

THE JEWISH
 HISTORICAL
 SOCIETY
 of SOUTH CAROLINA

FALL 2006 VOLUME XI - NUMBER 2



B'NAI ISRAEL TABERNACLE, SPARTANBURG, S. C.

From the President: Belinda Gergel2
 Reflections on Greenville’s Jewish History.....3
 Dean Street Synagogue: In Search of B’nai Israel’s Founders.....4
 Looking for More Information about Descendants.....5
 Pillars: Support the Society.....6
 JHSSC Meets in Greenville and Spartanburg: October 20-22, 2006.....7
 Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.....8



From the President

I recently reread Eli Evans' outstanding book, *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*, and once again was reminded of the increasing interest and growth of southern Jewish history and Jewish Studies as fields of academic inquiry and personal interest.

As Evans observed in this 1993 work, "Today we celebrate the validity of the southern Jewish experience—for academic research and literature—and take pride in its history and its struggle, in the unique Jewish perspective on southern history. We celebrate the southern Jewish experience as a body of knowledge that needs deeper probing, that can benefit from our perspective as southerners and Jews."

As Evans penned these words, preliminary meetings were taking place here in South Carolina among academics and community leaders about the critical need to collect and gather the personal accounts and documents that told the special story of Jews in our state. Before too long this interest led to the formation of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC), housed at the College of Charleston. Since our inception over a decade ago, our organization has had a remarkable record of achievement in collecting and disseminating the dynamic and diverse stories of southern Jews.

This important effort remains ongoing. The Society has been especially active in fostering and nurturing interest in Jewish history over the last several months. In March we held a regional meeting in Sumter, a community with Jewish residents as early as 1815 and the home of America's first Jewish Chief Justice of a state supreme court. We worshipped at the beautiful Temple Sinai, built in 1913 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Our program was packed with overflow audiences as we explored issues and events of Sumter's unique Jewish past. In the process, we learned more about South Carolina's history, southern history, and the remarkable journey of immigrants to this great nation.

In June a number of our members participated in the 2006 Biennial Scholars' Conference in Charleston, coordinated by Dale Rosengarten, curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston, Marty Perlmutter, director of the College's Jewish Studies Program (JSP), and Enid Idelsohn, administrator of both JSP and JHSSC. Under Dale's outstanding guidance as chair of the program committee, the nation's leading American Jewish historians came to Charleston to explore issues of regionalism, with several programs focused on southern Jewish history. The JHSSC was a co-sponsor of the conference's "Gershwin in Charleston" program at the historic KKBE temple, and our former president Robert Rosen provided an insightful introduction to George Gershwin and his experiences in South Carolina.

This fall we move to South Carolina's upstate region. Our October meetings will be held in the Greenville/Spartanburg area on October 20-22. We will begin in Spartanburg with services at the historic Temple B'nai Israel and travel to Greenville on Saturday for services at Beth Israel. Following the Saturday services, our program will consider the historical experiences of Jews in these important cities, with special panel presentations on a range of topics exploring the settlement of these communities, the activities of Jewish community leaders, and the development of Jewish communal organizations. Our Sunday program and board meeting will be held at Temple of Israel. I hope you will make plans now to join us for this exciting weekend.

We welcome and need your involvement and active participation. Please help us spread the word about our important work and tell your friends to check out our website at www.jhssc.org. I look forward to seeing you in October in Greenville/Spartanburg.

Sincerely,

*On the cover:
Postcard of B'nai
Israel Tabernacle,
Spartanburg, SC,
circa 1918. Courtesy
of Joe Wachter.*

Reflections on Greenville's Jewish History

by Fred Leffert

The history of Greenville Jewry is both an easy and a complex subject. It is easy because it is short. Although individual Jews are known to have lived here in the 19th century, and there was even an Eleazer Elizar who was postmaster of Greenville in 1794, Jewish life, which is traditionally communal life, did not begin until the 20th century. The founding of Congregation Beth Israel in 1911 and the Temple of Israel in 1916 are the first events recorded of Jews in Greenville organizing to live as Jews, with other institutions following—a B'nai B'rith lodge in the early 1930s, a cemetery in 1938, a chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women in 1939, and Greenville Federated Jewish Charities in 1945—altogether a history of less than a hundred years.



