>

*Dr. Rosa Gantt with a pellagra patient.  
(Courtesy of South Caroliniana Library,  
University of South Carolina, Columbia.)*

Gantt's activism started in her religious community but expanded to involvement in local women's clubs largely composed of Protestant women. Some of the most forceful clubwomen, including Emily Evans, Martha Orr Patterson, and Margaret McKissick, were from the upcountry and were dedicated to progressive reforms related to the problems of

industrialization, urbanization, and education.<sup>40</sup> Gantt was the only known Jewish woman active in the New Era Club. Founded by Emily Evans in 1912 as a "study group," the club drew like-minded women of Spartanburg who met twice a month to discuss education and public health. The goal of thirty white, middle-class women was "to stimulate interest in civic affairs and advance the industrial, legal, and educational rights of women and children." The members expanded their original mission to pursue voting rights for women. In 1914 the New Era Club created the first statewide woman's suffrage organization and joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Charleston and Columbia followed their lead and established suffrage organizations in those cities. In May 1914, the three clubs, totaling more than four hundred members, united as the South Carolina Equal Suffrage League.<sup>41</sup> Gantt's participation in Protestant-dominated women's organizations reflected the commitment of Jewish and Christian women to work together for shared goals.

*Public Health Advocate*

"The low standard of public health in the South," according to C. Vann Woodward, along with a shortage of physicians, a high incidence of typhoid and malaria, and "a virtual monopoly within the nation of hookworm and pellagra . . . combined to make the South's public health problems unique in the country."<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, South Carolina "had a long history of neglecting the health-care needs of poor whites and African Americans."<sup>43</sup> Thus women who sprang into action in the twentieth century, like Rosa Gantt, were embarking on a crusade to improve the health and well-being of people who were dispersed, isolated, and often impoverished.

Among Gantt's early crusades was advocacy in behalf of the medical inspection of schools. Yet her arguments to convince the state of its responsibility for inspecting public schools in 1910 reflected middle-class, white women's biases that were often espoused by clubwomen and reformers. In an appearance before a state board Gantt stated that since public schools mixed children of all conditions in the classrooms, they were responsible for protecting the "normal child" from children "whose parents through ignorance or neglect have not corrected deformities which are easily correctible."<sup>44</sup>

*South Carolina governor  
Coleman L. Blease, c. 1910.  
(Library of Congress.)*

Irrespective of the middle-class prejudices exhibited in her plea, Gantt was joined by other medical professionals, as well as the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, who sponsored the adoption of medical inspection for the South Carolina school system. Governor Coleman L. Blease, the most antireform governor in the state's history, vetoed a bill providing for compulsory inspection. Gantt published a derisive reply to Blease and others in South Carolina who would oppose the bill. At the annual meeting of the Southern Medical Association in Jacksonville, Florida, in November 1912, she indicted the "laity" in their failure to educate children:

They fail to appreciate that everything which tends to promote the moral, mental and physical well-being of the pupil should be embraced in the educational system of the State. . . . [T]he unlearned and ignorant think that medical inspection means a thorough medical examination and diagnosis; that the privacy of the person of the pupil is invaded and that indignities are offered.<sup>45</sup>

Gantt mockingly restated Blease's veto message:

I would consider it a most outrageous intrusion upon my family affairs to have any physician to examine my child and expose its deformity or condition to the world. . . . [D]o you wish to force every poor man to bow down to the whims of all the professions? . . . This money is voted and appropriated for the education of the child and for development of

its brain and you have no right to take it to pay doctors' bills or for having children examined at the insistence of some cranks.<sup>46</sup>

Gantt concluded her talk by soliciting support from her colleagues to help in the fight for the medical inspection of school children. She pleaded that she stood "in common with 8,000 clubwomen of my State, and as a physician."<sup>47</sup> Her reference to the solidarity of South Carolina's clubwomen speaks volumes for the sense of power and moral authority clubwomen exuded. Club activities offered the women agency they would not have had otherwise.

In the early 1930s, Gantt established a mobile health unit that provided public health services to the poor in upcountry South Carolina and in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. In a feature story Gantt wrote about the Rural Health Program sponsored by American Women's Hospitals (AWH) in cooperation with the Spartanburg County of Health and Spartanburg County Department of Education, Gantt described the services she and her staff would offer.<sup>48</sup>

Gantt and her colleague and mentee, Hilla Sheriff, dispatched mobile units to rural areas lacking physicians. The "health mobiles" were

*American Women's Hospitals "health mobile."  
(Courtesy of South Caroliniana Library,  
University of South Carolina, Columbia.)*

staffed with physicians, nurses, and nutrition workers who offered immunizations, examinations, and prenatal and dental care. Their slogan was “Bringing Health to the Country.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to providing health services, Gantt and Sheriff promoted habits of good hygiene and healthy nutrition. The prevalence of pellagra and hookworm in the upcountry, especially in the mill villages, had attracted national attention.<sup>50</sup> In 1931, as president-elect of the American Medical Women’s Association, Gantt asked AWH, known for its work in alleviating health crises faced by wartime refugees during and after World War I, to address the poor health of “economic refugees” in the textile South.<sup>51</sup>

