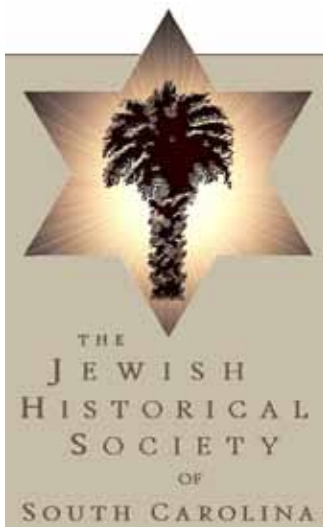


THE JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
of  
SOUTH  
CAROLINA



*Jewish Roots, Aiken Branches*  
*Register now for fall meeting*  
*in*  
*Aiken, SC*  
*November 15-16*

Fall 2014  
VOLUME XIX ~ NUMBER 2



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editor

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Cover: Addie R. Polier and Abe Cohen, the first Jewish couple married in Aiken, SC, 1896. Courtesy of Nelson A. Danish.

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# Letter from the President



For those of us who attended JHSSC's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration on May 17-18, all I can say is WOW! I am so proud to be associated with this great organization. Events like this do not just happen. They come about because of the hard work of not just one person, but the work of many individuals. I am going to attempt to name them, and please forgive me if I leave anyone out.

Susan Altman, with the help of the anniversary planning committee—Ann Hellman, Marty Perlmutter, Enid Idelshohn, Rachel Barnett, Sandra Conradi, Dale Rosengarten, and Mark Swick—orchestrated a wonderful evening of food, fellowship, and festivities. On Sunday morning, keynoter Stuart Rockoff took a hard look at "the changing face of the Jewish South," an exercise we all need to do to see where we are now and plan our direction for the coming years.

I especially want to thank the Society's past presidents for the insightful panel they presented before the gala on Saturday, and for their willingness to serve on a long-range planning committee. Chaired by Rachel Barnett and facilitated by David J. Cohen, the committee met twice over the summer, analyzing the Society's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to its future. To help chart our course over the next decade, they have designed a survey directed toward all members and friends of JHSSC. If you have not yet filled one out, please access the survey at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org) and tell us your thoughts.

Let me take a moment to acknowledge the sad reality that, with the death of Bernard Warshaw last February and Clyde Robinson in March, we lost two past presidents in the

space of 60 days. I am all the more grateful to my predecessors who, perhaps in response to these losses, have stepped up to the plate and renewed their commitment to the Society.

Thank you, Ann, for your tireless work on our web page, cemetery and memorial plaque program, and your help when I just need to talk.

Barry Draisen and Ernie Marcus, VPs in charge of Archives and Historical Sites, are doing a great job, recently adding Greenville to the Society's online database of cemeteries and memorial plaques, and beginning to explore new territory—Orangeburg—as a potential location for an historical marker.

Plans for the fall meeting in Aiken are coming together nicely, with a dialogue Sunday morning, November 16, between Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen (popularly known as the



Past presidents Jeffrey Rosenblum, Robert N. Rosen, Belinda F. Gergel, Richard Gergel, Edward Poliakov, and Ann Meddin Hellman at the Spring 2014 meeting in Charleston. Not shown: Rachel Gordin Barnett. Photo: Jeri Perlmutter.

"Gergel and Rosen Road Show"), a panel of old-timers and newcomers following lunch, and the public dedication of Adath Yeshurun's historical marker at 2:00 P.M. Aiken is a special place for me, as many of my ancestors settled there when they came to the United States from Russia, and many of the Poliakov branch of the family are buried in the Sons of Israel Cemetery.

Lastly, please take the time to fill out the survey and consider how you would like to get involved. The Society needs your participation and help!

David Draisen

**We need your ideas! Please go to [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org) and complete the online survey. Your responses will help us evaluate past programs and determine our direction for the future.**

# From White Russia to Aiken County: The Kaplan Family's Story

by Jeffrey Kaplan

My family's story begins in the 1880s in that part of the Russian empire known as White Russia: Byelorussia as it was called. Today it is called Belarus. Both of my paternal grandparents were born in that decade. My grandfather, Sam Kaplan, came to America in 1903, and my grandmother, Ida Kamenoff Kaplan, arrived in 1905.

My grandfather was born in Minsk, the capital of White Russia. The original family name was Tarant, not Kaplan. My grandmother was born in Lepel, in the province of Vitebsk. I should note that the name Kamenoff is derived from a village called Kamen, in the vicinity of Lepel. The Poliakovs, another early Jewish family in Aiken, originated in Kamen, so it is likely that these two families knew each other in the Old Country.



Left to right: Raymond Kaplan, his mother, Ida Kamenoff Kaplan, and her good friend Sophie Rudnick return from the races, Aiken, circa 1937. Courtesy of Jeffrey Kaplan.

My grandparents met in New York City and married there in 1908. They came to the Aiken area in 1908 or 1909, more than a hundred years ago—well before the founding of Adath Yeshurun, Aiken's synagogue. What brought them to Aiken, undoubtedly, was the fact that my grandmother's brother-in-law and sister, Jacob and Julia Kamenoff Wolf, were already living there. The first place in South Carolina that they called home was not the town of Aiken, but rather the village of Wagener, about 25 miles from Aiken itself. My grandfather, like so many Jews before and after him, opened a country store. There had been no stores in Wagener before my grandparents arrived, so I have been told, and they were also the first Jews to settle in the town. According to Uncle Ben, my father's oldest brother, there was no more anti-Semitism in Wagener than one would find in Tel Aviv. My grandparents were the object of curiosity, but not hostility.

My father, Raymond, was the youngest of four brothers. Born in Wagener in 1927, he was three years old when the

family moved to Aiken, where my grandfather ran a business hauling fruit between South Carolina and Florida. Sam and Ida died within six weeks of each other when I was just over a year old, so I have no memories of them. However, Sam was described to me as a sweet man who was well liked.

One story that my father passed on to me about my grandfather is an excellent example of the contradictions of living in the South, particularly in an earlier era. One of Sam's close friends was active in the Ku Klux Klan in Aiken. As a Klansman, he disliked Jews in principle, but he loved Mr. Sam, as my grandfather was known.

As to my grandmother, my mother tells a revealing story she undoubtedly heard from my father. My grandmother and her best friend, Sophie Rudnick (mother-in-law of the Hon. Irene K. Rudnick and grandmother of Morris Rudnick, Esq.), liked to sit on one of the park benches lining Laurens Street, Aiken's main thoroughfare, and read the Yiddish paper aloud and talk to each other in Yiddish. My father and his friend Harold Rudnick (Sophie's son) would shrink in embarrassment while this was going on.

Sophie Rudnick's husband, Morris, was as close a friend to my grandfather as his wife was to my grandmother. He was a man of great physical strength. After my grandfather became paralyzed on one side of his body, the result of a stroke, Morris would literally pick him up and put him in his car, and the two men would go for a ride.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Aiken's Jews held religious services intermittently above stores and in places such as the Aiken Masonic hall. However, they did not formally organize as a religious community until 1921, when Congregation Adath Yeshurun obtained a charter of incorporation from the state of South Carolina.

The little Jewish community of Aiken opened the synagogue in time for Rosh Hashanah in 1925. I remember the late Mandle Surasky, who for years was the congregation's lay leader, telling me how he, Meyer Harris, and a couple of others rushed to get the synagogue ready for High Holy Day services that year. The beautiful little synagogue of Adath Yeshurun still stands and is still in use. I recall my mother telling me that a handful of Jews built that synagogue.

I can thank my late father—and my mother as well—for glimpses of Jewish life in Aiken before I was born or old enough to remember. Some of these early Jews were people of great piety. Jacob Wolf's father, I was told, always wore a yarmulke and liked to say his daily prayers outside at dawn with his tallis over his head, in keeping with Orthodox custom. That certainly must have attracted a lot of attention.

Services at Adath Yeshurun in the early years reflected the Orthodoxy of its founders. The sanctuary has a single center aisle, and my mother says that when she married my father and moved to Aiken in 1951, men sat on one side of the aisle and women sat on the other side, although there was no formal mechitza separating the seating for men and women. Most of the women had their own prayer books that they brought to shul. (I still have my grandmother's.) My father said that the synagogue was packed when he was growing up. There was no rabbi in Aiken, but the baal tefilah (the lay hazzan), was a man named Zushke Poliakov, who wore a beard, a bowler hat, and a long tallis. My uncles found his reading of the prayers, which he apparently did with great speed, a source of mirth. Since none of my uncles knew Hebrew, what they told me should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt.

Of the many stories I've been told, one stands out in my mind concerning Mrs. B. M. Surasky, an outstanding figure in

Aiken's Jewish community in days gone by, who, my mother recalls, took upon herself responsibility for collecting funds for various Jewish causes from Jewish businesses in town. As an elderly woman, she was driven around Aiken by an African-American man who had worked for the Surasky family for years. Everyone called him Eb; no one can remember his last

name. Eb would go into each business to collect funds for Mrs. Surasky while she sat in the car. He would come out of one store after the other and show Mrs. Surasky how much money he had been given. If she was not satisfied, she would tell him to go back inside and let the proprietor know that he had to give a larger sum, at least as much as he had donated the year before.

Eb was a wonderful man. After my grandfather's stroke, Eb came to his house every morning and helped him bathe.

As a child, I remember Eb as caretaker of the synagogue. On a typical

Friday night, about two dozen people would attend services, but my mother remembers that on the High Holy Days Adath Yeshurun drew from towns smaller than Aiken, such as Barnwell, Williston, Edgefield, Johnston, Ninety-Six, and Saluda, and the sanctuary would fill with worshippers.

My parents met in Charleston, where my mother, Ruth Kirshtein Kaplan, was born and grew up. Before they were married my mother told my father that she wanted them to have a kosher household. My father agreed to this. My grandparents had tried to keep kosher when they settled in Wagener in the first decade of the last century, but they gave up the attempt. By the time they got back to Wagener with kosher meat, it was spoiled.