Temple of Israel today

That history is also complex, however, in that Greenville's Jewish community may be seen as a microcosm of the larger trends in American Jewish life. The 20th century saw Greenville go from having an orthodox congregation and a kosher butcher to having neither today, from 22 Jewish retail stores on Main Street to none today, and from a city which at mid-century had two Jewish physicians and one lawyer to over a hundred Jewish professionals of all types. It has seen Greenville go from a tightly knit community, an island in a fundamentalist Protestant sea, a community where the synagogue was the center of religious and social life (I have it on good authority that congregational meetings at Beth Israel occasionally became so heated that chairs were thrown), to an assimilated community at ease in a more tolerant larger society, with the synagogoue moving to the periphery of concern, and at least half the Jewish population having no affiliation with traditional Jewish communal institutions.



Old Temple of Israel

Although some of these transitions may be viewed with alarm or sadness, depending on one's point of view, one particularly heartening development has been the emergence of many individual Jews as leaders in the wider Greenville community. This is epitomized by the career of Max Heller, who, while remaining one of the pillars of our own Jewish community, went on to play a major role in the growth of Greenville. As a city council member, head of the chamber of commerce, and two-term mayor, he has been a central figure in the renaissance of downtown Greenville.

Short though its history may be as compared with that of its lowcountry brethren, the Greenville Jewish community has emerged as a diverse, strong, and growing component of the evolving history of Judaism in South Carolina.



Old Beth Israel



Beth Israel today

DEAN STREET SYNAGOGUE ♦ 1917-1961

♦ IN SEARCH OF B'NAI ISRAEL'S FOUNDERS ♦

by Joe Wachter



Stained glass windows in the original Temple B'nai Israel (Dean Street synagogue)

In the summer of 1917, the Temple B'nai Israel Jewish Community opened and dedicated its first synagogue on South Dean Street (at its intersection with Union Street) in Spartanburg, South Carolina. A marble tablet was attached to the main wall of the temple foyer to commemorate the event. The tablet was removed from that original building (which still stands) when it was sold in 1961. Two years later, when the current sanctuary on Heywood Street was built and dedicated, the plaque was fastened to one of the outer walls. As you face the tablet, the left column contains the names of those members of the temple who served on the building committee for the original synagogue building. The right column lists the other members of the temple in 1917. As a sign of those times, only men's names are listed.

I was born in Spartanburg and raised in Temple B'nai Israel and I have always wanted to know more about the founders of my hometown Jewish community. During the last two years I have researched a great many public and family records and interviewed over 50 descendants of those members whose names appear on the tablet. Here are just a few of the stories that have been shared with me. *DAVID AND MOSES GREENEWALD* were born in Americus, Georgia, and lived there during the Civil War. Their uncle, Jacob Weil, volunteered and fought for the Confederacy as part of the 4th Georgia Infantry in Northern Virginia, most notably at the Battle of Malvern Hill—one of the bloodiest battles of the war. *MAX AND ISAAC HENRY GREENEWALD* managed the Spartanburg Opera House, often referred to as the “Greenewald Opera

House,” from approximately 1886 to 1907, when the theater was torn down. The Spartanburg Opera House was similar to the present-day Newberry Opera House. *LOUIS ALEXANDER MEYERSON* hired a young student named Olin D. Johnston to work in the department store he managed in the early 1920s, and in 1934 was appointed to Johnston's staff when Johnston was elected governor. In 1939 Meyerson moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where he became treasurer of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. *MAX COHEN'S* youngest son, *HAROLD COHEN*, volunteered for the Army during World War II as a buck private and at the war's end was a lieutenant colonel. According to one source, he was in line to become a general at the recommendation of his commander, General George S. Patton. Cohen's infantry soldiers rode on tanks commanded by his wartime and life-long friend, Creighton Abrams, who later became a general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *ABE MEYERSON* sang as a young boy in vaudeville with Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, and others in shows on the Lower East Side of New York City. These shows featured young kids and were produced by songwriter, Gus Edwards, who is best known for writing hits such as “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” and “School Days.”

