

THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

SUMMER 2005 VOLUME X - NUMBER 2



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Bernard Warshaw

From^{the} President

Bernard Warshaw

We had a magnificent weekend, April 1–3, in Beaufort. If you were not there we missed you and you missed an interesting 100th anniversary. The entire program was exceptionally well planned and well executed, from the rededication prayers at Beth Israel Synagogue on Friday night and Shabbat services Saturday morning (thanks to Cantor Feinberg) to the dinner at the Yacht Club Saturday evening.

We were fortunate to have had outstanding speakers during the weekend, including both local talent—Helen Goldman and Stephen Schein—as well as two distinguished keynoters. Saturday evening Rabbi Harvey Tattelbaum recalled his tenure, some 45 years ago, when he served as chaplain at Parris Island and rabbi of Beth Israel Congregation in Beaufort and Temple Mt. Sinai in Walterboro. Sunday morning he gave us a preview of his forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Tales of the Village Rabbi*. Both talks were warm, loving, philosophical—altogether excellent.

Dr. Lee Shai Weissbach of the University of Louisville set Beaufort's Jewish history in the context of the experience of Jews in other small towns America, the subject of his new book, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, just published by Yale University Press.

We wrapped up Saturday afternoon with lively discussions and informative reports from Stanley Farbstein and Cyndi Levy, who, along with other committee members, are doing a superb job documenting Jewish burial grounds across the state.

On Sunday morning, the JHSSC Board Meeting was held at the Beaufort Arsenal, where the Jews of Beaufort worshipped before the synagogue was constructed. Thanks to Marty Perlmutter, Enid Idelsohn, Dale Rosengarten, and incoming president Belinda Gergel for their contributions to the agenda.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the celebration and looks forward to returning to Beaufort for more warm hospitality. Our hats are off to Joan Schor, president of Beth Israel Congregation, Rose Mark, Stanley Farbstein, Cantor Sheldon Feinberg, Paul Keyserling, and the many volunteers who made up the host committee.

Please mark your calendars for September 9, 10, and 11, 2005, to help Beth Shalom in Columbia celebrate its 100th anniversary and enjoy a weekend full of events (see page 9 for schedule of programs). Come join the excitement!

Sincerely,

Bernard Warshaw
President

*On the cover:
House of Peace
on Marion Street
Columbia, SC*

*Courtesy of Congregation
Beth Shalom*

Country Roads and Country Stores

by Stanley Farbstein



Keyserling family papers, Special Collections,
College of Charleston Library.

In today's era of paved roads, telephones, cable and Internet communication, with a cell phone in everyone's pocket, it is hard to visualize how difficult it was a century ago for people in Beaufort County who didn't live in the county seat to get about, buy food and other necessities, communicate with family and friends, or even go to school.

One hundred years ago, most roads were unpaved, made hazardous by ruts and sand in dry weather, deep mud when wet. Rivers and creeks were crossed by ferries; the first bridge between Beaufort and Lady's Island was completed in 1927. No road traversed the Combahee River between Gardens Corner and Jacksonboro until about 1935. Travel by car to Charleston was by way of Walterboro. In 1939, the road to Hunting Island stopped at Coffin Point. The thin strip of asphalt ended at Frogmore, after which, all was sand in dry weather and mud when it rained.

The easiest way to get from Beaufort to Yemassee was by the C&WC railroad, with stops at Burton, Seabrook, and Sheldon. From Yemassee, trains ran to Charleston and Savannah on the Atlantic Coast Line and Lobeoco on the Seaboard Air Line.

The other way to get to Savannah or Charleston was by boat. In 1914, there were three trips a day from the Bay Street dock in Beaufort to Savannah on the screw-propelled *Clivedon* and the side-wheeler *Pilot Boy*. You could leave Beaufort in the morning, shop in Savannah, and return to Beaufort before dark. To make the voyage more pleasant, the *Clivedon* hired a piano player and other musicians to perform en route. On some trips, the boat stopped at Port Royal, Hilton Head, Daufuskie, and possibly Bluffton. Regular service to Charleston was on the *Islander*.

Country stores served the needs of rural residents. They provided subsistence farmers with items that could not be raised in their fields, gardens, and chicken yards. The country store frequently included a post office and was possibly the only place to contact the sheriff or doctor or family members living elsewhere. In country stores, farmers might arrange to sell their crops and animals surplus to family needs.



From about 1890 until 1919, Jacob and Rachel Shindel Getz ran a country store on Parris Island and raised nine children over the store. For Parris Island farmers, the Getz family provided credit “on the book” with a page for each customer. Debts were settled when the crop “came in.” Supplies for the store came mainly on a ship from Baltimore that anchored in Port Royal harbor where cargo was unloaded onto a lighter owned by Jacob Getz. The ship made regular trips between Baltimore and Savannah.



*Getz store on Parris Island, SC, ca. 1900.
Courtesy of Stanley Farbstein.*

At this time, Parris Island had no school. As the Getz boys got older, they were sent to school in Savannah. They left the island by boat on Sunday afternoon, lived with a Jewish family in Savannah during the week, and returned to Parris Island on the Friday afternoon boat. Schooling for girls didn't get as much attention back then; the girls traveled to school in Port Royal each day by a cutter that crossed Port Royal harbor.