The AWH subsequently hired Sheriff to direct its first American units. Sheriff built on Gantt’s initiatives by offering health care for women and their babies and promoted family planning services.<sup>52</sup> She continued to institutionalize AWH programs after 1933, when she joined the Spartanburg County Health Department as its assistant director, the only female county health officer in the nation.<sup>53</sup>

Gantt was also actively involved in the Spartanburg Baby Hospital located across the state border in Saluda, North Carolina. Dr. Daniel Lesesne Smith, a pediatrician from Spartanburg, who believed the healthy climate of the mountains would benefit sick babies—particularly during the hot, humid, South Carolina summers when cases of dysentery resulted in high death rates—founded the baby hospital as a charitable institution. Gantt was appointed a board member of the hospital and supported it financially.<sup>54</sup>

### *Social Reform*

Gantt was active in many social reforms initiated by clubwomen across the state, including the need to provide guidance for “wayward girls.” Women’s clubs were concerned with children and their education, especially women and girls, and struggled to provide the victims of poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate parental supervision with opportunities for uplift.<sup>55</sup> This was one of the avenues in which women expanded their roles as mothers into public advocacy. Joan Marie Johnson maintains that “clubwomen hoped to build Southern prosperity through increasing the number of efficient men and women citizens of their state.” The movement to build a reformatory therefore addressed issues of economic progress.<sup>56</sup> South Carolina clubwomen spoke publicly of the need for

reformatories, raised funds, and lobbied the legislature for support. Through her participation in these efforts, Gantt helped establish the Girls Reform School in Columbia and served on its board of directors.<sup>57</sup>

A highly respected physician, Gantt rose to leadership positions in several medical societies. She served as an officer for the otherwise all-male Spartanburg County Medical Society and was one of the first female members of the Southern Medical Association. In addition, she was elected president of the American Medical Women's Association, a national organization founded in 1915 in Chicago at a time when women physicians were an underrepresented minority.

While Rosa Gantt was actively engaged in efforts to improve the health of upcountry South Carolinians and raise their political awareness for woman's suffrage, Sarah Bentschner Visanska was changing the future of Charlestonians through her campaign to bring much-needed reforms to the low country.

*"An Asset to Any Organization of Which She Was a Member":*

*Sarah Bentschner Visanska*

Sarah Bentschner Visanska was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on July 16, 1870. She was the daughter of David (Daniel) Bentschner of Neustadt, Prussia, and Hanne Jacobi Bentschner of Copenhagen, Denmark. Their residency in Charleston can be traced to the early 1860s.<sup>58</sup> Sarah's father operated a clothing business known for its fine quality men's attire, and Sarah's mother was a "woman of great literary and artistic tastes and was especially remarkable for her fluency [and] linguistic talent."<sup>59</sup>

The Bentschners were influential in the Jewish community and in their adopted city. David Bentschner's business success made it possible for him to purchase an imposing estate, known as the Cameron House, in the historic district of the city in 1861. The original owners were wealthy planters, and the colonial revival style in which the home was built was popular in Charleston at the time. When Bentschner took over the residence he added neo-Georgian ceiling medallions and colonial revival mantels, paneling, parquet flooring, and tiles. His mark is seen today in the gate with his initials on the front entrance.<sup>60</sup> His stylish additions reflect an individual who had acquired the discriminating tastes

*Portraits of Sarah B. Visanska and Julius  
Visanska, taken for their season passes to  
the South Carolina Inter-State and  
West Indian Exposition, 1901.  
(Courtesy of Charleston County  
Public Library.)*

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*Cameron House, later the Bentschner family home, at 12 Bull Street  
in Charleston. David Bentschner's initials adorn the iron gate.  
(Courtesy of Sarah Fick for Mapping Jewish Charleston.)*

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*Former home of Julius and Sarah Visanska,  
19 East Battery Street, Charleston.  
(Google Street View.)*

of a wealthy Charlestonian. Thus Sarah grew up in an upper-middle-class home with the accoutrements and values consistent with bourgeois family life in the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most significant influences on Sarah's reform-minded convictions were learned as a student at the Charleston Female Seminary. Founded by Henrietta Aiken Kelly in 1870, the seminary provided wealthy white girls in Charleston with access to higher education. The young women who attended the seminary received a classical education, underpinned by training in benevolence—a hallmark of the school and its students.<sup>61</sup> Sarah graduated Latin salutatorian, First Honors, from the seminary in 1889.<sup>62</sup>

Like many educated women from wealthy families, Sarah traveled extensively in Europe, then in 1895 she married Julius Visanska, the proprietor of a "Gents Furnishings Store" on King Street. Julius Visanska served as treasurer of the city Chamber of Commerce and president of the Charleston Hebrew Benevolent Society.<sup>63</sup> Visanska entered a textile business with his father-in-law and substantially increased his wealth, making it possible for him and Sarah to purchase one of the grandest and most expensive homes in Charleston. Located on East Battery Street, the 6,872-square-foot mansion included double piazzas and incredible views of Charleston Harbor.<sup>64</sup>

Sarah's marriage to Julius and his position in the city's business community gave them prestige and status in Charleston society. As a woman of means with no children of her own, Sarah committed her life to helping children and the poor. Her activism began in her synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE), founded in 1749, one of the oldest congregations in the United States, and the birthplace of American Reform Judaism.