My supposition is that most of the first Jewish families in Aiken maintained kosher households. By the time my parents set up housekeeping, however, the only other family my mother



Sam Kaplan, the author's grandfather, manned the cash register at Kap's Restaurant on Laurens Street, owned by his son Isadore "Itch" Kaplan, circa 1952. Courtesy of Ruth Kirshtein Kaplan.

knows for sure was keeping kosher was that of my great-aunt Julia Kamenoff Wolf. I remember her as Tante Goldie. My mother's uncle Rev. Alter Kirshtein was the shohet in Charleston and had a butcher shop at the time. He would cut up and package a side of kosher meat for my mother and send it to her on the Greyhound bus. After my great-uncle gave up his butcher shop and retired, we got our meat from Shapiro's, the kosher butcher in nearby Augusta. In the early years of my parents' marriage, rabbinical students who came to Aiken to conduct services for the High Holy Days would eat at their house because my mother kept kosher.

By the early 1960s, Adath Yeshurun had undergone some changes. Men and women now sat together and read from a Conservative prayer book. The congregation was shrinking, including attrition in our own family, with the death of my grandparents and the departure of two of their older sons, Uncle Isadore (Itch) and Uncle Abe, and their families. I don't remember the synagogue being crowded with the exception of Simhat Torah, when my brother Sam, sister Laura, and I would march around the synagogue with the other children. The procession was led by Mr. Nathan Persky, who would then gather us all on the bimah under a large tallis, held up at the corners by four men.

Nathan Persky was the religious leader of Aiken's Jewish community, hugely respected, and I was privileged to have a special relationship with him. Although it wasn't widely known or appreciated, he was an outstanding Hebraist of national repute, as well as an expert on Jewish rituals and customs. My Orthodox grandparents in Charleston, Abe and Edith Kirshtein, were terribly worried that I would grow up in Aiken completely ignorant of Judaism, so Grandfather Abe arranged for Mr. Persky to tutor me. I vividly recall Mr. Persky closing his store and meeting me for lessons several times a week. As a result, I learned not only prayers but conversational Hebrew, and was even exposed to modern Hebrew poetry. Another precious memory I have is of my grandparents driving to Aiken from Charleston, and my grandfather sitting in on my lessons.

Nathan and Nettie Franzblau lived directly in back of us. Nathan had served in World War I and been gassed in France. It was said the Franzblaus settled in Aiken because they thought the climate would be good for his health. Mr. Franzblau led services in the synagogue, particularly after Mr. Persky died, and to quiet the hubbub in the sanctuary, he would slam his hand down on the reading desk a couple of times. That did get everybody's attention, at least for a little while.

Several of Aiken's Jewish families, including my own, also belonged to Augusta's Orthodox synagogue (it's now Conservative), and the children would carpool in the afternoon to Hebrew school there. This gave us the opportunity to meet more Jewish kids and to attend bar mitzvah dances in Augusta. My bar mitzvah took place at Augusta's Adath Yeshurun in January 1967, and one year later we moved to Charleston.

While I did not encounter a lot of anti-Semitism growing up, I do remember kids occasionally making disparaging remarks. Certainly I was aware of belonging to a very small group—a slim minority of the population. At the same time, we had good friends who were not Jewish, and living in Aiken was a positive experience for me. I also would note that Aiken's tiny Jewish community enjoyed a profile well beyond its numbers. At least three

Jews have served on Aiken's City Council: Mandle Surasky, Steve Surasky (the current president of Adath Yeshurun), and my father, Raymond Kaplan. Irene K. Rudnick has had a distinguished career in the South Carolina legislature and as an educator. She is pictured in an exhibit on prominent women at the Aiken Museum, which also features a photograph of my great-aunt Julia Wolf, whose elegant dress shop was a well-known Aiken landmark.

I feel very close to Aiken and am proud to be a member of Adath Yeshurun, as were my parents and grandparents before me. It's remarkable how Aiken retains the affection of people who lived there, or whose families lived there. The number of people who came back to Aiken three years ago for Adath Yeshurun's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary eloquently speaks to that.



Left to right: Jeffrey, Laura, and Sam Kaplan celebrate Simhat Torah at Adath Yeshurun, circa 1962. Courtesy of Jeffrey Kaplan.

## Aiken's First Jewish Wedding

by Nelson Arthur Danish

"The citizens of Aiken enjoyed the novelty of witnessing a Jewish wedding on Sunday afternoon in the Lyceum Hall. The contracting parties were Miss Addie R. Polier, a daughter of Mr. H. L. Polier, and Mr. Abe Cohen, a merchant of Augusta."

So began the story of the first Jewish marriage in Aiken, South Carolina, celebrated on May 31, 1896, as reported in the weekly *Aiken Journal & Review*. H. L. Polier was Harris Louis, the first Jewish man to reside in Aiken, having lived there for ten years when his daughter's wedding took place. As there was no synagogue at the time—118 years ago—the ceremony was held on the stage of the Lyceum Hall on Laurens Street. No photograph of the building, long since gone, exists.

Little is known of H. L., as most called him, but from his tombstone in Sons of Israel Cemetery, Aiken, where he was buried in 1921, this: "born Grodno, Russia." H. L. had two siblings, Morris S. and Sarah Anna, who became the second wife of Benedict Morris Surasky.

H. L.'s first wife (the mother of Addie Rebecca) was Anna Sutker, of whom nothing is known; curiously, she was not mentioned by name in the wedding story. Addie was their only child. H. L.'s second marriage was to his son-in-law's sister—no blood relationship—Fannie Cohen, and they had four children: Isadore (later, legally, Shad), David Solomon, Belle, and Esther. Shad and David became attorneys. All the siblings married: Shad to Justine Wise Tulin (her second marriage), daughter of Rabbi Stephen Wise of Temple Emanu-El, New York City; David to Ruth Sneider (who lived to 104, buried in the Jewish cemetery in Lancaster, PA); Belle to Harold Mittle; and Esther to Ben Engel.

Following the ceremony and reception "for about 150 guests . . . where an hour or so was spent around the tables in pleasant conversation . . . the happy couple accompanied by a number of their friends boarded the 10 P.M. train and went over to Augusta [about 17 miles away], which is to be the future home of the bride."

Abe and Addie had six children: Benjamin Phillip, married to Sarah Bradley, born in Switzerland, with sons Sheldon Bradley, now of Atlanta, and the late Adrian (Bunny) Maurice; Hyman (Hymie) Isidore, married to Rose Lee of Moultrie, GA, no children; Rose, married to Henry Antopolsky, with son Jules Norman (who went by his middle name); Pearl Polier, unmarried; Maurice, who died in a childhood accident; and Minnie, married to Josef Pierre Danish, with sons, yours truly, Nelson Arthur, unmarried (now of North Augusta, SC) and Michael Barry, now living in Aberdeen, MD. His wife is Bettye A. Rabinowitz of Beaufort, SC, the daughter of Ethel Lipsitz and Henry Rabinowitz.

On May 28, 1981, the *Aiken County Rambler*, no longer published, reprised the story about Aiken's first Jewish wedding, marking what would have been Addie and Abe's 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary, providing this information: Addie Polier was from Kiev in the Ukraine and was brought to Aiken by her father in 1890 when she was 16. The bride was 22 and Abe was 31 when they married. Again, from the *Aiken Journal* story: "Rabbi A. Polikoff, of Augusta, performed the ceremony which was according to orthodox [sic] Jewish custom. He was attired in a black suit and wore a tall silk hat which he never removed."

Several weeks after the 1981 anniversary story appeared, I received a phone call: "My name is Steve [Stephen Kent] Surasky [of Aiken] and I saw the story of your grandparents' wedding. My mother is a Polier." A little Jewish Geography later, we realized our relationship—third cousins. His great-grandfather was M. S.; mine, H. L.—the Aiken brothers.

After Abe Cohen died in 1930 (he is buried in Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta), Grandmother Addie lived in Augusta with her daughters Pearl Polier and Minnie Danish, and son-in-law Joe Danish. She died in 1944 and is buried next to her husband.

Only two things are left from this Aiken first: the couple's portrait and my grandmother's simple gold wedding band, engraved inside: "Abe to Addie May 31<sup>st</sup> 1896," which I wear, 24/7, on my right hand.



Addie R. Polier Cohen and her children, counterclockwise from upper left: Minnie Margaret (the author's mother), Pearl Polier, Hyman Isidore, Maurice, Rose (Pearl's fraternal twin), and Benjamin Philip. Courtesy of Nelson A. Danish.

# Suraskys and Poliers: The Old World Meets the New

by Stephen K. Surasky

I am 67 years old and was born and raised in Aiken, as were both my parents, Harry Surasky and Evelyn Goodman Surasky, and my mother's mother, Rebecca Polier Goodman. Her father, Morris S. Polier, had come to the town in the late 1800s or early 1900s to join his older brother, Harris Louis Polier, commonly known as H. L.

H. L. had immigrated to the United States from Knyszyn, a small town near Bialystok, in the region of Grodno, Russia (now Poland), around 1880. He settled first in Philadelphia where, according to family lore, he contracted tuberculosis or another respiratory condition that sent him fleeing to Aiken around 1888. At the time, the town was well known as a health resort, boasted several sanitoriums, and attracted tuberculin patients from across the country.

H. L. owned a department store and M. S. opened and operated a barber shop, both downtown. There is little information on the religious life of Aiken's first Jewish families; however, I am told that the Poliers, while not particularly observant of Jewish law, were deeply proud of their Jewish heritage, helping to raise money for a Jewish cemetery (1913) and Adath Yeshurun Synagogue (1925). M. S. was learned in theology and Jewish history and loved to visit and have lengthy discussions and debates with Christian ministers in Aiken, whom he counted as his friends. I am fortunate to have inherited several of my great-grandfather's books and treatises, including a multi-volume *History of the Jews* by Heinrich Graetz.

Around 1886, H. L.'s sister, Sarah Anna Polier Surasky, and her husband, Benedict Morris (B. M.) Surasky, arrived in Aiken from Knyszyn. B. M. was the oldest of five brothers, one of whom, Solomon Surasky, was my paternal grandfather. One by one the brothers and one sister, Ida Surasky Efron, immigrated to Aiken. The brothers traveled the countryside



Abraham Surasky was killed in July 1903 at the age of 30, near Aiken, SC. Courtesy of Jerry Cohen.