In the early years, Parris Island was a coaling station for U.S. Navy ships and later a naval disciplinary barracks. Port Royal Harbor was the deepest natural harbor south of Norfolk. In 1898, Jacob Getz carried supplies to the sailors on the Battleship Maine while it loaded coal prior to departure for Havana, Cuba. In 1915, the Marine Corp Recruit Depot was established. In 1919, the federal government bought all private property on the island, and the Getz family moved to Beaufort.

Many other country stores in Beaufort County were operated by Jewish shopkeepers, who typically lived and raised their families “over the store.” Here are a few store locations and proprietors that come to mind:

- Israel and Celia Keyserling had a store with a post office at Dale. They also sometimes provided room and board to the teacher of the school at Dale. Later, their son, King, and his wife, Polly Keyserling, operated the store at Dale.
- Michael and Rosa Levy Keyserling operated a store and post office at Seabrook. They had four children, Harold, Bertram, Leonard, and Sara Dena.
- Mark Keyserling operated a country store at Sams Point on Lucy Creek near the Coosaw River. The store was located near where Sams Point Road now crosses the creek. Mark would find it hard to believe that the road is now a divided four-lane highway.
- Samuel Schein and his wife, Esther Mark Schein, ran a store on land that is now part of the Beaufort Marine Corp Air Station. Their son, Morris, married Sadie Garber of Williston, South Carolina, and brought her to Beaufort where they operated a store on Bladen Street downtown.
- After their marriage, David and Annie Schein built a store and home on Cabin Bridge Road on Saint Helena Island.



Mark Keyserling with family and friends at Mark's Corners. Keyserling family papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston Library.



Mark Keyserling's store and dock at Sams Point, ca. 1935. Keyserling family papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston Library.

- Esther Schein's brother, Joe Mark, had a country store near Burton. His bride, Lena Mae Banisch, came from her home in Poland by way of New York to Yemassee where Mr. Mark met her. As far as is known, the Mark's four daughters and son Ernest spent their early years at the store near Burton on what is now shown on county maps as "Joe Mark Road."
- Aaron and his wife, Betty Lipsitz also had a store in Burton. Aaron previously had a store on Bladen Street, but wanted to move to the country, as do so many of today's city dwellers.
- In the early part of the 20th century, Sam Lipton arrived in Beaufort as a bachelor and operated a store at Grays Hill. After serving in the U.S. Army in France during World War I, Lipton returned to Beaufort and ran the cobbler shop on Parris Island.



Downtown Beaufort, ca. 1935. Keyserling family papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston Library.

He married Helen Stern from Charleston and they raised their three sons in Beaufort.

- Isaac and Betty Donen had a country store in Tomotley near Yemassee. They had four children.
- Moses S. and Pauline Mittle Epstin set up shop in Port Royal before the turn of the 20th century, but perhaps it should not be called a country store because Port Royal residents would not agree that their town was "in the country." After all, Port Royal was the eastern terminus of the C&WC Railway, had the deepest harbor on the Atlantic coast south of Norfolk, and boasted regular ship traffic to and from Europe.

All the families named here except the Epstins are buried in Beth Israel Cemetery in Beaufort. As far as is known, all were members of Beth Israel Congregation, and many of the earlier residents were charter members. At least four served as president of the congregation at one time or another.

Life in the country was not easy. In fact, between 1914 and 1922, Isaac Donen, Samuel Schein, and Aaron Lipsitz were murdered during robberies in their country stores.

There were many other Jewish-owned country stores in South Carolina, and no doubt some in Beaufort County that were missed in this article. If you know of other stores or have pictures or stories or anecdotes about the family life of country storekeepers, please send such information to:

Stanley Farbstein
14 Lockwood Drive
Apt. 11-H
Charleston, SC 29401

Any documentation we gather will go into the archives of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the Marlene and Nathan Addlestone Library and/or be put on display at the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center at the College of Charleston. If you would like to have your pictures returned, please so indicate and they will be copied and the originals returned.

Beth Shalom's Centennial: Early Synagogues



I think I know why I joined the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.

Originally, my idea was to preserve the present by celebrating Jewish cultural arts. Toward this end, I helped organize JHSSC's Council for Jewish Culture, which encouraged and publicized concerts, film festivals, theatrical performances, award ceremonies, and exhibitions

around the state. But looking more closely at the history of my congregation, Columbia's Beth Shalom, I realize that we also need to work to retrieve our past, that we have already sustained significant losses of our Jewish heritage. Columbia's first synagogue and one of Beth Shalom's earlier sanctuaries burned to the ground, and another was demolished and replaced with a parking lot. Why? How did this happen?

The Jewish community in Columbia has existed since the early 19th century. As in other early American cities, many of the town's first Jewish settlers were Sephardic, with ancestors from Spain or Portugal. In 1846, Columbia's first congregation was organized and given the name Sharit Israel—the same name that religious traditionalists in Charleston had adopted a few years prior, when they broke from Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in opposition to certain reforms.

Columbia's Sharit Israel met in a building on Assembly Street, upstairs from the Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded 20 years before. One of the nation's earliest Jewish Sunday schools convened in the basement. In 1865, the structure burned to the ground, as General W. T. Sherman and his troops occupied the city.

Columbia's Jewish community declined sharply after the Civil War, and then slowly grew with an influx of new immigrants from Eastern Europe. Henry Steele, who would become the first president of the Tree of Life, and Phillip Epstein, who would become the

founding president of the House of Peace (later renamed Beth Shalom), were among the individuals who met together for services.