Sarah helped found and presided over the Charleston section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) as well as the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society. The oldest volunteer Jewish women's organization in the United States still in existence, the NCJW was founded in 1893, and the Charleston council section thirteen years later. Based on Jewish values and a progressive commitment to social justice, "the Council was often the portal through which Jewish women entered secular organizations."<sup>65</sup> The local section focused on the public health care of Charleston's poor, while the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, estab-

lished in 1896, provided charitable and educational funds for the local Jewish community.

*Leading South Carolina Clubwoman*

Visanska's passion for social reform guided her to Charleston's women's clubs, where she became an inspiring leader. Many dynamic clubwomen, black and white, engaged in reform in Charleston, including Louisa B. Poppenheim, Marian B. Wilkinson, Mabel Pollitzer, and Susan Pringle Frost. Sarah's commitment to women's clubs and her activist vision led to her election as the first recording secretary of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs (SCFWC). She subsequently served as corresponding secretary from 1905 to 1907 and then as president from 1901 to 1912. In the latter capacity, over an organization with thousands of members across the state, she had a powerful platform for motivating clubwomen to embrace progressive reforms.

Visanska expressed her pride as a southerner in talks addressed to the clubwomen of her state. Her plea for clubwomen to take up the banner of social reform was reinforced with pride in the South, where she linked her incentive for social reform with southern identity. Johnson offers a persuasive explanation for understanding how leading southern clubwomen and activists linked social reform with southern pride by "invoking their sense of place." She maintains that Visanska's espousal of southern identity was based on her belief that "the New South should be built upon the Old South."<sup>66</sup> This was clearly revealed in her 1900 address to clubwomen titled "The American Woman of To-Day." Visanska reminded clubwomen that, as one of the original thirteen colonies, South Carolina sounded "the bugle call of progress and reform" and that, despite the region's suffering during the war, "those clarion notes have been stilled but never quite forgotten. . . . Once again, the eyes of the nation are turning Southward." She continued, "We, daughters of the South, as well as our brothers, realize how crowded is the present hour with vast opportunities and grave responsibilities."<sup>67</sup>

In other words, according to Johnson, Visanska and other southern female reformers believed that "their duty as daughters of the Confederacy was the improvement of the New South."<sup>68</sup> With pride in the past, clubwomen would bring attention to the badly needed reforms that cor-

related with industrial changes in the New South. Ida Lining, a member of the SCFWC, also raised the issue of southern identity in an article, "What the South Needs," and declared that the efficacy of women reformers to help bring about a "New South was in large part, based on their love of home, combined with pride in the past." She urged clubwomen to establish schools and libraries, aid the poor, and end illiteracy in order to be "self-respecting southerners."<sup>69</sup>

Visanska's platform for southern reform was pivotal to her position, and she intended for women to be the driving force. Elucidating the importance of women's clubs, she reinforced their new focus on community service and asked South Carolina women to come to the aid of mill children who required education, cleanliness, and nutrition, and growing cities that needed playgrounds, parks, and libraries.<sup>70</sup>

In 1904, Sarah Visanska won election as one of South Carolina's delegates to the General Federation of Women's Clubs national meeting in St. Louis.<sup>71</sup> This opportunity brought her into contact with thousands of clubwomen from across the nation, where they discussed topics ranging from the need to combat tuberculosis to woman suffrage. These interactions strengthened Visanska's ties with female Christian reformers and reinforced their commonalities, "underscoring," according to Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, "the values and teachings that Jews and Christians share."<sup>72</sup>

Tuberculosis was a dreaded disease at the turn of the century, and Visanska viewed it as a public health issue that clubwomen must combat. Local women had been involved with the disease as early as 1814, when the Ladies Benevolent Society of Charleston began volunteer care of those stricken with it. Thirteen years after the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis (NASPT) was established, Charleston organized a chapter in 1917. By that time tuberculosis was the leading killer of young adults in South Carolina.<sup>73</sup>

In December 1909, Visanska invited clubwomen from the state to attend a series of lectures, illustrated talks, and an exhibition in Charleston sponsored by the NASPT:

I ask the interest and co-operation of every federated clubwoman in South Carolina to this fight against the "great white plague." . . . In thus doing your share to aid in this war against the most fatal of modern ills; in thus extending a message of hope to the afflicted, of enlightenment to

the ignorant, of a life of cleanliness and sunshine to those who walk amid darkness, filth and disease, you will be fulfilling the highest and best object for which we are bound together – the upbuilding of our citizenship and the uplift of humanity.<sup>74</sup>

Visanska's words reflect an image that clubwomen projected of themselves as protectors of the South. Like female reformers throughout the country, South Carolina clubwomen identified as "municipal housekeepers" who were compelled to clean up their cities and rid them of disease and contamination. In 1908, Charleston established its first tuberculosis clinic, and clubwomen continued their mission to educate the public concerning the disease.