Some 20 years ago while researching the case I learned that Lee Green had been convicted of killing another person some years later. I called one of his grandchildren, then an elderly woman, to see if she would meet with me and provide information on Green's life. She refused to discuss the case or her grandfather except to tell me that he lived out his life as a good Christian man and was now with the Lord. I declined to ask her where she thought my great-uncle was. Around that same time, I also located Abraham's unmarked grave at the Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta, GA. It is a mystery as to why there was no gravestone. Abraham's two young daughters, Dorothy and Mildred, were raised by their uncle Sam Surasky and his wife, Mary. Sam moved the family to North Carolina and Dorothy's son, Mel Cohen, is the long-serving mayor of Morganton. Mel's daughter, Stacy, then a high school student, was also researching the history of her great-grandfather's murder and in 1993 organized a reunion in Aiken of Abraham's living descendants. On the Saturday morning of the reunion we gathered at Abraham's gravesite for an unveiling of his tombstone, 90 years after his death. Better late than never.

as peddlers, selling their wares to rural folk who would normally have to travel long distances into town to shop for goods.

Eventually all brothers but one were able to open stores on Laurens Street. The tragic exception was Abraham Surasky, the youngest of the Surasky brothers. He was working his route about 15 miles from Aiken in July 1903 when a young man, Lee Green, arrived home to find Abraham helping Lee's wife carry some goods from her wagon into the house. Abraham, who was a widower with two young children, was gruesomely murdered by gun and axe and his body left in his buggy in the woods. The primary witness as to motive was a teenage black girl, Mary Drayton, who was hired by Green and his wife to come to the scene and clean up the evidence while Green found someone to help hide Abraham's body.

According to Mary's sworn affidavit, Green held a long-standing grudge against Jewish peddlers and had admitted to her that he shot at another peddler, Levy, three weeks prior, "only to make him drop his bundle." Green had told her that he intended to kill Surasky.<sup>1</sup> He and his wife, Dora, disclosed to Mary the gruesome details: how Green shot Abraham with his shotgun, and as Abraham begged for his life, offering to give him "all I have got," Green exclaimed, "Stand back, you son of a bitch, don't come on me," and shot him again. Abraham dropped to his elbows and knees and was then shot and axed twice in the head.<sup>2</sup>

Another witness testified that Green "was going to kill ever [sic] Jew peddler that came around and get shed of them."<sup>3</sup> According to Drayton, Green and Dora decided to tell authorities that Green had arrived home to find Surasky making a pass at his wife, and he was thus merely defending his wife's honor, as any southern gentleman would do. Green was acquitted of the murder at trial. One must assume that in 1903 the testimony of a black teenager could not match



Surasky Bros. Store, Laurens Street, Aiken, SC, circa 1914. Interior: left to right, Ernestine Murrah, clerk; Solomon Surasky; H. C. Surasky; John Henry Holmes, employee; Sam Surasky; Mandle Surasky. Courtesy of Stephen K. Surasky. Exterior: B. M. Surasky, Sam Surasky, H. C. Surasky. Esther Persky albums. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Dora Green's claim that her husband was merely protecting her virtue from the assault of a Jewish peddler.

Like many small towns—not only southern but elsewhere as well—by the 1920s downtown Aiken was populated by numerous Jewish-owned businesses, including H. L. Polier Dept. Store, B. M. Surasky's Department Store, and Surasky Bros. Department Store. M. S.'s wife, Augusta Polier, my great-grandmother, owned a millinery shop next to her husband's barber shop, and in 1922 Ida Surasky Efron's oldest son, Jake, opened a combination dry goods and grocery store.

It is said that the arrival of B. M. and his wife, Sarah Anna, was instrumental in starting regular religious services in Aiken. For years people convened for Sabbath prayer and holidays in the local Masonic hall, which was at the time above one of the Laurens Street stores. B. M. acted as both rabbi and cantor and, until his death in the 1930s, was the lay leader of the Jewish community. His wife—Auntie B. M. as she was known—is said to have introduced kashrut to Aiken, traveling to Augusta, about 17 miles away, to bring back chickens and kosher beef.

I grew up in a synagogue populated by a substantial congregation; almost all the members were my cousins, descendants of the Poliers and Suraskys. Other prominent original Jewish families were the Wolfs, whose progenitor Jacob Wolf was one of our synagogue's founders; the Efrons, who arrived in Aiken as a result of the marriage of the one Surasky sister, Ida, to an Efron; and the Rudnicks, who were active in the congregation and in Aiken's business community.

In my youth, Adath Yeshurun was not affiliated but would have been considered Orthodox. The women sat on one side of the aisle and men on the other. No women were called to the Torah and none played a part in the services. Aiken did have, however, an active Hadassah/Sisterhood, and the ladies ran the Sunday school. Very few would have been considered especially religious or observant, but the older members were the children of Eastern European immigrants and continued to follow Old World traditions. Nathan Persky, son-in-law of one of the Surasky brothers, had inherited B. M. Surasky's duties as the community's religious leader and Hebrew teacher and occupied that unofficial post until his death in the 1960s. We held services in the synagogue only when a member had a yahrtzeit, at which time the men would receive calls that a minyan was needed and would go to the shul to say kaddish. Other than that, regular services were held only on the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Purim, and Simhat Torah, with Mr. Persky leading the services.

In 1950s and '60s Aiken's downtown remained crowded with Jewish businesses: Surasky Bros. Liquor Stores, owned by my father, Harry, and his brother, Ben, who was also an attorney with offices above the store; Nathan and Esther Persky's Department Store; Efron's Red & White Supermarket, owned and operated by Jake Efron and his wife, Helen; Sam and Minnie Shanker ran another grocery store, Sam's Supermarket; Efron's Garage and Taxi Co., operated by Isadore Efron. Ida Wolf owned and operated Aiken's finest women's store, Julia's

Dress Shop, and Mandel Surasky and his partner, Manning Owen, operated Owen-Surasky, Aiken finest men's shop; Abe Wolf's Famous Brand Shoes was just down the street, and only a few blocks away was Laurel's Hardware owned by Lazar Laurel, and its next door neighbor, Franzblau's Hardware, owned and operated by Nathan and Nettie Franzblau. Harold Rudnick sold furniture out of Rudnick's Barn, which doubled as his wife Irene's law office and campaign headquarters. On the Columbia highway was Marvin's Drive-In, owned by Marvin Rifkin and his wife, Mollie Efron Rifkin, a favorite hangout of Aiken's teens. Aiken's only movie theaters, the Patricia and the Rosemary, were named after owner Bert Ram's daughters.

Not only were Aiken's Jews leaders in the city's business community, they were also actively involved in Aiken's political and civic life. M. S. Polier was Grand Master of the Masonic lodge, B. M. Surasky, and later, his son Mandel, served on the city council and as mayor pro tem. Mr. Nathan Persky was instrumental in bringing the Boy Scouts to Aiken and was voted as Citizen of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce. Irene Krugman Rudnick, past president of our synagogue and now president emeritus, served in the South Carolina legislature for many years.

I am the last Surasky in Aiken and, from the Polier family, only one other remains a member of our Jewish community—Nelson Danish, great-grandson of H. L. Polier. Julie Wolf Ellis and her kin are the last remaining descendants of the Wolf family in Aiken. Among the Rudnicks only Irene and her son, Morris, are congregants. The rest of the original families are now gone, most buried in Aiken's Sons of Israel Cemetery, and their children and grandchildren scattered worldwide. There remains not one Jewish-owned retail business in Aiken, although we are well represented in the legal, medical, and other professions. The University of South Carolina at Aiken, as well as the Savannah River nuclear facility, have attracted new Jewish families, and our synagogue continues to thrive as the center of Jewish life in Aiken, now populated mostly by newcomers from the North who have retired to the area to enjoy the weather, golf, and equestrian events.



*Ida Surasky Efron sitting in front of her store on Laurens Street, Aiken. Courtesy of Sondra Shanker Katzenstein.*

Growing up as the only Jewish boy in my schools and among my peer group did not seem at all odd to me. I knew that in the realm of religion I was "different," but I never perceived any antagonism or anti-Semitism, at least among my friends and acquaintances. I believe you would hear the same sentiments from other Jews who have made Aiken their home. My family, although intensely proud of its heritage, was fully integrated into the majority southern culture. I might attend a Purim service one day and attend a "Young Life" meeting at the Presbyterian Church with my girlfriend the next. I thought there was nothing unusual about my saying ha-motzi and kiddush on Friday night and on Monday morning reciting the Lord's Prayer in homeroom. I thought it was the official school prayer, not a Christian rite.

While we did not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday and would never have had a tree in our home, my parents, not wanting, I suppose, for my sisters and me to feel deprived, always invited Santa to visit us on Christmas morning. My friends were envious that I would receive gifts for the eight nights of Hanukkah and rack up again on their holiday. I believe the following true story illustrates the point. One of my father's favorite traditions during the Christmas holidays was to call the homes of his gentile friends and, as Santa, speak to their children. One year he called our own home and asked for my little sister, Anne, then about six. "HO, HO, HO," Santa bellowed. "What's your name, little girl?" "Anne Surasky." "Have you been a good girl this year?" "Oh, yes, Sir!" "Good. What would you like Santa to bring you tomorrow morning?" Anne then ran off a long list. "Do have any brothers or sisters?" "Yes. I have an older brother, Stephen, and an older sister, Brenna." "What do you think they might want Santa to bring them?" "Oh, you don't have to worry about them—they're Jewish."

#### NOTES

1. Patrick Q. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Mob: Violence against Religious Outsiders in the U.S. South, 1865–1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1975), 201.
2. Ibid, 200, citing Drayton affidavit.
3. Ibid, 201, citing Parker affidavit.

## "Mr. Persky" and His Clan *by Mordecai Persky*

My cousin Beatrice Efron was one of the Surasky Mkinfolks I found very special when I was a youngster in Aiken. She was smart as a whip, and had a there-in-her-eyes kindness that I remember well a good 60 years after I last laid eyes on her, for she left us a little past age 20 to marry Morris Mink down in Louisville, Georgia, at about the same time I went off to Carolina.