The group tried to compromise between Reform and Orthodox practices, but by 1905 the Orthodox families began conducting services in a separate space and, two years later, filed a lawsuit against the trustees of the Tree of Life. (See *Epstein v Berman*, 78 S.C. 827, 1907.) The Orthodox minyan met in a small house on Park and Lady Streets, and decided to call itself House of Peace. Congregants moved across Park Street into their first real shul, and in 1912 they received a state charter.



Sanctuary of second synagogue built on Park Street, later called "The Big Apple."

In 1915, Beth Shalom's sanctuary burned to the ground—the city's second synagogue lost to fire. The Torah scrolls were rescued by Isadore Gergel, who ran into the burning building to save them.

A larger structure was erected on the same site in the old style, with a bima in the center of the sanctuary. The second Park Street synagogue still stands today, moved from its original location to the corner of Park and Hampton. Known as the "The Big Apple," named for a dance craze that was popular at the time, the building operated as a night club. The former Beth Shalom has been restored by the city of Columbia and is listed in the National Registry of Historical Buildings.

A Year of Celebration

Lost Forever

by Lyssa Kligman Harvey

The congregation's first rabbi, David Karesh, who began leading services in 1908, served for 50 years as the "everything rabbi"—cantor, kosher butcher, mohel, and Hebrew teacher. With the growth of Columbia's Jewish population, he and his flock felt a bigger space was needed. They bought a lot on Marion Street, but, in the midst of the Great Depression, with monthly dues of \$2.50, the congregation could not afford to begin construction until 1935.

M. B. Kahn, a member of Beth Shalom and one of Columbia's leading contractors, constructed the new building in a style typical of synagogue architecture in the '30s and '40s. It was an imposing brick structure, with steps leading up to an arched entrance. (See cover photo.) Inside there was a raised pew at the back and a balcony, which turned out not to get much use. In 1935, shortly before the new synagogue was dedicated, the board of directors proposed a momentous change: to allow women to sit downstairs. The synagogue sisterhood, called Daughters of Israel, voted unanimously in favor of this new policy, while many members were staunchly opposed.

A compromise was reached permitting women and children to sit on the far right hand side of the sanctuary where two front rows were removed to make sure they were separated from the men and the ark. In 1946, the House of Peace became a member of the United Synagogues of America, officially affiliating with the Conservative movement, as many congregations across the nation did in the years following World War II.



Trenholm Road Synagogue Trilogy Celebration, January 1993.
l-r: Bill Stern, president; Carol Bernstein and Rose Kline, co-chairs;
and Ben Stern, past president.



Wedding of Helen Greher and Sol Kahn, 1936
—first marriage performed in Marion Street synagogue.

I remember this synagogue quite well. My family regularly attended Friday night services and all the High Holidays services. I remember walking around the Marion Street block during yizkor services for Yom Kippur, and running around in the downstairs social hall during kiddush luncheons. I was four years old when the congregation celebrated its Golden Jubilee. In 1955, land had been purchased in the area of town where many Jewish families were relocating. Plans were to build a Jewish Community Center, an education building, and eventually a new synagogue. My sisters and I attended Hebrew school and Sunday school at the new Beth Shalom education building on Trenholm Road. In 1968, twelve of my classmates and I celebrated our bat mitzvahs at the Marion Street shul.

In 1971, a third synagogue was built on additional land purchased less than two miles from the JCC and education building. The congregation adopted the name Beth Shalom and dropped its English translation, House of Peace. This structure, where we worship today, is a contemporary concrete design in a wooded lot in suburban Columbia. An education wing was built in 1980. In this synagogue, the Harvey/Kligman family have witnessed many family weddings, brisses and naming ceremonies, and bar and bat mitzvahs.

All photos courtesy of Congregation Beth Shalom.

My family has played an active part in Beth Shalom's history by taking leadership roles and helping to make policy changes for the congregation. My grandfather, Louis Kligman, was on the board of directors of the Marion Street synagogue. My father, Melton, has been on the board of directors at the present synagogue and served for many years as chair of the ritual committee. My mother, Helene, and my sister, Heidi Lovit, both have been Sisterhood presidents. My brother-in-law, David Lovit, recently served as president of the congregation.

For three generations, family homes have been located close to the synagogues. My grandfather, Louis Kligman, had a dry-goods business on Assembly Street and lived close to the Park Street shul. My father's office and my parents' first home after they married were quite close to the synagogue on Marion Street. When Beth Shalom moved to Trenholm Road, the Kligman family moved a mile and a half away, and my husband and I settled within a two-mile radius. Living in walking distance, when my children were little we walked to shul. It is comforting to know that the synagogue is close by. Its proximity reflects its importance in my life.

What became of the Marion Street synagogue? The property was sold and the building demolished. Where Beth Shalom once stood is now a parking lot. The chapel in the present synagogue houses the old Marion Street pews and eternal light, as well as the doors of the ark and Torahs from the old synagogue. It is reassuring to be among these familiar relics. When I drive by Marion Street and see nothing where the old synagogue used to be, I get nostalgic and angry.

Razing a building that embodies a part of history causes irrevocable loss to the community. At the dedication ceremony of the Marion Street synagogue in 1935, Governor Olin D. Johnson remarked, "As I look at this handsome structure, I am reminded of the many sacrifices, the labor of love that devoted members of this congregation have put into its successful completion." Our synagogue today stands strong because of the dedication of this continued lay leadership in our congregation.