Visanska's most passionate cause was education. She understood the primacy of educational reform and asserted that it should begin with the young child. Thus she began a crusade for the establishment of kindergartens in a state whose education system was marred by problems of class, race, poverty, and geography.<sup>75</sup> If clubwomen could establish kindergartens, they could provide care to the poor children of working mothers. She flamboyantly implored clubwomen to work toward this goal: "[T]he feeble cry of the children of the poor has been heard in the land, and fortunately, with the want has also come its relief – the free kindergarten."<sup>76</sup>

Visanska campaigned relentlessly for a free kindergarten and, with other clubwomen, successfully established these preschools on the local level. With her as the initial president, the Kelly Kindergarten Association opened the first free kindergarten in the South in 1891, named after Henrietta Aiken Kelly, the founder of the Charleston Female Seminary. The first free kindergarten served the children of factory operatives in a mill village in Charleston.<sup>77</sup>

Clubwomen continued to work for the establishment of additional kindergartens, particularly in the mill districts of the upcountry, the hub of textile manufacturing in South Carolina. Visanska remained committed to the kindergarten movement throughout her lifetime and chaired the Kindergarten Department of the South Carolina State Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>78</sup>

The free kindergartens, like the Kelly Kindergarten, were funded by charitable donations. However, during the 1920s clubwomen petitioned the South Carolina legislature to fund local public kindergartens.

Despite their efforts, a kindergarten bill was killed in committee and never came to a vote.<sup>79</sup> Fortunately, with the unrelenting work of clubwomen, free kindergartens were established in South Carolina long before the state took the initiative to provide public funding.<sup>80</sup>

Progressives urged their local governments to construct playgrounds to improve the mental, moral, and physical well-being of children.<sup>81</sup> Playgrounds were an important component of the progressive agenda, and some of the first playgrounds were started by settlement houses in large cities or civic groups on land donated by philanthropists. Serving as president of the Charleston Civic Club from 1904 to 1910, Visanska fought for the establishment of playgrounds. Under her leadership and savvy fundraising acumen, substantial donations provided by Charleston's elite made the first municipal playgrounds possible in South Carolina.<sup>82</sup> Once again, clubwomen's initiatives preceded municipal and state government reforms as women expanded their realm from family to community needs.

#### *The Evils of Child Labor*

In a state dominated by textile manufacturing, child labor was a way of life for many children from poor families. Cotton mills were the most child-labor intensive industries in the United States. In 1900, children under sixteen comprised twenty-five thousand of the nearly one hundred thousand textile workers in the South. By 1904, overall employment of children had increased to fifty thousand with twenty thousand children under twelve working.<sup>83</sup>

South Carolina clubwomen and reformers focused attention on the child labor issue because of the dangers associated with young children working in the mills, besides the fact that working children did not attend school. Motivated as they were by the need to educate children, reformers focused on the needs of mill children "who were overwhelmingly more likely to be illiterate."<sup>84</sup>

Visanska was among the first federation leaders to raise the problem of child labor in South Carolina mills. In an address on "The City Woman in Club Life," she described the problems associated with the New South: the impact of industrialization and child labor. As the child labor problem in the South attracted national attention, she recommended a legislative program to abolish child labor, mandate compulsory

*Lewis Hine, "Spinners & doffers in Mollahan Mills, Newberry, S.C.  
 Many others as small," 1908.  
 (Library of Congress.)*

education, and pass maximum hours and minimum wage laws. In her appeal she asked, "Shall our men, women, and children progress towards a higher citizenship or be allowed to deteriorate through adverse surroundings, unwise legislation and avarice?"<sup>85</sup>

Middle-class progressive reformers like Visanska and the clubwomen she represented became the targets of antireform politicians. According to historian Walter Edgar, they were accused of neglecting their families, and "running around, doing society."<sup>86</sup> Coleman Blease, South Carolina's governor from 1910 to 1913, resisted any intervention in the lives of millworkers and fought against child labor legislation.<sup>87</sup>

Visanska and other clubwomen were also faced with a degree of awkwardness concerning child labor. Their class status proved problematic for several reasons. First, many clubwomen were married to mill owners. Second, clubwomen were often friends or their husbands were associates of mill owners. Finally, their "pride of place" in the state's industrial progress affected their struggle.<sup>88</sup> These issues created divisions

among clubwomen in advocating fully for child labor reforms. Thus, knowing she could not garner support from most clubwomen to pressure the legislature for child labor laws, Visanska appealed to women to improve opportunities for education in mill towns. Yet this provided another example of how Visanska and other activists were frequently thwarted from realizing their reform agenda because of antireform governments and state legislators who were unwilling to appropriate funding or challenge the status quo.