There are many other stories that I am investigating about B'nai Israel's members and their families who helped organize Spartanburg's Jewish community. Please contact me at the address or numbers below if you have information to share or can help me locate any of the descendants. I welcome your comments and would enjoy talking and visiting with you.



*B'nai Israel
Spartanburg,
South Carolina*

Contact: Joe Wachter
4505 Camellia Drive, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577
Home: 843.449.6259, Office: 843.449.2000, Fax: 843.449.7755
E-mail: jhw@48th.com

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DESCENDANTS OF:

Interior of the original Temple B'nai Israel (Dean Street synagogue)

ABRAHAM LEVIN was born in Germany in 1877. He was a tailor and he and his wife, Gertrude, had four children: David, Rose, Bessie, and Sara. He was elected as Temple B'nai Israel's first president in 1912.

JULIUS S. SCHWARTZ was born in Russia in 1887. He was a dry goods merchant and he and his wife, Rebecca Bokritzsky, had one child, Harold, who was born in Georgia. In the early 1900s he lived in Jasper, Georgia.

JOSEPH JACOBS was born in Russia in 1876. He was a tailor and he and his wife, Fannie, had five children: Moses, Jacob, Abraham D., Oscar, and Sadie. Prior to coming to Spartanburg, he lived in Baltimore, Maryland. Shortly after the temple was built, he and his family first moved to Washington, D.C., and later moved to Long Beach, California. His eldest son, Moses, earned a degree in pharmacy from the Medical College of Virginia (now called Virginia Commonwealth University) and his youngest son, Oscar, became a dentist and practiced in southern California.

HARRY HARRIS BRILL, SR., was born in 1885 in South Carolina. He was the son of William and Rachel Brill, who at one time lived in the town of Kozer, Colleton County, South Carolina. His mother and some of his siblings later lived with him in Augusta, Georgia. He was an electrician and he and his wife, Rhea Hyman, had two children: Pauline E. and Harry Harris, Jr. In 1930 he lived in Miami, Florida, working as a life insurance agent. He later lived in Columbia, South Carolina, where he was a member of the Tree of Life Congregation.

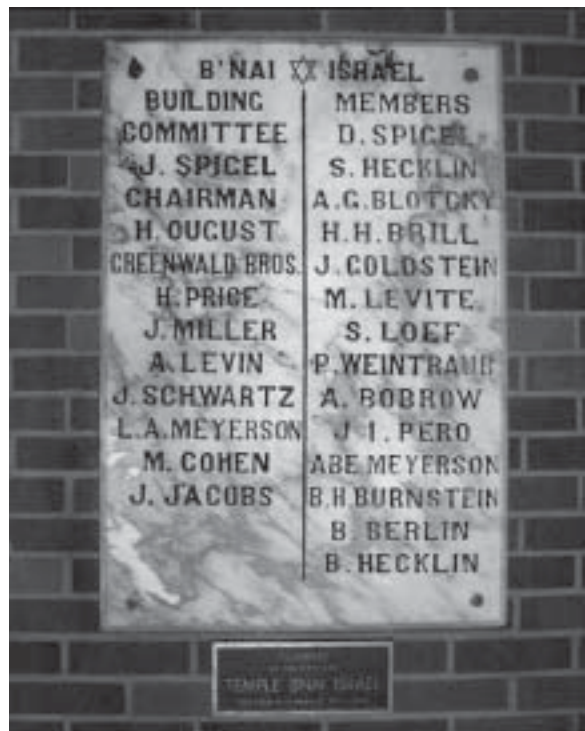
JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN was born in Russia about 1865. He was a merchant working as a salesman in department stores, first in New York City and later in Spartanburg. He and his wife, Hannah, had seven children: Sarah, Rebecca, Louis, Betsie, Harris, Rosie, and Samuel Joseph.