As I get older, I want to remember and preserve the past. Preserving our heritage is too big a task for any one person. Being a member of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina has made me grateful for individuals who are curious about our history and anxious to record it. Beth Shalom has a vital, active group of archivists and historians: Helen Kahn, Florence Levy, Henry Hammer, Sol Silver, Helen Copland, Melton Kligman, Leon Spotts, Alan Kahn, Rose Kline, Dean Bernstein, Belle Jewler, Aaron Smalls, Toby Drucker, Henry Ray Wengrow, Jerry Kline, Shelley Kriegshaber, and many more.

Belinda and Richard Gergel's history of Columbia's early Jews, *In Pursuit of the Tree of Life*, includes an account of Beth Shalom's beginnings. Laurie Baker Walden is in the process of writing a full-scale congregational history, as Beth Shalom enters its second century. These individuals, along with the Historical Society, will ensure that we do not lose any more of the culture embodied in our historic buildings, artifacts, or in the stories we tell. I am grateful that Beth Shalom's history and our present Jewish life will not be lost for future generations.

The major source of historical information for this article is the Beth Shalom Centennial Celebration keepsake book (2005).

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH CAROLINA **ARTS AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina is pleased to announce its third annual Arts and Cultural Achievement Award. Previous winners are Dale Rosengarten and Meira Warshauer.

This year the award will be presented to an individual of any faith in South Carolina (native-born or resident) who exemplifies and demonstrates exceptional leadership, support, and/or prowess in fostering and preserving Jewish arts and culture in South Carolina.

This individual can be:

- A presenter, coordinator, or patron of the arts
- An individual who is involved in visual, literary, theatre, media, or performing arts, or music.

The award will be presented at the fall meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina held in Columbia, SC, September 9–11, 2005. The deadline for nominations is August 15, 2005.

For more information contact: Lyssa Harvey at 803.920.0707.

JHSSC Meets in Columbia, SC Sept 9-11, 2005



Beth Shalom Synagogue, 2004.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

Friday, September 9th

- 6:30 – 7:30 pm Shabbat Services at Beth Shalom
5827 North Trenholm Road
Sermon: “Writing Beth Shalom’s History,”
Laurie Baker Walden
- 7:30 – 8:30 pm Dinner in the Social Hall
Panel Discussion: “The Future of Beth Shalom,”
moderated by Moss Blachman

Saturday, September 10th

- 10:00 am – 12:00 noon Shabbat Morning Services
Welcome: Jack Swerling, President of Beth Shalom
Proclamation Presentation from Governor Mark Sanford by Bernard Warshaw, President of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina
- 11:00 am **First Keynote Address**
- 12:00 – 1:30 pm Kiddush Luncheon
- Afternoon open
- 6:00 pm Reception at *The Big Apple*
Formerly a Beth Shalom Synagogue
- 8:00 pm Concert by “**Brio**,” an internationally renowned early sephardic music quartet, at the USC School of Music

Sunday, September 11th

- 9:30 am The First Columbia Synagogue Historical Site Commemoration on Assembly Street
- 10:30 – 11:30 am **Second Keynote Address**
- 11:30 am – 12:30 pm Jewish Historical Society Board Meeting
- 12:30 pm – Whaley Street Cemetery Tour
Conducted by Aaron Small

JHSSC Meeting Columbia, South Carolina

September 9-11, 2005

NAME(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

*The cost for this weekend is \$65 per person
not including hotel accommodations.*

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Return form to:

*JHSSC / Jewish Studies Program
96 Wentworth Street
Charleston, SC 29424*

COLUMBIA HOTEL INFORMATION:

The Whitney Hotel

700 Woodrow Street
Columbia, SC 29205
Phone: 803.252.0845
or 800.637.4008

RATE: \$99/night

Special rate available until August 10, 2005

You must make your own reservations
(request a room in the “**Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina** room block.”)

From Halfway around the Globe Miedzyrzecki Family Reunites in Charleston

by *Harlan Greene
and Warren Kohn*

In Polish, the term Miedzyrz means “between two rivers.” In southern parlance, “between two rivers” can only refer to the peninsula between the Ashley and the Cooper Rivers. It was here, in Charleston, South Carolina, at the end of December 2004, that members of Miedzyrzecki family of Kaluszyn, Poland, held the first reunion in their history. Not only had most never been to Charleston, but many, coming from all over the U.S.A. and as far away as Australia, had never met before, scattered by the Holocaust and divergent life paths after the war.



Eleazar Miedzyrzecki, ca. 1920

Eleazar, a tallis maker, and his wife Rivka Ruchel Miedzyrzecki, had five children in Poland. Their descendants now number 186. Two of the Miedzyrzeckis' sons came to America in 1913. Abraham became Abraham Goldberg in Paterson, New Jersey, where he was a textile merchant. His brother Isaac settled in Charleston and became Isaac Cohen. Isaac was followed by his wife and children in 1920—Yehudis Cohen, who married Abe Kirshtein, and Alter (Albert) Cohen, who became Albert Kohn. Albert's son Warren is the family member who organized the reunion.



Opening reception of the reunion, Charleston, SC, December 2004.

