

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Bryan Edward Stone, *Associate Managing Editor*

Scott M. Langston, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

Stephen J. Whitfield, *Book Review Editor*

Jeremy Katz, *Exhibit Review Editor*

Adam Mendelsohn, *Website Review Editor*

2014

Volume 17



Southern Jewish History

Editorial Board

Robert Abzug	Kirsten Fermaglich
Dianne Ashton	Dan J. Puckett
Ronald Bayor	Stuart Rockoff
Hasia Diner	Ellen Umansky
Seth Epstein	Deborah Weiner
Lee Shai Weissbach	

Southern Jewish History is a publication of the Southern Jewish Historical Society available by subscription and as a benefit of membership in the Society. The opinions and statements expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the journal or of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

Southern Jewish Historical Society OFFICERS: Dale Rosengarten, *President*; Ellen Umansky, *President Elect*; Phyllis Leffler, *Secretary*; Les Bergen, *Treasurer*; Jean Roseman, *Corresponding Secretary*; Stuart Rockoff, *Immediate Past President*. BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Stephen Bodzin, Perry Brickman, Bonnie Eisenman, Robert Gillette, Gil Halpern, Sol Kimerling, Beth Orlansky, Dan J. Puckett, Bryan Edward Stone, Jarrod Tanny. Bernard Wax, *Board Member Emeritus*. EX-OFFICIO: Rayman L. Solomon.

For authors' guidelines, queries, and all editorial matters, write to the Editor, *Southern Jewish History*, 6856 Flagstone Way, Flowery Branch, GA 30542; e-mail: MarkKBauman@aol.com. For journal subscriptions and advertising, write Rachel Heimovics Braun, 954 Stonewood Lane, Maitland, FL 32751; e-mail: journal@jewishsouth.org; or visit www.jewishsouth.org. For membership and general information about the Southern Jewish Historical Society, write to PO Box 71601, Marietta, GA 30007-1601 or visit www.jewishsouth.org.

Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*; *America: History and Life*; *Index to Jewish Periodicals*; *Journal of American History*; *Journal of Southern History*; RAMBI-National Library of Israel; the Immigration and Ethnic Historical Society *Newsletter*; and the *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (www.bjpa.org).

Southern Jewish History acknowledges with deep appreciation grants from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, New York, and the Gale Foundation, Beaumont, Texas.

Copyright © 2014 by the Southern Jewish Historical Society

ISSN 1521-4206

PERMISSION STATEMENT

Consent by the Southern Jewish Historical Society is given for private use of articles and images that have appeared in *Southern Jewish History*. Copying or distributing any journal, article, image, or portion thereof, for any use other than private, is forbidden without the written permission of *Southern Jewish History*. To obtain that permission, contact the editor, Mark K. Bauman, at MarkKBauman@aol.com or the managing editor, Bryan Edward Stone, at bstone@delmar.edu.

Postscript: Reminiscences and Observations

by

Bernard Wax*

I have been fortunate to be present and to participate in the resurgence of interest and production of works in the field of American Jewish history on the national, regional, and local levels since 1966. Although there previously had been numerous studies, books, and exhibits on the subject, the numbers produced in almost fifty years have been astounding, as have the numbers of both amateur and professional historians. These have been accompanied by a steady increase in the number of museums of outstanding size and quality ranging across the nation, as well as the creation of local, state, and national genealogical societies. I should like to comment upon the changes that have transpired in the two institutions with which I have had the most intimate and knowledgeable experience, the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) and the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), each of which has been affected by the events that I have cited.

Since my retirement from the AJHS, that institution has moved from the campus of Brandeis University to New York City, its original home from 1892 to 1968. In my view, what had been essentially an archival, research, and publication institution geared primarily to serving the academic community and interested laypeople changed as a result. The governing body, which had been national in representation, became identified with New York City, whereas previously members had come from diverse

* The author may be contacted at dollybern2@cs.com.

areas such as Texas, California, Illinois, Michigan, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania, as well as New York. Annual meetings also took place in these states in order to “drum up” interest as well as financial support. The AJHS’s return to New York, where it has partnered with several other Jewish institutions under the aegis of the Center for Jewish History, has led to a less significant national presence in recent years and increased its economic needs. After the advent of the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, the AJHS’s prominence may have been diminished as well.

Other competing factors have also emerged, primarily the number of college and university publications now devoted to the field, as well as commercial publishers who have recognized the public interest in the subject. The role of academics, previously an integral part of society operations, also seems to have been diminished, perhaps because of these other “opportunities.” In essence this has resulted in less grassroots participation, not only from lay participants but also from professionals,’ although biennially scholars’ conferences highlighting particular themes designed primarily for academic participation meet in different communities. The topic of the last such meeting was “Jews and Judaism in the American World of ‘Difference.’” The major representation of scholars appears to be associated with the AJHS quarterly, *American Jewish History*, whose various editors, board members, and advisers number more than twenty.

Despite what I have described as a change from what I perceived as its original purpose—the collection and preservation of historical material—the AJHS in one aspect has returned to its roots with the establishment of the AJHS New England Archives at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. This new entity is dedicated to documenting and preserving the history of the Greater Boston and New England Jewish communities by using, in part, digitization on an extensive scale.

In contrast to the founding of the AJHS, the SJHS’s roots were regional in nature and purpose. The original entity was formed during the 1954 tercentenary marking the arrival of the

first known group of Jews in what was to become the United States. The SJHS was rejuvenated during the period of the nation's bicentennial for the purpose of noting the contribution of southern Jewry to the nation's history and whose several hundred members come from a wide variety of states, including those in the North, like myself. Unlike the AJHS, the SJHS is completely run and staffed by volunteers, with a modest budget for publications, meetings, and awards for research, books, and exhibitions, nominations for which are actively solicited nationally and internationally. Annual meetings are held in different southern communities with both lay and academic participation and with local involvement in planning for and hosting attendees. Religious services are integrated into each meeting, with congregations involved in welcoming visitors and speakers invited to address jointly the members of the society and the host synagogue. The community element of the SJHS is perhaps best demonstrated by its newsletter, the *Rambler*, which contains news relating to the annual meeting, local southern Jewish historical societies, publications, events, and related stories. I cite all these activities because I feel that each has played a role in making southern Jewish history a popular and useful study for the ordinary citizen seeking information about the Jewish experience in the South, and it is to the credit of the society's leadership that these activities continue to be supported.

What seemed initially to be an organization with limited and narrow vision has, upon examination and reflection, turned out to be quite the opposite. The professionalism achieved by the SJHS is best demonstrated by its various activities and the results of its support for publications, research, and exhibits throughout its history. The broad program content for the 39th annual SJHS conference—held in Austin jointly with the Texas Jewish Historical Society and titled “Crossing Borders: Southern Jews in Global Contexts”—serves as an indication of the extensive professional advancement of the SJHS.