Bea and I never got much beyond hello talking to each other, but I heard the sensitivity in her words and saw it in her eyes when she spoke to our mamas. I was usually in her presence because my mama, Esther, had asked if I wanted to go with her to Bea's mama Theresa's house on Fauburg Street, a few short blocks away, but in Aiken that was far enough to keep people apart.

I had two sets of young Aiken cousins—three Payeff siblings and two Efrons, all older than I, all five possessing exceptional humor and intelligence. The Payeffs were Kivy, Mandel, and Sophie, who with Daddy Yeshuah and Mama Dora traipsed over to our house every Sunday from Chesterfield Street. A few years and a world war later, Grandma invited them to live in an apartment at her house, for the place where we lived belonged to her.

I felt close to Beatrice and her big brother, Julius, who shared Kivy's gift for show-off comedy; I enjoyed that gift as it took wing in Kivy and Julius, and envied it just as much. But why did I have such comical cousins? Was it because they were Jewish, like so many comedians of that radio age—Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, Groucho Marx, Milton Berle?

Julius and Kivy were eight years older than I, Bea and Mandel four or five years older. It was fun to be around them, but I had no reason to suppose I'd be welcome company for them. I knew a nine-year-old could only get so much attention from 14- or 17-year-olds. Mandel's friend Harold Rudnick once offered to shut my mouth for me if I interrupted them again. Harold was bigger and I shut up.

I was born into a house where it was pre-ordained that I would be a student of Yiddishkeit (Jewishness) under the tutelage

of my parents, Nathan and Esther Persky, and a student of frumkeit (observant religiousness) under both Daddy and Grandma Freydl Surasky. Maybe it was my early exposure to frumkeit that makes me rebel against the automatic disbelief that's been going around for decades now.

Even at Jewishly-famous Valozhyner Yeshiva in Belarus my daddy had been no ordinary student, as the picture of his fur-hatted rebbe atop Mama's piano testified. His yeshiva years had so steeped him in the art of synagoguery that even Adath Yeshurun's older members seemed grateful to have him lead their services. I think they saw how good he was at doing it, and how modest. I saw how well he did it by attending shul later in a couple of big cities, where no rabbi made me feel as warm inside my tallis as Daddy did, so that skipping shul then became my habit.

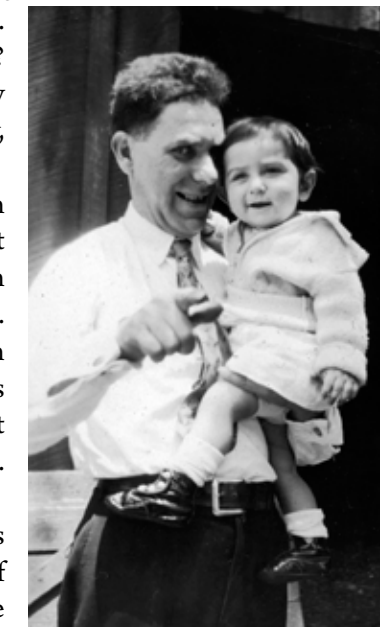
But the tongue that gilded Daddy's Torah readings could turn around on his family and hurt. For when he felt misused at home, his mouth often found a way to disgorge angry words loudly, in a mood I later thought was born decades earlier in Europe, though it was true his anger occasionally found real fuel in Aiken. His mother and wife withstood the pain; so did I and my half-sister, Eve, product of his first marriage to a Jewish Mary he found in his first port of New York. Eve would visit us in the summer, but she grew up in the vastnesses of the great Metropolis.

We loved him through thick and thin. Every shouting incident ended with his swift departure, and we saw how ashamed he was when he came back home hours later in agonized silence.

But there were more and better Nathans inside him: 1) the warm, humorous man who would do anything for those he loved; 2) the man who charmed Aikenites of all faiths when he spoke at Rotary, Masonic, Eastern Star, and Boy Scouts meetings; and 3) the Nathan of that moment in the synagogue that was his and mine, as wonderful to me as Bea's smile, Kivy's wit, Spencer Tracy's movies, and the home runs of Hankis-Pankis Greenberg.



*Above: Nathan and Esther Surasky Persky. Below: George and Mandel Payeff.*



The moment came unpredictably in shul when he called me for an aliyah. He'd look my way, take a step toward me, and end his preamble in an outflow of father-love that brought our names together, "Mordechai b'reb Nechemyeh," he said: Mordecai son of Nehemiah was called to Torah. I turned and read from the open scrolls, feeling like a prince honored by a king, forgetful of the troubled boy who had entered that synagogue. Only in my aliyahs did he retrieve "Nehemiah" from the Ellis Island clerk who renamed him Nathan in 1909. He was 21 and "right off the boat" from Bremerhaven.

There was also the Nathan Persky who, knowing that stores must close on the Sabbath, ignored the rules in favor of making a living. But may I add to this report that when a good customer heaped up a stack of clothes for his family at the register, there was a Nathan who often added enough gifts to cut his profits below zero. When the man Nathan died in 1965, his legend said that every minister in town eulogized him, and some even rang church bells.

But only I was there to hear the love and forgiveness in the eulogy of his wife, Esther, in his hospital room a night before he died. I sat there as Mama held his head and called him, ever so softly, "Mein feygaleh, mein feygaleh," my little bird, my little bird.

Today you won't find me in shul unless something personal is happening there, and maybe not then either. In 1954 I left Aiken for good, setting South Carolina aside until my last visit, still to come.

As a little boy I was putty in Grandma's hands, and she made a game of keeping Sophie and me "legal" Friday night and Saturday, when coloring, snipping, and writing violated the Sabbath. Then at Saturday twilight, Grandma, Sophie, and I walked down Richland Avenue looking for the first star. We usually spotted the Lord's sign that Shabbos was over high in the sky over Hitchcock Clinic. Sophie and I went home to crayons and scissors again, and

Grandma loved our company. We understood each other, she told us, because we were in our first childhoods and she was in her second.

It was only much later that I became a skeptical Jew to my marrow, proud to withstand the anger of Jews who believe going to shul or loving Israel makes them more Jewish. Yes, some think fealty to our nation-state makes them upright, even when Israel un-Jewishly claims a God-given right to eject, harass, libel, and make war against people it has turned into our own "others from Hell," forgetting that's just who we so recently were ourselves.

The Holocaust left us with a choice we chose not to see—Hitler's new lesson or Rabbi Hillel's ancient one. We could learn from Hitler the dubious privileges bestowed by brute strength (once we saw that such strength could be Jewish), or remember Hillel's simple "reduction" of Jewish law into a sentence: "Do not treat others in a way hateful to you."

After 80 years of baking in American sunshine, I became a different, not necessarily improved or worsened brand of Jew than Mama, Daddy, and Grandma, or you, my softly wise Bubbeh Leah, mother of Nathan the scholar, who was so proud of bringing you to join him in America, telling all who'd listen that when the immigration fellow asked why he wanted you here, he said, "Because she is my mother."

Oh my Bubbeh, I felt and learned from your kind and silent wisdom till age six, when you died in the big house's darkest room. As a little boy, I knew much of your language, Yiddish, which you never spoke to Yiddish speakers elsewhere in the house because you never left your rocker by the window overlooking the great yard and its giant magnolia trees. I learned more from your quiet nature than I did from the louder voices around me. Your feelings about life and love reached me by ear and observation. Meanwhile, your son soon found in the mother he brought



Above: The author's grandmother Leah Persky, likely photographed with family or friends back in Belarus. Below: the H. C. Surasky house from the rear, 825 Florence Street.



to America the one he left in Belarus—a faulty one who was a handy target for his anger.

Bubbeh, I saw no prayer books—no siddur or mahzor like Grandma's—near your rocker. That part of my studies you left to your son, who taught them in a way unlike Grandma, his mother-in-law. When you left us, Bubbeh, they kept me two rooms away from your bed, where I hung on the door nearest you and heard Daddy's terrible sobs from behind the front-hall mirror—a sad and scary sound I never heard again. I knew I'd come too close to the visitor Death, who outwits us all at least once.

Yes, I am your grandson too, Grandpas Chaim Surasky and Mordecai Persky, zeydehs I never knew—Nathan's father Mordecai dead in Valozhyn years before his son's bar mitzvah, but why? Zeydeh Mordecai, I bore your first name to places where it was a "kick-me" sign, and years later wondered if it was ever a burden to you. Back then, I hated being "Mordecai," which some now assure me is a beautiful name. I want to answer, but not out loud, "You didn't wear it to Aiken first grade in 1937."

Grandpa Mordecai, had you lived to join your son in America, would you and I have shared corned-beef-on-rye sandwiches and lattice-top apple pie, the reigning meycholim (taste thrills) at Furst's Bakery in Augusta, Georgia?

As for you, my other zeydeh Chaim, who died a half-year into 1932, the year Mama, Daddy, and I left Daddy's grocery store with the upstairs apartment I was born into eight months earlier, you were the reason we were leaving. For you had left us your dry goods store in Aiken. Alas, Grandpa, I never knew your sister Chayeh Rachel Efron, or your brothers Boruch (B. M.), Solomon, or Abraham. I only half-believed the story that my grandma, your wife Freydl, had pursued Solomon and never stopped loving him. But I knew Grandma asked me to bring her Bing Crosby's record of "Danny Boy" because she loved you. And I knew that in her beautiful Yiddish poem you were the sun being told how hard it was for the left-behind moon (herself, "der levonneh") to keep shining on her own.

I remember Great-uncle Solomon's face in shul, stamping itself in my memory as the face of a Hebrew prophet. Me so young watching him so old, seated across the aisle with his wife where no other men sat—his own man, without a doubt.

But Zeydeh, your brother Shaiyeh (Sam to his Carolina friends) came to see us again and again, always in a good humor, though he'd driven 212 long miles to our house from Morganton's

North Carolina foothills with pretty, white-haired Aunt Mary. I loved his asking me, only a few steps out of his car, if I'd had today's lokshen (noodle) soup yet. After which he asked to see my "muscle," then tapped my elbow, pronounced it harder than a muscle has any right to be, and said it gave me super-human strength—at which his face subsided into a kindly grin.