A daughter of Eleazer and Rivka Ruchel Miedzyrzecki, Yehudit Miedzyrzecki, settled in Charleston and married Elozer (Louis) Toporek. Their daughter, Rosalee (Toporek) Gellman, resides in Savannah, Georgia.

Another daughter, Kayla, married Moses David Kawer, and perished in the Holocaust. Her daughter and son-in-law, Regina and Sam Greene, survived and settled in Charleston in the late 1940s. Regina's sister, Maria, also survived and eventually settled in New Jersey, marrying a Miedzyrzecki cousin there.

The fifth child of Eleazer and Rivka Ruchel Miedzyrzecki, Tauba, married Motre Liebhaber in Poland. They had four children, two of whom perished in the Holocaust. The surviving children eventually immigrated to Argentina and Australia and descendants of that branch of the family were in attendance at the 2004 reunion.

From halfway around the globe, and down seven generations, cousins came together in the hospitable American South to affirm their connection to each other and to life.



*Warren Kohn
holding
Miedzyrzecki
family tree.*

New and Noteworthy:

Early Scrapbooks and Journals of Jacob S. Raisin

by Solomon Breibart

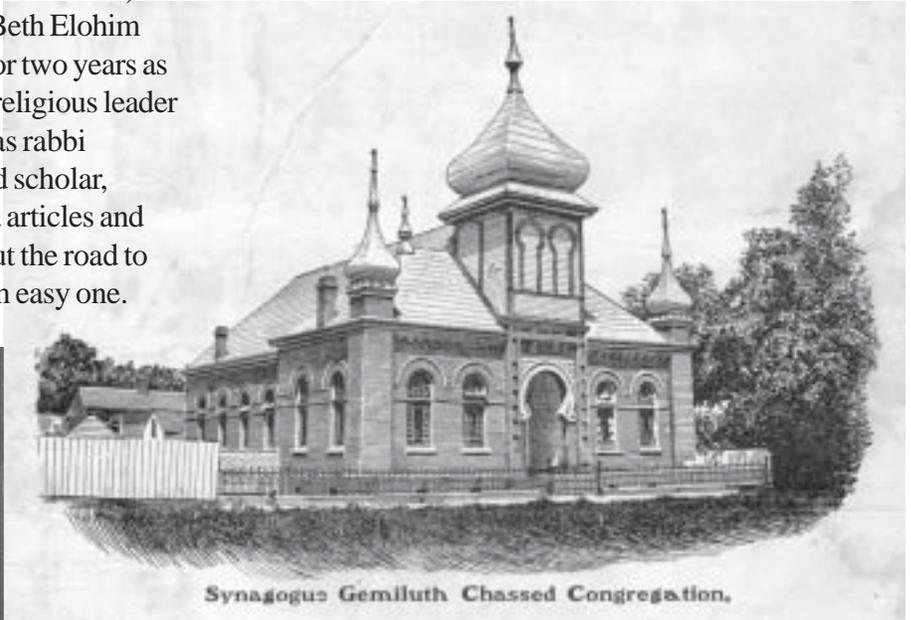
For 29 years, Jacob Salmon Raisin (1878–1946) served Charleston’s historic Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim faithfully and with dedication as rabbi and for two years as rabbi emeritus. He was the longest tenured religious leader of the congregation and first to be honored as rabbi emeritus. He was a recognized Hebraist and scholar, author of several books and many published articles and essays, and, withal, a community leader. But the road to Charleston and Beth Elohim had not been an easy one.



Jacob S. Raisin, ca. 1900.

Jacob Raisin began his career in 1900, fresh from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. At the age of 22, barely eight years after he came to America with his family from Russia, bursting with energy, he took the pulpit at Gemiluth Chesed Synagogue in Port Gibson, Mississippi, a congregation which had been organized in 1875 and whose building was erected in 1891.

Port Gibson was, at that time, a small, typically southern town of about 3,000 people, with the usual southern attitudes on social issues, especially the race question. Raisin deplored the racial bias he witnessed in Mississippi, hated what it did to people of color, and had to restrain himself on the subject.



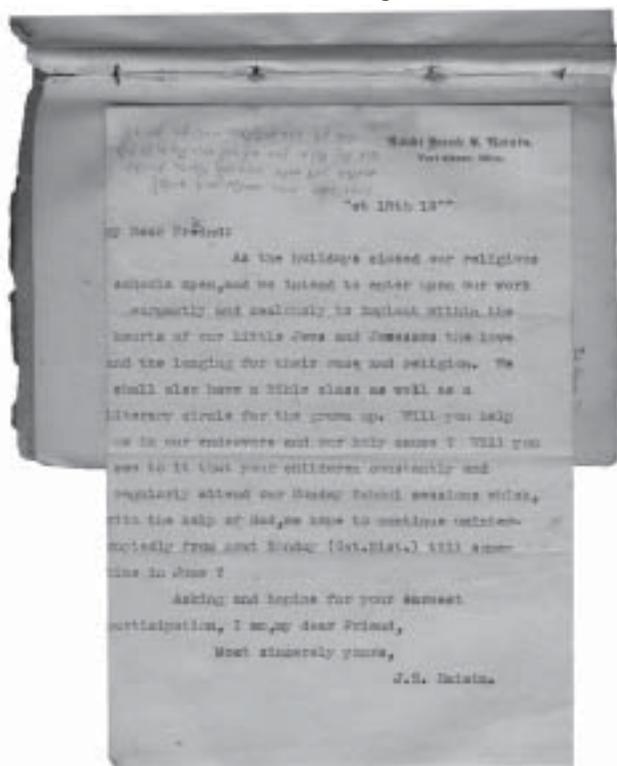
Engraving of Synagogue Gemiluth Chesed, Port Gibson, MS., from The Owl, New Orleans, LA., August 1902.