MORRIS ABRAHAM BOBROW was born in Russia in 1880. He was a shoemaker by trade and lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City and in Chicago, Illinois, before coming to Spartanburg. He and his wife, Tilly Annie, had five children: Mildrew M., Paul, Aaron, Louis, and Gertrude G. In 1930 he and his family lived in Newark, New Jersey.

JEROME I. PERO was born in New York City in 1896. He was the cousin of Louis A. Meyerson and Abe Meyerson. As far as can be determined, he never married. He was a salesman and buyer for a department store while living in Spartanburg. He later moved to Florida and passed away in 1945.

BENJAMIN H. BURNSTEIN was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1892, the son of Louis and Lena Burnstein. He also later lived in Richmond, Virginia, as did his parents and siblings. He and his brother, Jacob Robert Burnstein, operated a junk dealership in Spartanburg. He and his wife, Wise (who was from Argentina), had one child, Juanita.

BERNARD ("BARNET") BERLIN was born in Russia between 1865 and 1870. He worked as a peddler in both Union and Spartanburg, South Carolina, and later managed a candy store in Brooklyn, New York. He and his wife, Jenny ("Zina" or "Zenna"), had nine children: Solomon, Edith, Jacob, Sarah, Annie, Selma, Ida, Rosa, and Abraham.



B'NAI ISRAEL BUILDING COMMITTEE PLAQUE:

Joseph ("Joel") Spigel, Chairman, Hyman Ougust ("August"), Greenwald brothers (David, Moses, Isaac Henry, and Max Greenwald), Harry Price, Joseph Miller, Abraham Levin, Julius S. Schwartz, Louis Alexander Meyerson, Max Cohen, Joseph Jacobs. MEMBERS: David M. Spigel, Samuel Hecklin, Abraham G. Blotcky, Harry Harris Brill, Sr., Joseph Goldstein, Meyer Levite, Samuel Loef, Phillip Weintraub, Morris Abraham Bobrow, Jerome I. Pero, Abe Meyerson, Benjamin H. Burnstein, Bernard ("Barnet") Berlin, Barnett Hecklin

Pillars: Support the Society


by Martin Perlmutter, Executive Director

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina relies on its benefactors for much of its annual support. Pillars provide the Society with the wherewithal to accomplish all that it does.

The Society has taken major steps forward this year. In addition to our bi-annual newsletter, ongoing archival efforts at the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston Library, the College's annual Elderhostel on South Carolina Jewish History, and our annual meetings, the Society co-sponsored the 2006 Biennial Scholars' Conference on American Jewish History, which met in Charleston this past June. Well over a hundred academics from across the country and beyond met at the College of Charleston, went to KKBE for a panel session, dinner, and a Gershwin concert, traveled to Middleton Place for talks about southern Jewish cuisine and tastes of the same.

This semester, the Society's President, Belinda Gergel, is giving a course on southern Jewish history at the College of Charleston. Moreover, the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program has committed to developing a Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College. Such a Center would assure the long-term excellence of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina by adding an archivist to the staff of the Jewish Heritage Collection, expanding the library's holdings of southern Jewish material, and making the College a hub of public programs on southern Jewish history and culture.

The Society needs your continued support. Pillars make a five-year commitment of \$5000, that is, \$1000 a year for five years. Please become a Pillar and help make the Jewish history of South Carolina a living legacy for future generations.



The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina
Newsletter is published twice a year.