In North Carolina, he must have put a similar brand on the muscular elbow of adopted grandson Jerry Cohen, the Long Island-dwelling cousin I didn't know till we lived a medium driving distance from each other. I met Jerry and his Lubah 18 years ago, so I dialed their number while writing this, and found they had not only survived, but done so in finer fettle than I, owing to being six years younger. And incidentally, Jerry's brother, Melvin, the only Jew in Morganton (pop. 18,000), has been re-elected its mayor without fail for the last 29 years. His 30<sup>th</sup> is just beginning.

Shaiyeh and Mary adopted the two daughters of his and Grandpa's brother Abraham—one daughter was Jerry and Melvin's mom, Dorothy—and did so shortly after Abraham, brand new to America, was killed by gun and axe while out peddling, a long-shrouded Aiken horror tale recently recalled to life in *Bella*, a shiny new Aiken magazine. Thankfully, the "Jew-peddler" bigotry that proved

fatal to Abraham is now a much less essential part of the South's psychic furniture, though drawers remain open as they did while sharing my childhood with Adolf's death machine an ocean away.

Do Jews in the year 2014 still fear the unforgotten Jewish drumroll of death, waiting for us we never knew where, when, or why? And must the neighbors of the Israelites suffer always for living in the only land Jews feel is truly ours? (Answers now unknown in New York, Aiken, Gaza, and Jerusalem.)

All images in this article are from the Esther Libby Surasky Persky scrapbook and photo albums (1912–1925), Mss. 1106, gift of Mordecai Persky. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Our thanks to *Bella Magazine* publisher Kathy Urban Huff, staff writer Anna Boylston Dangerfield, and layout editor Jim Stafford, who provided digital copies of their stories and images of Aiken's Jewish families. For a look at past issues, go to: <http://www.aikenbellamagazine.com/archives/>, especially Dangerfield's profiles of the Wolfs (Oct. 2011), Rudnicks (Nov. 2011), Poliakovs (April 2012), Efrons (Summer 2012), and Suraskys (Sept. 2012).



# Jewish Roots, Aiken Branches: From Shtetl to Small-Town South

November 15–16, 2014  
Aiken, South Carolina

## Saturday, November 15

3:00 P.M. Optional tour of Aiken and sites of Jewish interest  
Dinner on your own

## Sunday, November 16

Meeting location: Congregation Adath Yeshurun, 154 Greenville Street, NW, Aiken

9:30 A.M. Annual meeting: Strategic plan will be presented – everyone is invited to attend!

11:00 The Hon. Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen, Esq.:

*The Remarkable Story of the Early Jews of South Carolina*

12:00 NOON Lunch

12:30 P.M. Panel discussion: *Aiken Pioneers, Then and Now*

Moderator: Dale Rosengarten

Panelists: Doris L. Baumgarten, Nelson A. Danish, Marvin Efron, Samuel Wolf Ellis,

Judith Evans, Jeffrey Kaplan, Sondra S. Katzenstein, Ernie Levinson,

Irene K. Rudnick, and Stephen K. Surasky

2:00 Dedication of historical marker, followed by reception

### Registration form

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

The cost for this weekend is **\$18 per person**, not including hotel accommodations.

If you are not a current member of the JHSSC, please add \$36 for your membership.

Total Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_



### Deadline for registration:

November 7, 2014.

Return form to:

JHSSC/Jewish Studies Program

96 Wentworth Street

Charleston, SC 29424

OR

Register online at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org)

### Hotel reservations:

**Towneplace Suites**

1008 Monterey Drive

Aiken, SC 29803

Phone 803.641.7373

Fax 803.641.7391

Ask for special JHSSC rate for Saturday, November 15: \$119 plus tax.

# Efron Family History

by Marvin Efron

The earliest Efron from our line that we have traced was Leizor (sometimes called Eleaser) Efron, born between 1830 and 1840. His first wife's name was Guillermina. They lived in both Knyszyn and Minsk, the present capital of Belarus. They had two sons: Morris, born in Knyszyn in 1869, and Ari Joel, born in Minsk. Morris worked as a saddle maker in Minsk, while Ari Joel studied to be a rabbi. Morris married Ida Surasky from Knyszyn. An unusual situation occurred because Ida's mother's second husband was Leizor Efron, Morris's father. This made Morris and Ida not only husband and wife, but also step-brother and step-sister.

Because of economic conditions, religious persecution and the threat of war, the Efrons decided to leave Russia. Some family and friends had left earlier and wrote that the Americas offered a better life. Morris and his family decided to move to the United States, while Ari

Joel and his family decided to immigrate to Argentina. In 1998, at age 100, my father told us about his family in Argentina. My wife, Sara, and I were in Buenos Aires for a medical convention and I was surprised to discover three pages of Efrons in the phone book there. A friend of mine who is bilingual called one of the Efrons at random and the recipient was excited to hear from one of the North American Efrons. He knew he had relatives here.

Morris left for the United States soon after my father Harry's birth in 1898. He left from Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, and landed at Ellis Island on September 19 under the name of Moische Efron. He stopped first in New York City with a cousin, Sore Kaplan, and then proceeded

to St. Louis, Missouri, where another cousin, a member of the Berger family, owned a pickle factory. Morris soon found employment as a presser. He was joined two years later by his wife, Ida, his three sons (Jacob, age six, Max, age five, and Harry, age two), and his mother-in-law, who was now divorced from his father.

The newcomers arrived with Yiddish names but soon changed them to American-sounding names. They settled in St. Louis and all lived together. Morris went into the recycling business. He collected burlap bags, renovated them, and sold them back to manufacturers and distributors.

In 1903, Ida's mother, whose American name was Sophia Rosa, was married for the third time to Hyman Levy. The family integrated into American culture quickly. They learned the language, found work, and made friends in their new homeland. Morris and other members of the family soon became naturalized



*The Efron family, circa 1911. Seated left to right are Sophia Rose Surasky (Ida's mother), Ida, and Morris. Dena is in front of Morris. Standing: Annie, Harry, Jake, Jake's wife, Helen, Max, and Isadore. Missing is Lillian, who wasn't born until 1914. Courtesy of Marvin Efron.*

citizens. After Ida arrived in the United States, she and Morris had four more children, Isadore, Annie, Dena, and Lillian. All of the children attended school, but Isadore was the first to graduate from high school.

Everything went well until in 1918, when Morris died suddenly, apparently of typhoid fever. Shortly after his death, Ida decided to move to Aiken, South Carolina, where her brothers had settled and were operating successful retail clothing businesses. She had five brothers, but one, Abram, had been murdered in 1903. When Morris died, his three oldest sons were married and his youngest child, Lillian, was only four years old. After Ida settled in Aiken, each of her children followed her. The family prospered



there and multiplied. Jacob (Jake) had married Helen Kaback from St. Louis and they had three children, Mollie, Minnie, and Martin. In Aiken he opened a supermarket. Max had married Theresa Wise from Holland, Michigan, and they had two children, Julius and Bea. He operated a trucking line. Harry had married Mary Fadem from St. Louis and they had five children, Sylvia, Joe, Lyn, Marvin, and Evelyn. Isadore operated a taxi service and married three times, first to Dena Srago, then Fannie Leven, and finally Herta. Isadore and Dena had one daughter, Joann. Annie was a nurse and never married. Sister Dena assisted her mother in retail clothing and married



Lou Lusher from Canada. They had no children. Lillian married Sol Passink from Savannah, Georgia, and they had two daughters, Phyllis and Nanci.

As the family moved to the next generation, it grew in both numbers and diversity, boasting an extensive variety of professions and occupations. Unfortunately, the only Efrons left in Aiken are in the Sons of Israel section of Bethany Cemetery. Members of the family live in many states and in Israel and China, but 55 of them came together in Charleston, South Carolina, in July 2012, for a family reunion.

*Helen, Mollie, and Jake Efron. Esther Persky albums. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

## Recollections of Growing Up in Aiken

by *Sondra Shanker Katzenstein*

My parents, Minnie and Sam Shanker, both were born in St. Louis, Missouri, and in the mid-1930s came to Aiken where my grandparents Jake and Helen Efron had a grocery store. My parents opened their own grocery store and worked long hours seven days a week. They closed the store for church hours on Sunday—the only day we, as a family, ate our midday meal together. We had a “colored” lady who took care of me and my two younger brothers during the day, and her mother stayed with us until my parents came home from the store at night. May and then Ethel walked to our home early in the morning to cook our breakfast and got us up for school. Mother usually drove us to school. Then she would go to the store to help my father.

The small neighborhood store was in a predominantly black area on Highway 1. Customers who lived in the housing developments nearby would stop to shop and often buy their groceries for the week. There were few supermarkets as we know of today. Our shop sold gasoline and kerosene as well as foodstuffs.

I often helped out working as a cashier or putting away merchandise. The store was not air conditioned but was cooled with fans on the ceilings. We had very nice black customers to whom my parents extended credit when needed. We were taught at an early age that they were our “bread and butter.” I

never ever thought of them as anything other than people with a different color skin. In fact, I saw May or Ethel more than I did my own mother.

I can remember having some of the little black children come to our home to play school in the mornings. (Oddly, I never considered becoming a teacher, even though I thought this was a worthwhile thing to do.) I remember seeing the



*Sondra Shanker, circa 1942.*

Ku Klux Klan marching down the street in front of my grandparents’ grocery store on Park Avenue. My mother explained to me that they not only hated blacks but hated Jews as well. When I was going to Aiken Elementary School, not far from where I lived, I was chased home one day by some boys a little older than I was. They were yelling at me: “You killed Jesus!” I was so afraid and cried back, “I wasn’t even around then.” After that incident, my mother picked me up from school.

Another unpleasant encounter occurred when I was handing out samples of Sealtest cottage cheese at one of the grocery stores. A customer said to me, “You

act just like a Jew.” I had enough chutzpah to say back to her, “That is funny—I am Jewish and I’m proud of it!” Those were the only two episodes of anti-Semitism I can remember.