After years of political opposition to state government intervention in the lives of millworkers, child labor legislation, and compulsory education, however, the election of Governor Richard Manning in 1914 signaled a new era for progressive reform. Under Manning's leadership, the state legislature of South Carolina passed compulsory education and child labor laws with the minimum age set at fourteen.<sup>89</sup>

Like many clubwomen, Visanska realized that it was difficult to get men to vote for their social reforms, so they sought the ballot to better influence politicians. Nonetheless, she was simultaneously concerned

*South Carolina governor  
Richard Manning.  
(Library of Congress.)*

that the suffrage movement might jeopardize women's reform initiatives. Concerned that "suffragists were marking all women's clubs political," Visanska suggested that it "would be beneficial for the suffragists within clubs to moderate their actions so that they would not cause 'outsiders' to associate all clubs with suffrage."<sup>90</sup>

The changes that occurred in women's roles as a result of their involvement in clubs and reform activities threatened traditional southern and American male expectations of woman's proper place. Southern women often faced resistance "from those who believed that clubs threatened women's traditional gender roles."<sup>91</sup> Consequently, they stepped cautiously into the public sphere by emphasizing their "womanly" qualities and maternal intentions. Thus it comes as no surprise that Visanska and other southern activist women walked a fine line balancing what Johnson defines as "traditional notions of Southern womanhood that encompassed both traditional ideals of the Southern Lady and more progressive norms of the New Woman."<sup>92</sup>

At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Charleston City Federation of Women's Clubs, Visanska proudly stated: "In City, State, and Nation, the Federated Clubwoman has long been recognized as an uplifting force, a power in every 'Battle for the Right.'"<sup>93</sup> Acknowledging the struggles, defeats, and the frequent lack of support they experienced over the years, the members of South Carolina's women's clubs successfully raised the public's awareness of the problems facing the New South. They lobbied the legislature, raised money, and brought about significant reforms that improved the lives of South Carolinians.

Visanska never slowed down and rarely took a break from her good works. She continued to be active in many Charleston organizations, as a charter member of the Charleston Female Seminary Alumnae Association, the Charleston Guild of Arts and Crafts, and the Roper Hospital Auxiliary. When the South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Regional Trade Exposition (known as the Charleston Exposition) took place from December 1901 to June 1902, Visanska served on the Board of Administration, a position signifying her status in the community.<sup>94</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Rosa Hirschmann Gantt and Sarah Bentschner Visanska were progressive reformers whose actions were rooted in Jewish values that

stressed women's obligations to their religion and to the community.<sup>95</sup> Moving from leadership roles in Jewish women's organizations to involvement in women's clubs, they transformed charitable and benevolent work into reform "and began to generate new solutions to social problems."<sup>96</sup> Few things hindered their determination, and even in wartime they poured their energies into local patriotic causes and civic responsibilities.

During World War I in Spartanburg, Rosa Gantt organized five hundred local women to serve in the Red Cross, sell Liberty Loans, and engage in hospital work for soldiers. She was the only woman appointed to serve on a draft board in the United States and advanced to a position on the District Advisory Medical Board of Appeals. Gantt also held a commission from the Department of Commerce as a medical examiner of air pilots. In true Progressive-Era fashion, Gantt served on the Fosdick Committee on Training Camp Activities to develop a recreational morale program for the soldiers stationed at Camp Wadsworth in Spartanburg.<sup>97</sup>

Visanska, meanwhile, turned her attention to the home front in Charleston where she organized the Women's Division of the American Red Cross and conducted the city's food conservation campaign. She directed several drives on behalf of Liberty Loans, the Red Cross, and War Savings Stamps and helped organize the Community Club for enlisted men.<sup>98</sup>

Imbued with a progressive spirit seeking to improve the health, education, and general well-being of women, children, and the deserving poor, Gantt and Visanska left an indelible mark on the health and welfare of South Carolinians. As the historian Katherine Kish Sklar commented, "these [issues] highlight the most crucial features of women's reform activism in the Progressive Era—the ability of women to speak for the national welfare."<sup>99</sup>

There is no evidence that Rosa Gantt and Sarah Visanska ever met, yet they shared similar goals and often advocated for the same reforms, like medical inspection of schools and guidance for wayward girls. Gantt and Visanska were part of a larger, nationwide movement led by reforming women during the early twentieth century. While they were not well-known like the women at the forefront of national reform movements such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, Ida B. Wells, or Mary McLeod Bethune, they were leaders in statewide reform move-

ments.<sup>100</sup> They joined the ranks of women like Gertrude Weil of North Carolina, who advocated for southern farmers and millworkers, birth control, and suffrage; Suzanne Scruggs, who founded the Children's Protective Union in Memphis, Tennessee; and Mary Munford, president of the Richmond, Virginia, Educational Association.<sup>101</sup> They were among a group of South Carolina reformers like Emily Plume Evans of Spartanburg, who fought for the cause of women and children workers in the state; Wil Lou Gray, the education reformer and advocate for adult literacy; Martha Orr Patterson, who championed reformatories for delinquent boys; and the Pollitzer sisters of Charleston, who promoted education reform, free libraries, public health, and woman suffrage.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, Rosa Gantt and Sarah Visanska managed to achieve major city and state improvements while retaining conventional appearances as southern and American women. When Rosa Gantt died in 1935, she was praised for her many accomplishments: "Aside from her skill and genius as a practitioner, her gentle, cultured womanly bearing and sympathetic personality endeared her to those with whom she came in contact."<sup>103</sup> Another tribute commented that her personality "shone with the gentle radiance of a star. A soft-spoken gentlewoman, devoted wife, and gracious hostess, she was also endowed with strength of purpose, foresight and the undaunted courage of the pioneer."<sup>104</sup> When Sarah Visanska passed away in February 1926 a local newspaper writer noted that "in addition to her gifts as a lecturer [and] her ability as an organizer and executive, Mrs. Visanska was a woman of charming personality."<sup>105</sup> The tributes written in honor of Gantt and Visanska reflect not only their contributions as professional women but their attributes as southern ladies.