With a congregation of only 50 members, his duties were not demanding. Most of the time, he was bored to distraction and spent hour upon hour reading and writing. He boarded in a house of one of the townspeople, occupying a small but fairly comfortable room in the attic. He kept a diary, which he later bound into a volume called *My Life’s Tragi-Comedy*. He missed intellectual discourse and congenial people. Frequently, to improve his command of English, he would go to the synagogue and read aloud passages from the works of famous clerics.

Raisin was anxious to start a family and have a home of his own, but few opportunities presented themselves and his compensation would not allow it. Despite the fact that he was “held in high esteem by the entire community—Christian as well as Jewish,” he saw no future for himself in Port Gibson and, almost from the beginning, sought desperately a more lucrative and stimulating environment.

He was, his diary reveals, a very troubled young man who began to doubt his choice of a profession, especially after his relentless search for a new position from New Orleans to Philadelphia, and many small places in between, proved unsuccessful. He did manage to leave Port Gibson in 1905, and served later in pulpits in Butte, Montana; Las Vegas, New Mexico; and Troy, New York.

It is not my intention in this article to write more about Jacob Raisin; that will come later. Here, I want to acquaint our readers with the treasure trove of information contained in the new addition to the Raisin papers, recently donated by Mordenai Raisin Hirsch and Rachel Raisin to the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston. The brief account above is based on items from a scrapbook kept by Raisin and a portion of one of the diaries he maintained while at Port Gibson. Fascinating stuff!



Letter pasted into Rabbi Raisin's Port Gibson diary.

The collection contains his published books, manuscripts of works both published and unpublished, and monographs on a variety of issues, Jewish and general. The scrapbooks, covering approximately 50 years, are replete with clippings from newspapers and magazines, and articles in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish. Besides shedding light on the career and life of Raisin, they also reflect the Jewish experience in the communities he served and visited, including the town where he settled down and stayed, Charleston, South Carolina.

All illustrations from the Jacob S. Raisin papers. Gift of Mordenai R. Hirsch and Rachel M. Raisin. Special Collections, College of Charleston Library.

Explorations in Charleston's Jewish History



In its over three hundred years of history, Charleston, South Carolina, has been known for many things. One of the most intriguing aspects of its past— and present—is its dynamic Jewish community.

Documented in the Lowcountry since the 1690s, Charleston Jews have contributed to the region, the nation, and the world. In 1800, the city boasted the largest and wealthiest Jewish population in the country, and Charleston has been continually shaped by this significant group of men and women, both religious and secular, humble and heroic.

Here are their stories—old and new— intermixed with tales of historic buildings, congregations, religious movements, and cemeteries, wonderfully told by preeminent Charleston Jewish historian, Solomon Breibart. Collected from a lifetime of work, these explorations offer the reader a wealth of material: essays of historic significance, biographies, lists and chronologies, and telling vignettes that together suggest the rich mosaic of Jewish life in Charleston and the Lowcountry.

It is a tale told nowhere else, and no one could tell it better, or in such a lively way, than Solomon Breibart.

The History Press, 2005, \$24.99

Other Books of Interest:

Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History

In this book, Lee Shai Weissbach offers the first comprehensive portrait of Jewish life in American small towns. Exploring the history of communities of 100 to 1000 Jews, the book focuses on the years from the mid-19th century to World War II.

Weissbach examines the dynamics of 490 communities across the United States and reveals that smaller Jewish centers were not simply miniature versions of larger communities but were instead alternative kinds of communities in many respects.

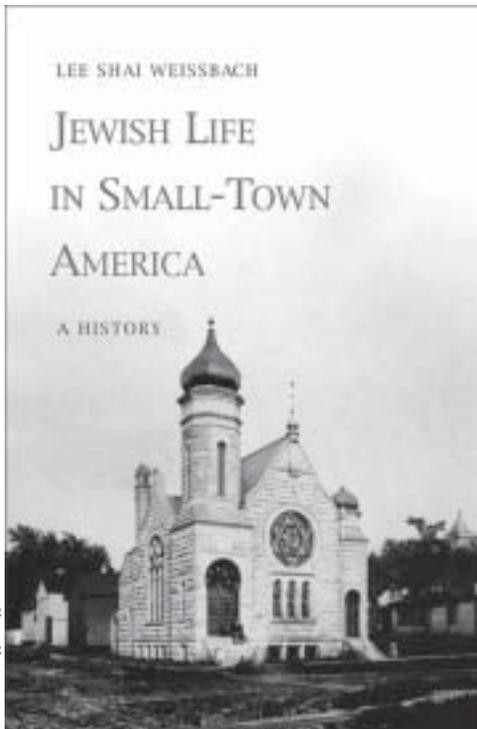
The book investigates topics ranging from migration patterns to occupational choices, from Jewish education and marriage strategies to congregational organization. The story of smaller Jewish communities attests to the richness and complexity of American Jewish history and also serves to remind us of the diversity of small-town society in times past.

“Unquestionably the most thoroughly researched of all books on small Jewish communities, this volume will stand for many years as the definitive work on the subject.”