All of my friends were Christians and often invited me to help decorate their Christmas tree or come to their



*Above: Isadore Efron’s garage, Aiken, SC. Courtesy of Anne Thomasson. Right: Isadore Efron. Esther Persky albums. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



eggnog party or go with them to midnight mass at the Catholic church. I remember spending the night with a friend on Easter eve so the Easter bunny could give me a basket. I am sure that my mother helped my friend’s mother with the goodies.

When my parents sent me to Camp Tel Yehuda one summer, I didn’t like it at first. I felt that I had been dropped in the middle of Israel! Everything was said in Hebrew. At meal time, we had to remember the words for the food to get served. We had to work in the garden, etc. We had Hebrew every day but Shabbat. At the beginning of the month’s stay I knew nothing, but I certainly learned a lot. Most of the campers were not from the South.

The next year, I went to Camp Blue Star and LOVED it! I didn’t want to come home. My parents borrowed the money to keep me there for two months. They knew that I had a boyfriend in Aiken and they were keeping me away from him.

I feel that I got most of my Jewish education from camp. Going to synagogue in Aiken was not a good experience. Not having had any Hebrew, women sitting on one side and men on the other side, with virtually no English in the service, was really boring. Girls were not taught Hebrew then. Only my brothers

studied with Mr. Nathan Persky for their bar mitzvah.

My cousin Rahlene Rifkin Linder and I were made to go to Augusta to the Young Judaea group. We did not feel accepted there. A few times we went to the conventions. To me, it was my camping experiences that gave me a good feeling about being Jewish.

I attended the University of Georgia for one year. The school was way too big for me. I did pledge SDT and joined the sorority. The boys at Georgia were party animals. This was not the scene for me.

I met my husband on a blind date. He was at the navy supply school in Athens when I was a freshman. The date was arranged by a customer and friend of my parents. He was the Episcopal minister in Aiken who shopped at my parents’ grocery store. His wife was a physical therapist. She asked me to help her teach adaptive swimming to handicapped children one summer.

Many years later, I went back to school at Central Piedmont Community College to become a physical therapist assistant. I had three different children in three different schools then and I was going to college in Charlotte. I am really proud to say that all three of my children have had their bar or bat mitzvah and all four grandchildren have too.



*Marriage of Sondra Shanker and Charles Katzenstein, February 1, 1959, conducted by Rabbi Norman Goldberg. Courtesy of Sondra S. Katzenstein.*

## Reflections of a Southern Jew

by Samuel Wolf Ellis

Being a Jew in the South is not quite Faulknerian, but there is a certain amount of quirk that goes with the territory. Sitting in Shabbat services, one is reminded of this every time the Greyhound bus pulls into the station next door, shaking the building's foundation, its engine drowning out the Hebrew song and reading of Torah.

For the Jewish people, it is often difficult to distinguish where heritage ends and faith begins. Nowhere is this more evident than in the American South, where Jews are essentially a minority of a minority. Simple survival requires a real commitment to the Jewish faith and way of life. The synagogue where I grew up, Adath Yeshurun in Aiken, South Carolina, sits as a reminder of an age that has long passed; an age where Jewish immigrants fought to make their way while refusing to shed their Jewish roots. My roots are in this synagogue; my great-grandfather Jacob Wolf was one of its founding members, along with members of the Polier, Surasky, and Poliakoff families. Like these other families, the Wolfs came here circa 1900.

I was born in 1983 and I'm not much of a historian, so my ability to tell my family history is limited. My favorite anecdote about Jacob Wolf recounts that when he struck up a correspondence with his future wife, Julia Kamenoff, who was still in Russia at the time, he sent her pictures of a much more handsome man in order to entice her to come to Aiken. Imagine her surprise when she arrived and he met her at the train! Despite the innocent deception, they did in fact get married. Out of their union came my family, and two historic Aiken institutions, Julia's Dress Shop and the aforementioned Adath Yeshurun Synagogue.

Adath Yeshurun is a pretty building but not exactly beautiful by modern standards. What my synagogue lacks in grandiosity is made up for in sheer heart, the same type of character found in many surviving old buildings in the South. The humble two-story, two-room sanctuary resonates with the character of the men and women who scraped

together what little money they had to build their own place of worship, moving from the attic above the Masonic Temple where services were originally held. To illustrate what it was like to live as a practicing Jew in the South, there were many occasions when the Jewish businessmen who owned the clothing and shoe stores on Laurens Street, Aiken's main thoroughfare, would close up shop during business hours to make minyan.

Growing up at Adath Yeshurun, I was no different from any other child. I would dread the arrival of the High Holy Days, less because of the intensity of the liturgy and more because I could sit patiently for only

*Above: Members pose on the steps of Adath Yeshurun during the congregation's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, 1996. Photo: Todd Lista. Left: Julia and Jacob Wolf on their wedding day; Julia Kamenoff Wolf and six of her seven children: Rebecca (1903), Ann (1908), Ida (1913), Abe (1916), Sam (1914), and Sonny (1906). Courtesy of Rosalee Berger Rinehart.*



so long. Sunday school was much the same, except that it was taught by the wonderful Mrs. Irene Rudnick, whom I admired as our synagogue president. I admired her for her unique sense of humor and for her friendship with my grandmother Evelyn Wolf. I cannot recall every Bible story told to me during Sunday school, but I can recall with pride the traits she bestowed upon me by example: kindness, fairness, and compassion. Irene's impact cannot be understated, as she tirelessly worked to keep Adath Yeshurun strong.

Although I was too young to fully appreciate the intricacies of Jewish faith and philosophy, I was intensely aware that something profound was being passed from generation to generation. It began with my great-grandfather, was passed to my grandmother and Mrs. Rudnick,

to my mother, and finally, to me. My mother and father were married in Adath Yeshurun. My bar mitzvah was held there. Our humble temple and the Jewish faith were intertwined in a complex relationship that was beyond words or reason. Mrs. Rudnick and my mother did a wonderful job instilling this in me, as I did not know my grandfather or great-grandparents, and my Mimi passed away when I was very young.

I wish that I had something more profound to say about Jewish philosophy based on my experiences growing up at Adath Yeshurun, but I have to be honest. The things that stick out in my mind the most are the simple joys, celebrating holidays with a small but tight-knit congregation. Simhat Torah, in particular, was my favorite; parading around the sanctuary with Torah in hand, singing our hearts out, reveling in the joyous stomping that you get when a congregation is marching on hundred-year-old floorboards with an entire Sunday school in tow. Perhaps that is the ultimate testament to Jewish philosophy, this continuation of Old World pragmatism coupled with a zest for life.

*Right: Wedding of Julia Wolf and Michael Ellis, 1980; Irene Rudnick teaching Sunday school, circa 1997; Wolf grandchildren at the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synagogue, 2011—all at Adath Yeshurun. Courtesy of Samuel Wolf Ellis.*



# Apples of Gold: My Life and Times

by Irene Krugman Rudnick

It is only at twilight that we can see the beauty of the day. As I have grown older and look back on my life, I realize how good G-d has been to me. My tombstone will read, "Wife, Mother, Teacher, and Legislator," and underneath these words will be my favorite biblical expression: "A word fittingly spoken is as apples of gold in settings of silver." And then the added line, "Please forgive me for not getting up."

(As was said on *Seinfeld*, "It's our sense of humor that sustained us as a people for 3,000 years.")

Born in December 1929 to Jack and Jean Krugman, I was raised on Hampton Street in Columbia, South Carolina, where we lived with my grandfather, Harry Getter, who was a restaurateur. My mother was an only child and came to America alone after World War I from Chzortkow, Poland, to join my grandfather.

My father, who had a small dry goods store on Assembly Street in Columbia, entertained policeman on the beat with coffee and doughnuts. They often asked him where he was born, and he would retort, "Zabludova, New Jersey." Zabludova lies 20 miles outside of Bialystok and is located near the border of Poland and Russia. His father was killed in 1905 at the Wailing Wall in Israel by terrorists.

My father's mother, Ida Krugman, came to this country from Russia with her four children and lived in New York. When her cousin, Chaim Baker, came to New York on a buying trip, he asked if he could take my father to the South with him, and she consented. Chaim Baker had ten children and my father, who was 14 or 15 when he arrived in South Carolina, worked for members of the family in three towns: Elloree, Estill, and Columbia. He was given work in exchange for shelter, food, and a small stipend, and was considered part of the Baker family. My father opened, as he called it, his "hole in the wall" on Assembly Street.

As time went by his business expanded and his store continued to prosper. My mother and father

were married on January 29, 1929. She was his star saleswoman. From both of them I learned that hard work means amassing sweat equity. The virtues and values they praised were printed on the backs of their business cards: "Square Deal Jack." By dint of their persistence and incredible work ethic, they were able to send all three of their children to college. My brother, Stanley



Harold Rudnick (leaning on truck, front left) in Germany while serving under General Patton during World War II. Courtesy of Irene K. Rudnick.

Krugman, was King of the BBGs [B'nai B'rith Girls] and presently practices dentistry in Miami, Florida. I introduced my sister, Dorothy Krugman, to her future husband, a native Charlestonian named Jack Goldstein, who had graduated from West Point and was an army lieutenant stationed at the Savannah River Site Radar Unit in Aiken. Dorothy subsequently became a teacher and homemaker and now

lives outside of Washington, DC.

In Columbia we were members of Beth Shalom Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly. The Sunday school was conducted by the Reform congregation Tree of Life. My love of Judaism was influenced by my confirmation class teacher, Mrs. Helen Kohn Hennig, who wrote books on South Carolina and was in charge of the Sunday school. Her enthusiasm, intelligence, and teaching ability made a lasting impression on me.

In elementary school my teachers would ask me to go from class to class telling stories, and this skill has served me well in many capacities. In junior high school, I was president of the student body and a member of the honor society, and I was valedictorian of my senior class at Columbia High School.

I graduated from the University of South Carolina cum laude with a double major in political science and English. After graduation from USC law school, where I was one of only two or three women, I was briefly employed by Dean Samuel L. Prince as his secretary. Unable to find a job in a

law firm, I opened my own office. To pay my rent, I tutored students in English.