As Bauman demonstrates in his study of female activists, southern Jewish women did not avoid serious civic involvement, nor did they "shr[i]nk from controversy because of their desire for acceptance."<sup>106</sup> Rosa Hirschmann Gantt and Sarah Bentschner Visanska exemplify New South progressives who served their communities in leadership positions and challenged gender barriers. They are examples of the positions that numerous Jewish women carved out in activist women's organizations in South Carolina and elsewhere during the early twentieth century.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Mark K. Bauman for prompting my interest in this topic. His recommendations and excellent editorial skills made this article possible. I am also indebted to the work of Joan Marie Johnson, whose work on *Southern Ladies, New Women*, provided a much-needed framework for understanding the lives of southern female activists.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Club-women in South Carolina, 1890–1930* (Gainesville, FL, 2004), 134.

<sup>2</sup> For classic books on the Progressive movement, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (1955; repr. New York, 2011); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967); and Arthur S. Link, *Progressivism* (New York, 1983). For books specifically on Progressivism in the South, see Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, TN, 1983); William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880–1930*, (1992; repr. Durham, NC, 2000); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For African American women and the Progressive movement in the South, see Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890–1920* (New York, 1990); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s–1920s* (Urbana, IL, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Diane C. Vecchio, *Merchants, Midwives, and Laboring Women: Italian Migrants in Urban America* (Urbana, IL, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (1970; repr. Charlottesville, VA, 1995), 107, 141.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South, 1865–1945* (Wheeling, IL, 2008), 71.

<sup>7</sup> Mark K. Bauman, “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22 (Spring 2003): 34–78.

<sup>8</sup> Eric L. Goldstein and Deborah R. Weiner, *On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 2018), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life*, (New York, 1972), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil: Jewish Progressive in the New South* (Chapel Hill, 2017), ix.

<sup>11</sup> Goldstein and Weiner, *On Middle Ground*, 73.

<sup>12</sup> Dianne Ashton, “Expanding Jewish Life in America, 1826–1901,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York, 2008), 47–69.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, *Women and Gender*, 76.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Flynn Siler, *The White Devil's Daughters: The Women Who Fought Slavery in San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Turner, *Women and Gender*, 74–76.

<sup>17</sup> Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Southern Lady*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Sallie Southall Cotton, "Accomplishments of Women's Clubs," quoted in Scott, *Southern Lady*, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*, 73.

<sup>21</sup> Turner, *Women and Gender*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 44.

<sup>23</sup> These publications include Johnson, *Southern Ladies*; Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*; Marjorie J. Spruill, "Forward," *Southern Women in the Progressive Era: A Reader*, ed. Giselle Roberts and Melissa Walker (Columbia, SC, 2019), ix–xii; Amy Thompson McCandless, "Anita Pollitzer: A South Carolina Advocate for Equal Rights," in *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson (Athens, GA, 2010), 2:166–89; and Belinda Friedman Gergel, "Irene Goldsmith Kohn: An Assimilated 'New South' Daughter and Jewish Women's Activism in Early Twentieth-Century South Carolina," in Spruill, Littlefield, and Johnson, *South Carolina Women*, 2:190–214.

<sup>24</sup> Gergel, "Irene Goldsmith Kohn," 193.

<sup>25</sup> In a recent issue of *The Journal of American History* (December 2019, pp. 662–94), an interchange on "Women's Suffrage, the Nineteenth Amendment, and the Right to Vote" featured several leading historians discussing the Nineteenth Amendment, suffrage, and women's political activism. The participants discussed major themes in the scholarship and the scholarly work that influenced them most. The discussion centered on issues of race. Immigrant women were largely left out of the discussion except for one reference to Chicanas. When asked about the gaps in scholarship on these topics, one discussant suggested digging into local records to examine activism at the rank-and-file level (p. 693). I would suggest pushing that further to examine local records that reveal the role of ethnic women in these endeavors.

<sup>26</sup> See Gergel, "Irene Goldsmith Kohn" and McCandless, "Anita Pollitzer."

<sup>27</sup> Pollitzer's artistic talents introduced her into a lifelong friendship with Georgia O'Keeffe. Pollitzer authored a book based on their shared letters, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O'Keeffe, The Letters & Memoir of a Legendary Friendship* (New York, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Her full name was Love Rosa Hirschmann, but she dropped Love, and preferred to use L. Rosa, or simply Rosa.

<sup>29</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Charleston County, South Carolina.

<sup>30</sup> Biographical Information, folder A, Hirschman Family Papers, MSS 1034-045, Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC (hereafter cited as Hirschman Family Papers).