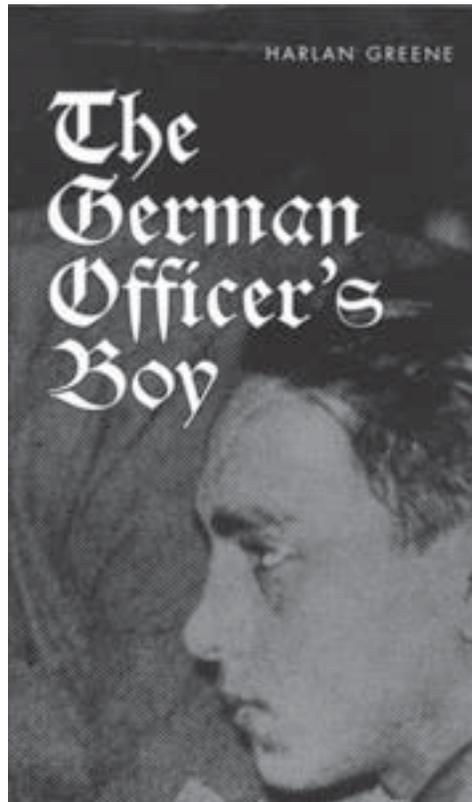
— Jonathan Sarna, author of *American Judaism*

Lee Shai Weissbach is professor of history at the University of Louisville.

Yale University Press, 2005, \$45.00



The German Officer's Boy



What really happened on that infamous afternoon in November 1938, when a young Polish Jew named Hershel Grynszpan walked into the German embassy in Paris and shots rang out? The immediate consequence was concrete: Nazi Germany retaliated with the “Night of Broken Glass,”

recognized as the

beginning of the Holocaust. Lost and overlooked in the aftermath is the arresting story of the confused teenage assassin, whose murder of Ernst Vom Rath was used to justify Kristallnacht.

In this historical novel, award-winning writer Harlan Greene may be the first author to take the Polish Jew at his word. Historians have tried to explain away Grynszpan’s claim that he was involved in a love affair with Vom Rath. Greene, instead, traces the lives of the underprivileged and persecuted boy and the wealthy German diplomat as they move inevitably towards their ill-fated affair. In spare, vivid, and compelling prose, Greene imagines their world, their relationship, and their last horrific encounter, as they tried to wrest love and meaning from a world that would itself soon disappear in a whirlwind of violence and madness.

The son of Holocaust survivors, Harlan Greene is the author of several books of nonfiction and two earlier novels. He is currently project archivist of the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston.

University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, \$26.95

A Small Temple with a Big Heart: Beth Or, Kingstree, South Carolina

by *Miriam Drucker*

In 1988, as I prepared to enter Temple Beth Or for the very first time, I was full of apprehension. My husband and I had recently returned to his hometown to live, and we were attending our first Sabbath services in Kingstree. Much to my surprise everyone welcomed me with open arms. I instantly felt at home in this congregation.

Many of these people had been members of Beth Or since the synagogue was founded in 1948. Thanks to their hard work and determination, the temple was able to offer lots of the amenities of a larger congregation. Even before the building was constructed, members conducted Friday night services in private homes, and some of the adults and older children taught Hebrew to the younger children. The Men's Club and the Sisterhood sponsored a range of activities, including an annual trip to Poinsett State Park, womanless weddings, Purim festivals, clothing donations to Israel, Passover seders, fund raising bazaars, Chanukah parties, religious school classes, and holiday break-fasts. The temple quickly became the center for Jewish life in Kingstree and surrounding communities.

Each year a student rabbi from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City traveled to South Carolina to conduct Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. Often these young rabbis spent the entire High Holiday period in Kingstree. Most of them had never experienced Judaism in the rural South. For some it was the first time they had driven a car in years. Others enjoyed the incredible meals they were served in the members' homes. The visits proved to be educational experiences for everyone, and many of the student rabbis would return for a second visit.

For 56 years the temple was operated successfully, despite the congregation's dwindling numbers. Our dedicated members persisted, but finally we agreed there were just too few of us to continue. In 2004, for the first time since 1948, High Holiday services were not held in Temple Beth Or. As my family sat in Beth Israel in Florence, I found myself overcome with emotion. Although I had been a member of Beth Or for only 16 years, I felt as if a part of me was missing. I can only imagine the void it has left in those who have been members since the founding of the congregation. Its demise leaves us all with sadness in our hearts.



Temple Beth Or, Kingstree, SC. Courtesy of Miriam Drucker.

On February 17, 2005, the final papers were signed for the synagogue to be sold. The local Catholic Diocese needed a larger place of worship and our building was a perfect fit. For various reasons the paperwork for the closing of the temple had been delayed many times—perhaps because the temple would be needed for one last service. Funeral services for Jerry Drucker, my father-in-law, were held on February 16, the day before the closing.

A menorah, a kiddush cup, a tallit, a mezuzah, a yarmulke, the flag of Israel, a plat of the temple property, and books from the religious school have been placed in the Williamsburg County Museum. I hope that people will remember Temple Beth Or as I do, as a small temple with a big heart.



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Dale Rosengarten.....Editor

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Moïse Family Spans Four



Reunion participants assembled in the yard behind the Sullivan's Island home of Loren and Mindelle Ziff, June 2004. Courtesy of Phil Moïse.