After practicing law for two years, in November 1954 I married Harold Rudnick from Aiken, South Carolina, who was introduced to me by his sister, Rose. She was married to Hyman Rubin, who served for many years as a senator from Richland County.

We moved directly to Aiken and joined Adath Yeshurun Synagogue, where Harold had grown up. Mr. Nathan Persky conducted services and Mandle Surasky was the president. As my children grew older, I became more active in the Sisterhood, supervised the Sunday school, and was a Sunday school teacher. I served as president and maintenance director of the synagogue for over 20 years. When Morris and Helen became of bar and bat mitzvah age, we traveled to Augusta, Georgia, where they were able to complete their Jewish education with Rabbi Maynard Hyman. I also taught Sunday school in Augusta.

After my marriage, I practiced law in Aiken. I shared an office over the Farmers and Merchants Bank with Benjamin Surasky. As my husband, who was the owner and operator of Rudnick Furniture, needed me in his store, I moved my office to that location. Since 1983, I have practiced law in partnership with my son under the firm name of Rudnick & Rudnick.

I began teaching commercial law at USC Aiken in 1961 and after 50 years was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Education by USC President Harris Pastides. My teaching has been a most rewarding experience, and I am still in the classroom.

Harold and I succeeded in instilling in our children a belief in the value of education. Our daughter, Helen Rudnick Rapoport, graduated from USC magna cum laude with both a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in mass communications. She also graduated from USC law school with a juris doctorate and now teaches full time as a college professor. My son, Morris, also graduated from USC with a bachelor of science in business and a juris doctorate from USC law school. I have been blessed with six grandchildren—Whitney, Jared, and Joshua Rapoport, Charles and Laura Jean Rudnick, and Kathleen Tokar and her children (my great-grandchildren), Michael and Ashley—who have brought me great joy and happiness.

My political career began as superintendent of education for Aiken County. (The legislative delegation later abolished the

position and the superintendent of education is now appointed by the Aiken County School Board.) My job entailed that I investigate and report on the physical conditions of the entire Aiken County school system. I traveled to 38 schools during the year, reported at the public meetings of the Aiken County School Board, and submitted legal descriptions of all the school properties. While serving in this position, I brought to light many issues. For example, after reading the state's fire marshal reports I saw to it that sprinkler systems were installed in schools.

I was elected for the first time in 1973 to the South Carolina House of Representatives from District 81, in Aiken, where I served for 14 years. I was the first Jewish woman elected to the General Assembly and worked tirelessly on behalf of my constituents, priding myself on being available, accountable, and responsive to their needs. Major concerns to me were environmental safeguards, family law issues, as well as funding for public education and myriad safety issues. I addressed problems associated with highway safety, traffic lights, and cross bars and warning signals at railroad crossings. I regularly held

public meetings where voters in my district could voice their questions and concerns. I saw that the journals of the House and Senate were made available in the library and introduced hundreds of bills while in the legislature; I was intellectually honest and sincere about reforming government.

As a Democrat in a highly Republican district, my campaigns were hard fought. Without a supportive network of friends and family, including my husband, an unapologetic cheerleader who helped me steer a steady course when campaigns became intense, our children, and many loyal

constituents, I could not have been elected. My mother often came with me to the General Assembly where she enjoyed the wonderful people and easy camaraderie of my associates. After the redistricting of my district, I lost my seat.

Today I still teach at USC Aiken, practice law, audit college classes, and am active in civic organizations. Time and again, I have learned that all of our experiences teach us resilience and patience. The most important thing that I have learned, though, is the power of a word fittingly spoken. As the novelist Henry James so aptly said: "Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind."



Law partners Irene Rudnick and her son Morris. Courtesy of Irene K. Rudnick.

*Time for Irene*  
RUDNICK - HOUSE DISTRICT 81

# The Poliakovs of Aiken

by *Stuart Fine*

J. S. Poliakov was born in Minsk, Belarus, in 1867. He immigrated to the United States as a teenager, no doubt to avoid being conscripted into the tsar's army and to escape the pogroms that were prevalent. Many times I have imagined how intolerable life must have been for a youngster to leave his parents, knowing that he probably would not see them again, and for parents to encourage that migration. I discussed those very points with my 13-year-old grandson, Henry Fine of Newton, MA, who wrote about his great-great-grandfather for a sixth-grade genealogy project last year.

J. S. settled in Aiken likely because there were relatives in the area who were willing to provide shelter and food until he could establish himself. I suppose he peddled for a while, as did most new immigrants, until he was able to open his store on Laurens Street.

J. S. married Rebecca Vigodsky, also from Belarus, although I don't know whether they met in Aiken or in the Old Country. While my mother, Gussie, J. S.'s and Rebecca's fourth child, spoke often about the endearing personal characteristics of her parents, to whom she was devoted, she spoke little to me about their lives in Belarus. I can only imagine that life there was so unpleasant that they rarely talked of it after settling in America, the land of opportunity.

Growing up in Aiken, all the Poliakov children attended the Aiken Institute, as the local school was known. As I recall, the school ended with the tenth or eleventh grade. The Institute became a library some years ago and is still located across the street from The Willcox Hotel. My mother recalled socializing with the children of other Jewish families in Aiken—the Suraskys, Poliers, Wolfs, Rudnicks, and others. A gregarious person, my mother also made friends with non-Jewish classmates with whom she would walk home at the end of the school day. She made a point of telling me that they did not regularly visit in each other's houses. She never mentioned overt discrimination.

While J. S. kept the store on Laurens Street and participated in the activities of the small Jewish community, Grandmother Rebecca tended to the family. During a family gathering in 1928, Rebecca died suddenly and unexpectedly after consuming a large meal. "Acute indigestion," my mother called it. Most likely, the cause of death was a massive heart attack. Photos document that she was a large woman, who (I speculate) probably ate lots of fatty foods, didn't exercise much, and surely was not treated for high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

After her mother's passing, my mother remained in Aiken and helped J. S. manage the store until he retired in 1937, at which time they moved to Baltimore. Southern Jewish merchants were familiar with Baltimore because Jacob Epstein, owner of the Baltimore Bargain House, sent them "free" railroad tickets several times a year and provided "free" overnight accommodations at the Lord Baltimore Hotel. In exchange, he expected the merchants to stock their inventories with purchases made at his store. It was a successful business strategy!

Shortly after relocating to Baltimore, J. S. took a boat from Baltimore to Newport News, VA,

to visit his daughter Sadie. The boat caught fire and all passengers and crew were ordered to jump overboard into the river. J. S. was the only casualty. My mother alleged that he knew how to swim. Age 70 at the time, it's possible he suffered a heart attack; no autopsy was performed.

I visited Aiken for the first time in 1952 at age 10, stopping en route to Augusta, GA, for a family wedding. We stayed overnight at the now defunct Hotel Henderson. I have very few memories of that trip. Fifty years passed before I visited Aiken again, this time with my wife, Ellie. But before that visit, I was fortunate to make contact with Doris Baumgarten, the unofficial historian and archivist of Jewish Aiken. Practically everything I know about my



*Jacob (J. S.) Poliakov, a founder of Sons of Israel Cemetery and Adath Yeshurun Synagogue. Courtesy of Doris L. Baumgarten.*

grandfather's contributions to the Jewish community in Aiken derives from information provided by Doris.

To wit: J. S. was one of a small group of merchants who provided funds to build Adath Yeshurun and to purchase two acres for a Jewish burial ground, Sons of Israel Cemetery. Whenever I walk through that cemetery, I feel like I am visiting my mother's friends and relatives, about whom I heard her speak so often. There are the cousins Jean and Anne Poliakov, my mother's very good friend Dorothy Sarat (née Surasky) Scheinfeld, the Poliers, the Suraskys, the Wolfs (most of whom I met either during my 1952 visit to Aiken or when they visited us in Baltimore), and, of course, the grandparents I never met, Rebecca and J. S. Poliakov, who had six children, born between approximately 1893 and 1908, profiled below.

After several visits to Aiken, one with our granddaughter Sarah Pranikoff, Ellie and I decided to organize a Poliakov/Polikoff\* family reunion. In December 2013, about 30 family members gathered in Aiken for two days. It was truly wonderful watching the great-grandchildren and the great-great-grandchildren of J. S. and Rebecca called to the bimah for an aliyah. J. S. and Rebecca would have loved it!

At the conclusion of the service, the synagogue hosted a magnificent oneg for the family and all the congregants in the lower level social hall. Many of the delicacies were homemade. Adath Yeshurun leaders expressed their delight at welcoming descendants of one of the founders of the congregation some 90-plus years later, while family members explained how special it was to be walking in the footsteps of the patriarch about whom they had heard so much but never met.

After the oneg, we visited the Poliakov section of the Sons of Israel Cemetery and the ancestral home on Pendleton Street, a beautiful, two-story brick house built in 1912 and now the Johnson Law Offices. We hiked in Hitchcock Woods with Dr. Harry Shealy, a retired professor of biology and former president of the Hitchcock Foundation, and enjoyed meeting new relatives and sharing several delicious meals at The Willcox. The event, reported in the *Aiken Standard*, was so successful that another group of 40 to 45 Poliakovs will convene in Aiken in December 2014. (I was pleased to be recognized in the *Aiken Standard* article as

\*Most Poliakovs include an "a." According to Gussie, when her brother Benet attended the University of South Carolina, he dropped the "a" and became Polikoff. Subsequently, his siblings followed suit.

Sam Pranikoff's grandfather!) Hats off to Doris Baumgarten, Gary Poliakov of Spartanburg, Irene Krugman Rudnick, Peppy and Stephen Surasky, and their many helpers, without whose efforts the reunion could not have occurred.

The grand, great-grand, and great-great-grandchildren of J. S. and Rebecca are proud of what the Poliakovs and their friends did for the Aiken Jewish community more than 100 years ago. I'd like to believe that J. S. and Rebecca would be proud of them as well.