<sup>31</sup> William Chapman Herbert, "L. Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, M.D.," in *A Brief History of Medicine of the Spartanburg Region and of the Spartanburg County Medical Society, 1700–1900* (Spartanburg, SC, 1992), 164.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–66.

<sup>33</sup> “Love Rose Hirschmann Gantt, M.D.,” in *Opening Doors: Women at the Medical University of South Carolina*, accessed December 17, 2019, <http://waring.library.musc.edu/exhibits/MUSCwomen/Gantt.php>.

<sup>34</sup> D. A. Russell, South Carolina Writers’ Project, “Life History, Robert Joseph Gantt,” February 15, 1939. Robert Joseph and Dr. Love Rosa H. Gantt Collection, Kennedy Room, Spartanburg County Public Library, Spartanburg, SC (hereafter cited as Gantt Collection).

<sup>35</sup> Rosa H. Gantt, “Report of a Case of Angio-Myxo Sarcoma of Larynx with Expulsion of Large Tumor,” *Laryngoscope* (St. Louis, 1908), and “Congenital Cataract-Hereditary Influences,” *Southern Medical Journal* 9 (March 1916): 266–68. Gantt Collection.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Evridge Hill, “Dr. Hilla Sheriff: Caught between Science and the State at the South Carolina Midwife Training Institutes,” in Spruill, Littlefield, and Johnson, eds., *South Carolina Women*, 3:78–94.

<sup>37</sup> Marsha Poliakoff, *Portraits of a People: A History of Jewish Life in Spartanburg, South Carolina* (Spartanburg, SC, 2010), 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Southern Israelite*, March 24, 1927; Sisterhood files, Temple B’nai Israel, Spartanburg, SC.

<sup>39</sup> Poliakoff, *Portraits of a People*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 151–52.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Edgar, “The New Era Club,” *The South Carolina Encyclopedia* (Columbia, SC, 2006), 666–67. See also Antoinette Taylor, “South Carolina and the Enfranchisement of Women: The Later Years,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80 (October 1979): 298–310.

<sup>42</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1971), 425.

<sup>43</sup> Hill, “Dr. Hilla Sheriff,” 79.

<sup>44</sup> Medical Inspection of Schools, Columbia, SC, April 22, 1910, February 21, 1912, and December 23, 1912. Gantt Collection.

<sup>45</sup> L. Rosa Gantt, “Medical Inspection of Schools in South Carolina,” reprint from *Southern Medical Journal* 4 (April 1913): 239–43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>48</sup> L. Rosa Gantt, M.D., “American Women’s Hospitals,” *Annual Report*, Spartanburg General Hospital file, Gantt Collection.

<sup>49</sup> “Love Rosa Hirschmann Gantt,” *Opening Doors*.

<sup>50</sup> L. Rosa Gantt, “American Women’s Hospitals,” *Annual Report*, Spartanburg County Department of Health; General Hospital; County Health Department; TB Department, and Negro Department, 1930, 5/41, Gantt Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Hill, “Dr. Hilla Sheriff,” 82.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Herbert, *Brief History of Medicine of the Spartanburg Region*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–200.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 179.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>57</sup> Biographical Information, folder A, Hirschman Family Papers.

<sup>58</sup> I could not locate immigration records for the Bentschner family but was able to establish that they were living in Charleston from the 1860s. See JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR), Ancestry.com, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/1411>.

<sup>59</sup> "Sarah Visanska," Field Work Files, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC (hereafter cited as JHC-CC).

<sup>60</sup> Erin Smith, Thomas Wingard, and Michael Jowers, "Historic Report of 12 Bull Street: The Cameron House," accessed February 19, 2020, <http://wardj.people.cofc.edu/Historic%20Report%20Cameron%20House%20historic%20report.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Debra Bloom, "Henrietta Aiken Kelly (1844-1916): The Correspondence of a Special Field Agent," in Roberts and Walker, *Southern Women in the Progressive Era*, 141-79.

<sup>62</sup> "Sarah Bentschner Visanska," in *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada, 1914-1915*, ed. John William Leonard (New York, 1914), accessed May 16, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/womanswhoswhoofa00leon/page/840/mode/2up>.

<sup>63</sup> "Sarah Visanska," Field Work Files, JHC-CC.

<sup>64</sup> Jim Parker, "19 East Battery: Classic South of Broad Mansion Known as 'Golden Home' Boasts Top-Notch Charleston Harbor Visages," *Post and Courier*, July 7, 2018, accessed February 19, 2020, [https://www.postandcourier.com/business/real\\_estate/east-battery---classic-south-of-broad-mansion/article\\_1d30ce62-7e28-11e8-aa8d-afcc90f3c290.html](https://www.postandcourier.com/business/real_estate/east-battery---classic-south-of-broad-mansion/article_1d30ce62-7e28-11e8-aa8d-afcc90f3c290.html).

<sup>65</sup> Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*, 75. See also Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (1993; repr. Tuscaloosa, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>71</sup> "Federation of Women's Clubs, The State Executive Committee Meets in Newberry – Delegates to the National Gathering in St. Louis," *Keowee Courier*, February 24, 1904.