The reunion began with a Friday afternoon pilgrimage to the Coming Street Cemetery, a “viewing of the ancestors,” as it became known. Established in 1764 by Congregation Beth Elohim, the Coming Street Cemetery is the oldest surviving Jewish cemetery in the South. In 1841, when Beth Elohim became the first reform congregation in the United States, its orthodox members seceded and established their own cemetery right beside the Coming Street burial ground, walled off from their reform-minded neighbors. The two congregations reunited following the Civil War, and the wall came down. In 2004, wars and divisions long forgotten, Moïse family members mingled in the warmth of a summer afternoon, taking each other’s pictures in front of fading tombstones.

Friday evening found the family in Shabbat services at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, the family’s religious ancestral home. This is the second oldest synagogue building in the United States, and the oldest in continuous use. It was entered into the National Historic Register in 1980. Many of the Moïses had never worshiped in a synagogue. However, regional and religious backgrounds were quickly forgotten when the services ended and the family joined the congregation in the reception that followed. Long known for their sociability, the Moïses

outlasted the congregation and stayed until the tables were cleared and the lights went out.

In June 2004, over a warm Father’s Day weekend in Charleston, South Carolina, 150 Moïse family members from 16 states gathered to celebrate their history in America. That history began in 1791 when Abraham and Sarah Moïse landed in Charleston from Santa Domingo (now Haiti), driven from their sugar plantation by bloody slave uprisings that eventually freed the island from French domination. They arrived with nothing but four children, a small chest of valuables, and the clothes on their backs, completing an odyssey that began years earlier in Strasbourg, France. Abraham was 55; Sarah, 29. They would have five more children over the next 10 years.

The refugees were welcomed by members of Congregation Beth Elohim, established in 1749, the fourth oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. While the family began its life in America as faithful Hebrews (“Moïse” is French for “Moses”), as years passed descendants migrated and intermarried. By the time the family reunited in 2004, it had assimilated into a vibrant mix of Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and those of other persuasions. Judaism took center stage, however, as family members from outside South Carolina reacquainted themselves with their roots.

Centuries in South Carolina

The American Diaspora had forever changed the face of the family, but for that weekend the scattered faithful returned to the Holy City.

by Phil Moïse

Saturday was spent exploring Charleston and gathering at the home of Scott Moïse and Bailey Crump, which became reunion headquarters. There, family histories were shared and gaps in the genealogical chart were filled as family members traced their ancestries through Abraham and Sarah's nine children. On Saturday walking tours created by Ann Moïse and Anita and Ira Rosenberg showed family members where Moïses lived and worked in the early 1800s.

In keeping with the Moïse family's legendary interest in cooking and eating—there are two cookbooks of family favorites—the highlight for many was Saturday night dinner at the home of Loren and Mindelle Ziff on Sullivan's Island, overlooking one of Charleston's world famous salt marshes. The main course was Frogmore Stew, the unofficial seafood dish of South Carolina. Reportedly invented about 60 years ago by a National Guardsman from Frogmore, a small town by that name on St. Helena Island near Beaufort, it consists of shrimp, sausage, and corn on the cob boiled in whatever the cook finds flavorful. The cook that night—lowcountry chef extraordinaire Ben Moïse—never revealed what he put in the water, but it was sufficient to have most diners return for seconds and thirds. Grilled flounder and other delicacies were also provided for those not indulging in the celebrated stew.

Even giving him his full due for the wonderful meal on Saturday night, Ben's main contribution to the family reunion was hosting a Sunday cookout on Moïse Island, on the Intracoastal Waterway north of Charleston. Purchased by Ben in 1985, the Island is about 1/5 of an acre at high tide, just large enough for a one-room cabin, open cook shed, outhouse and campfire area, well-guarded by two cats and a flock of guinea fowl. Swept clean by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, Moïse Island was rebuilt and now is scene to a multitude of Charleston gatherings both sacred and profane. A flotilla of boats carried the party from Isle of Palms Marina to the Island, where the family feasted on hamburgers, hot dogs, and an impressive array of side dishes and desserts brought to be shared, in true southern style.

Fond farewells were exchanged back on the dock at Isle of Palms, bringing to a close one of the most memorable events in the long history of the Moïse family. While the family again scattered to their homes across America, they left a legacy—the Moïse Family Preservation Fund, with donations to be invested in preserving the family's history in Charleston.

Penina Moïse comes home

Sol Breibart, Anita Moïse Rosefield Rosenberg, Ira Rosenberg, and painting conservator Catherine Rogers pose with the partially restored portrait of Penina Moïse (1797-1880) on an easel in Ms. Rogers's studio, April 2005. The Rosenbergs recently acquired the painting from a family member living in Texas. The canvas, attributed to Penina's nephew, Theodore Sidney Moïse, depicts the renowned poet, teacher, and hymnalist against a background of the 1838 fire that destroyed the first synagogue of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim.
Photo: Dale Rosengarten.

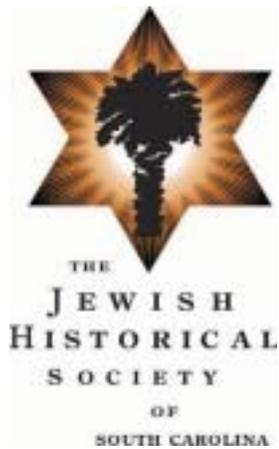


..... and Forward with Promise



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