Dale Rosengarten.....Editor
Enid Idelsohn.....Design and Layout

The Pillars of the Society (2006)

John and Marcie Baker	Columbia, SC
Doris Baumgarten	Aiken, SC
Norman and Eve Berlinsky	Charleston, SC
Fred and Bunny Bernstein	Mt. Pleasant, SC
Alan Coleman	Charleston, SC
Harriette Kraft Ehrlich	Jacksonville, FL
Carolee and Harold Fox	Charleston, SC
Meri Gergel	Columbia, SC
Richard and Belinda Gergel	Columbia, SC
Dr. Mark and Judith Green	Charleston, SC
Reuben Greenberg	Charleston, SC
Ruth B. Greenberg	Florence, SC
Ann and Max Hellman	Charleston, SC
Alan and Charlotte Kahn	Columbia, SC
Michael Kogan	Little Falls, NJ
Ronald Krancer	Villanova, PA
Cynthia Levy	Hilton Head Island, SC
Ina Rae Levy	Hilton Head Island, SC
Susan Lourie	Columbia, SC
Frieda and Jack Margolies	Charleston, SC
Rose Mark	Beaufort, SC
Albert and Robin Mercer	Owensboro, KY
Leon and Karen Ortner	Charleston, SC
Susan Pearlstine	Park City, UT
Edward and Sandra Poliakoff	Columbia, SC
Klyde and Claire Robinson	Charleston, SC
Benedict and Brenda Rosen	Myrtle Beach, SC
Robert and Susan Rosen	Charleston, SC
Jeffrey and Mickey Rosenblum	Charleston, SC
Stuart M. Shamah	Myrtle Beach, SC
Paul and Jayne Siegel	Walterboro, SC
Steven and Harriett Steinert	Sullivan's Island, SC
Mark C. Tanenbaum	Sullivan's Island, SC
Bernard and Ann Warshaw	Walterboro, SC
Jerry and Anita Zucker	Charleston, SC
<hr/>	
Harvey and Mimi Gleberman, o.b.m.	Spring Island, SC
Anne Oxler Krancer, o.b.m.	Villanova, PA

.....

**Yes, I/we want to become a pillar of the JHSSC.
In doing so, I/we commit to a gift of \$5,000
over a period of five years.**

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____ **Fax:** _____

Email: _____

Check enclosed \$ _____ (includes annual membership)

.....

JHSSC Meets in Greenville-Spartanburg, SC October 20-22, 2006

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

Friday, October 20th at B'nai Israel, Spartanburg

- 7:30 – 8:15 pm Shabbat Services
- 8:15 – 9:45 pm Oneg Shabbat: **Friday Night Live with Mappamundi**

Mappamundi is a gleeful North Carolina band that performs world music or ethnic music from all kinds of places including Eastern and Western Europe, the British Isles, colonial America, and recently, Latin America. They specialize in music from Jewish traditions—Yiddish, Sephardic, Hebrew, and Klezmer—and perform at bar/bat mitzvahs and Jewish weddings.

Saturday, October 21st at Beth Israel, Greenville

- 10:00 – 11:30 am Shabbat Morning Services
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm Kiddush Luncheon
- 1:00 – 2:30 pm Rediscovering Jewish Spartanburg:
Panel Discussion with
Marsha Poliakoff, Harry Price,
and Joe Wachter
- 2:45 – 4:15 pm Reflections on Jewish Greenville:
Panel Discussion with
Hy Brand, Fred Leffert,
and Jay Wachs
- 7:00 pm Light Dinner
- 8:00 pm Havdallah and Concert:
Mappamundi:
World Music Our Way

Sunday, October 22nd at Temple of Israel, Greenville

- 10:00 am Judy Goldman: **Growing Up Jewish in Small Town South Carolina**

Judy Goldman's second novel, *Early Leaving*, was published in hardcover by William Morrow in October 2004 and in paperback by Harper Perennial in September 2005. Her first novel, *The Slow Way Back*, was published by William Morrow and released in paperback by Harper Perennial. She is also the author of two books of poetry, *Holding Back Winter* and *Wanting To Know the End*, winner of the Gerald Cable Poetry Award, a national prize, and three top poetry prizes in North Carolina.