<sup>72</sup> Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, eds., *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives* (Hanover, NH, 2001), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Shea Rabley, "History of Tuberculosis in South Carolina," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://sntc.medicine.ufl.edu/Files/OnTheFly/Content/16%20-%20Hist%20of%20TB%20in%20SC%20-%20Rabley.pdf>. Combating tuberculosis (or consumption as it was commonly called) was a major national issue for Jews and Jewish organizations. The B'nai B'rith established the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives in Denver, Colorado, in 1899.

<sup>74</sup> "Club Women Invited: Mrs. Visanska Addresses Open Letter to Women of South Carolina," *Watchman and Southron* (Sumpter, SC), November 24, 1909.

<sup>75</sup> Virginia B. Bartels, ed., "The History of South Carolina Schools," accessed February 18, 2020, [https://www.carolana.com/SC/Education/History\\_of\\_South\\_Carolina\\_Schools\\_Virginia\\_B\\_Bartels.pdf](https://www.carolana.com/SC/Education/History_of_South_Carolina_Schools_Virginia_B_Bartels.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 138.

<sup>77</sup> Bureau of Economic Research, State of South Carolina, "An Outline of the History of the Free Kindergarten Association of Charleston, South Carolina," Anita Pollitzer Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Lowcountry Digital Library, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/content/anita-pollitzer-family-papers>. Such free kindergartens with the added role of social settlement spread throughout the region and country with the support of Jewish women. The Free Kindergarten and Social Settlement of Atlanta, for example, was founded in 1906. Yet in Atlanta, unlike Charleston, this was a Jewish-organized and run facility. Bauman, "Southern Jewish Women," 44.

<sup>78</sup> "Sarah Visanska," Field Work Files, JHC-CC.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 139.

<sup>80</sup> A 1962 law made kindergartens mandatory in South Carolina. See South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59—Education, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c065.php>.

<sup>81</sup> Julia Sniderman Bachrach, "Playground Movement," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed February 19, 2020, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/976.html>.

<sup>82</sup> "Sarah Visanska," Field Work Files, JHC-CC.

<sup>83</sup> History of Child Labor in the United States—Part 1: Little Children Working, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2017/article/history-of-child-labor-in-the-united-states-part-1.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 152.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC, 1998), 472.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>90</sup> Johnson, *Southern Ladies*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 167.

<sup>94</sup> 1901-1902 Charleston West Indian Exposition, accessed February 20, 2020, <http://www.stolenhistory.org/threads/1901-1902-charleston-west-indian-exposition.1567>.

<sup>95</sup> See Dorothy Schneider and Carl L. Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York, 1993), 96.

<sup>96</sup> Katherine Kish Sklar, "Organized Womanhood: Archival Sources on Women and Progressive Reform," *Journal of American History*, 75 (June 1988): 176-83.

<sup>97</sup> William Chapman Herbert, "Selected Biographies of Spartanburg County Physicians," in *A Brief History of Medicine in the Spartanburg Region*, 165; Brad Steineke, "Dr. Rosa

Gantt: A Medical Pioneer," Spartanburg County Public Libraries quarterly publication (Winter 2019): 8–9; Poliakoff, *Portraits of a People*, 64.

<sup>98</sup> "Sarah Visanska," Field Work Files, JHC-CC.

<sup>99</sup> Sklar, "Organized Womanhood," 177.

<sup>100</sup> Jane Addams, the social reformer and founder of Hull House in Chicago; Florence Kelley, a resident of Hull House whose investigations into slum conditions in Chicago led to social welfare legislation; Julia Lathrop, another resident of Hull House who committed herself to education reform and children's welfare; Ida B. Wells, the investigative journalist especially of lynching and a founder of the NAACP; Mary McLeod Bethune, the civil rights activist and educational reformer who founded Bethune-Cookman College in Florida.

<sup>101</sup> For Gertrude Weil, see Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil*; for Suzanne Scruggs, see Johnson, *Southern Ladies*; for Mary Munford, see Clayton McClure Brooks, "Unlikely Allies: Southern Women, Interracial Cooperation, and the Making of Segregation in Virginia, 1910–1920," in Angela Boswell and Judith McArthur, eds., *Women Shaping the South*, (Columbia, Missouri), 2006.

<sup>102</sup> These women are discussed in Johnson, *Southern Ladies*.

<sup>103</sup> "Services Today for Dr. Gantt," *Spartanburg (SC) Herald*, November 20, 1935.

<sup>104</sup> Biographical sketch of Rosa Hirschman Gantt, *Journal of the South Carolina Medical Association* 83 (November 1987), folder B, Hirschman Family Papers.

<sup>105</sup> "Woman's Club News: Tribute to Mrs. Visanska," *Gaffney Ledger*, March 19, 1926, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/5482777/tribute-to-mrs-visanska-1926>.

<sup>106</sup> Mark K. Bauman, "The Youthful Musings of a Community Activist: Josephine Joel Heyman," in *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History: Studies in Institution Building, Leadership, Interaction, and Mobility* (Tuscaloosa, 2019), 168–69.