- 11:00 am – 12:00 noon
Jewish Historical Society Board Meeting

JHSSC Meeting Greenville-Spartanburg, SC October 20 – 22, 2006

NAME(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

*The cost for this weekend is \$36 per person
not including hotel accommodations.*

Total Amount Enclosed \$_____

Return form to:
*JHSSC / Jewish Studies Program
96 Wentworth Street
Charleston, SC 29424*

GREENVILLE HOTEL INFORMATION:

Hampton Inn

15 Park Woodruff Drive
(I-385 and Woodruff Road)
Greenville, SC 29607
Phone: 864.213.8200
or 800.426.7866

RATE: \$84/night

Special rate available until Sept. 30, 2006

You must make your own reservations

(Reservation Code: **JHS**)

Email: reservations@hamptoninnngreenville.com



THE
**JEWISH
 HISTORICAL
 SOCIETY**
 OF
 SOUTH CAROLINA

Martin Perlmutter, Executive Director
 Enid Idelsohn, Administrator

Officers

Belinda Gergel, *President*
 Edward Poliakoff, *Vice-President*
 H.J. Brand, *Second Vice-President*
 David J. Cohen, *Treasurer*
 Ann Hellman, *Secretary*

Past Presidents

Isadore Lourie, o.b.m.
Founding President
 Richard Gergel
 Klyde Robinson
 Robert Rosen
 Jeffrey Rosenblum
 Bernard Warshaw

Board of Directors

Gerry Sue Arnold, *Columbia*
 Doris Baumgarten, *Aiken*
 Eve Berlinsky, *Charleston*
 Moss Blachman, *Columbia*
 Jack Bloom, *Greenville*
 Sol Breibart, *Charleston*
 Leah Chase, *Charleston*
 Robert Dreyfus, *Greenville*
 Stanley Farbstein, *Charleston*
 Carolee Rosen Fox, *Charleston*
 Ben Goldberg, *Charleston*
 Leah Greenberg, *Sullivan's Island*
 Lyssa Harvey, *Columbia*
 Ruth Jacobs, *Charleston*
 Alan Kahn, *Columbia*
 Harriet Keyserling, *Beaufort*
 Michael Kogan, *Charleston*
 Harold Kornblut, *Latta*
 Mike Krupsaw, *Anderson*
 Cynthia Levy, *Hilton Head*
 Joseph Lipton, *Columbia*
 Mick Lourie, *Columbia*
 Elizabeth Moses, *Georgetown*
 I. Harby Moses, *Sumter*
 Robert Moses, *Sumter*
 Herbert Novit, *Hilton Head*
 Karen Ortner, *Charleston*
 Arline Polinsky, *Columbia*
 Mickey Rosenblum, *Charleston*
 Barbara K. Stender, *Charleston*

Jewish Heritage Collection
 Dale Rosengarten, *Curator*

Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: () _____ Fax: () _____

E-mail Address: _____

ANNUAL DUES FOR 2007 (JANUARY–DECEMBER)

_____ Individual/Family Membership	\$36
_____ Friend	\$200
_____ Sponsor	\$350
_____ Founding Patron	\$1000
_____ Pillar	\$5000 (\$1000 for 5 years)

Join or renew JHSSC online. Go to www.jhssc.org
 Enroll your friends and relatives for an additional \$36 each.
 Send us their information and we will inform them of your gift.

***Please make checks payable to JHSSC
 and mail to the address below.***

Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program
 College of Charleston
 Charleston, SC 29424
 phone: 843.953.3918
 fax: 843.953.7624
 website: www.jhssc.org
 e-mail: jhssc@cofc.edu

NON-PROFIT
 U.S. POSTAGE

P-A-I-D

CHARLESTON, SC
 PERMIT No. 437