## Descendants of J. S. and Rebecca Poliakov

**LOUIS** was a doughboy in World War I, though I don't know that he ever saw action. He started his career as a traveling salesman working out of Baltimore and eventually operated his own business, the Berkshire Sweater Company. In later years, he managed a family-owned development, Bristol Terrace Homes, near Levittown, NJ. Louis married Naomi Rombro of Baltimore. Marvin, born in 1921 and now deceased, was a practicing attorney in Baltimore who was active in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and '60s. He married Shirley Globus; their sons are Judson Casey and Adam Spence. Louis and Naomi's son Alan, born in 1929, was in the textile business. He married Dana, who worked in the fashion industry, and sired two sons: Lee, a pediatrician, and Mitchell, in the investment business. Both boys are married; Lee and his wife have one son.



*Poliakov section of the Sons of Israel Cemetery, 1996. Photo: Dale Rosengarten.*

**LILLIE** married her cousin, Milton Shapiro. They opened a store in Bamberg, SC, which they operated until Milton died in 1955. Lillie then relocated to Baltimore where she lived until about age 90. Daughter Geraldine (Gerry) married Sidney (Bud) Kalin of Sioux City, Iowa, where they reared three children, Steve, Janet, and Bruce.

Gerry and Bud lived to about 90. Steve is a prominent insurance executive in Minneapolis, active in the Jewish community, and the father of three daughters, Lindsey, Jessie, and Alana. Janet married Richard Yulman, a prominent businessman also active in the Jewish community in Miami. Janet, now deceased, and Richard's children are Katy and Brett. Bruce remained in Sioux City where he still runs the family's heating and air conditioning business. He and his wife Linda, a pediatric emergency department toxicology nurse, have four children: Michael, Jenna, Jacqui, and J. B. Shirley, the Shapiros' younger daughter, married Irving (Hershey) Schwartzman, a Baltimore attorney, and reared Marc. All three Schwartzmans are now deceased. Both Gerry and Shirley graduated from the University of South Carolina.

**BENET** was reputed to be the scholar of the family. After graduating from the University of South Carolina School of Law, he practiced in

Winston-Salem, NC. Married to Margaret New of Shaker Heights, OH, they had two children, Peggy and Benet Jr. In the 1930s, Benet was retained to represent Libby Holman, a nationally prominent torch singer who was accused of murdering her husband, Z. Smith Reynolds, the son of R. J. Reynolds. My mother said that all over the country people listened nightly to their radios to hear news of the trial. (It reminded me of our country's fascination with the O. J. Simpson trial in the 1990s.) Libby was acquitted. The judge set my uncle Benet's fee at one million dollars, quite a tidy sum in those days! As I heard the story, Libby persuaded Benet to relocate to New York and promised to introduce him to her friends in the entertainment world, some of whom might become his clients. Accordingly, Benet and family moved to Manhattan and spent their lives and careers there. Peggy married Bud Bradt and had two sons. Benet Jr. married Jean Loeb and had three children.

**GUSSIE**, my mother, relocated to Baltimore in 1937. For three years, she worked in a ladies' dress shop as a salesperson; then, in 1940, she married my father, P. Edward Fine, a practicing attorney. She quickly persuaded him to give up his practice and join her in business. They operated a men's and boys' shop in suburban Baltimore from 1940 until retiring in 1968. I was born in 1942, married Ellen (Ellie) Himelfarb in 1964, and completed medical school in 1966. Ellie, a gifted school teacher, and I have two children, Karen and Andy. Karen is director of admissions for the Triad School in Winston-Salem, NC. Her husband, Tom Pranikoff, is chief of pediatric surgery at Wake Forest Medical Center. Their children are Sam, born 1994, and Sarah, born 1997. Andy practices pediatric emergency medicine at Boston Children's Hospital and is on the faculty of Harvard Medical School. His wife, Laura, who was his classmate at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, is an ophthalmic surgeon in Boston. Their children are Henry, born

2001, and Hannah, born 2004. I have spent my career in academic ophthalmology. From 1972 to '91, I was a full-time faculty member at the Wilmer Ophthalmological Institute at Johns Hopkins; from 1991 to 2010, I served as professor and chair of ophthalmology and director of the Scheie Eye Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. After I retired from Penn at the end of 2010, Ellie and I moved to our vacation home in the Colorado mountains, near Carbondale. I am still engaged in research and education in ophthalmology and maintain a part-time faculty appointment at the University of Colorado's Anschutz Medical Center.

**SADIE** married Milton Levy who spent his career with the Department of the Navy in Washington, DC. They lived in Silver Spring, MD, where they reared their children, Jay Stanley, born in 1938, and Roslyn, born in 1940. Jay, a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Engineering, married Jean; they have one daughter, Sarah, and one granddaughter. Roslyn married Lewis Godfrey and lives in Silver Spring.

**BELLE**, J. S. and Rebecca's baby, was born in 1908. She married Nathaniel (Ned) Badaines, a physician, and lived with him and their three children in Syracuse, NY. Their eldest child, Roberta (Bobbi, now deceased), graduated from Syracuse University, married Aaron King of Syracuse, an otolaryngologist, and had ten children. They lived in Binghamton, NY. Belle and Ned's second daughter, Eleanor (Ellie), also a graduate of Syracuse, married Gerald Schwartzberg, a physician, and moved to Phoenix, AZ, where he was in private practice and where they reared their daughters, Beth and Janet. The Badaines' son, Joel, also a Syracuse graduate, obtained a Ph.D. in psychology and eventually relocated (alone) to Sydney, Australia, where he practices psychodrama. His former wife, Leslie, lives in Knoxville, TN, where their daughters, Debbie and Becki, were reared.

**Save the Date!**

**May 2-3, 2015**

## JHSSC's Spring Meeting to Commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE-Day

The Jewish Heritage Collection at the College's Addlestone Library will mount an exhibition to coincide with the meeting, and the program committee is planning a session in which participants will share their photographs and read first-person accounts of the war.

If you have photos, letters, memoirs, or other documents pertaining to World War II, please contact Dale Rosengarten: [rosengartend@cofc.edu](mailto:rosengartend@cofc.edu) or 843.953.8028.

*"Surrender!" Photo gift of Gerald Meyerson.  
Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



# The Baumgarten Family

by Linda Baumgarten, Sharon Mills, Ann Traylor, and Doris L. Baumgarten

Doris and Pete Baumgarten and their youngest daughter transferred from Wilmington, Delaware, to Aiken, South Carolina, in August 1977, just in time to enroll Sharon for her junior year of high school. Their oldest daughter, Linda, remained in Philadelphia to finish college, and their middle daughter, Ann, transferred to the University of Georgia the following year.

Peter, a DuPont chemical engineer, had been active in Temple Beth Emeth in Wilmington, serving as secretary and vice president of the congregation. He also served as president of the Men's Club. Pete taught religious school to teenagers for four years.

In Wilmington, Doris was active in the Sisterhood, serving as vice president. She chaired dinners and hospitality for the Temple Youth Group multiple times. All three daughters were active in the Youth Group and attended programs at Kutz Camp in Warwick, New York. (Two of Pete and Doris's grandsons now attend the same camp.)

After belonging to such a strong Jewish community, Doris and Pete were concerned about what Jewish life would be like in this small southern town. Remember that the World Wide Web and Google had yet to be invented.

Fortunately for the Baumgartens, a Jewish family had transferred from Aiken to Wilmington six months before the move, and they reported that Aiken indeed had a congregation of 40 families, including numerous Jewish teenagers. Doris was pleased to find out that there was no discrimination in buying a house or joining a country club in Aiken. She and Pete were delighted to see that this small congregation had a beautiful sanctuary, three Torah scrolls, and a student rabbi brought in for High Holy Day services.

Shortly after arriving in Aiken, Pete began to help conduct Shabbat and holiday services at Adath Yeshurun. Soon he was elected to the board of directors as secretary and treasurer, and subsequently served six years as president. Doris immediately became involved in the synagogue, including arranging hospitality schedules for student rabbis, and serving as treasurer and president of the Sisterhood. For years, she has been the first point of phone contact for the congregation, fielding random inquiries regarding Jewish life in Aiken.

What inspired Doris and Pete to continue their Jewish involvement in their new community? Doris was born into a Conservative Jewish family in

Allentown, Pennsylvania. The family moved several times before settling in Newport News, Virginia, where Doris attended religious school and was confirmed in 1945, as World War II ended. Doris remembers being very disappointed that her brothers weren't able to attend her confirmation a month after VE-Day, because they were both serving in the military, one in Germany and the other in Italy. Doris attended William and Mary College, where she was secretary of Hillel for more than three years, and then went to graduate school at the University of Delaware,

where she found her "nice Jewish boy," Peter Baumgarten.

Peter, who was rescued by the Kindertransport in 1939, cherished the American religious, educational, and political freedoms denied him during his childhood in Berlin, Germany. From Berlin, his family moved to Vienna, and then he and his brother were evacuated by the Kindertransport to Bournemouth, England. Since



Left to right: Doris Baumgarten, Sharon Mills, Ann Traylor, Linda Baumgarten, and Peter Baumgarten, March 2000. Courtesy of Doris L. Baumgarten.

*Aiken is a wonderful place to live. The town provides so many opportunities to participate in interesting activities, stimulate your mind, keep active, and be of service to others.*

– Doris Lerner Baumgarten

Peter turned 13 during this uprooting, he missed the opportunity to have a bar mitzvah. The boys' next journey was to Springfield, Massachusetts, where the entire family was reunited. The Baumgartens then moved to Atlanta. Peter attended Georgia Tech, entered the military, and attended University of Delaware for his masters and doctoral degrees, where he found his "nice Jewish girl," Doris Lerner.

In 1989, about the time of Hurricane Hugo, Pete and Doris joined the Southern Jewish Historical Society. When the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina was founded in the mid-1990s, they joined JHSSC and began attending meetings. Doris served on JHSSC's board of directors from 2004 to 2011. Networking with other members, Doris found the resources to locate a sofer to restore two synagogue Torahs. And after Pete's initial Sons of Israel Cemetery inventory for the Aiken-Barnwell Genealogical Society's survey, Doris, Nelson Danish, and others completed an inventory of burials for JHSSC's website.

Besides serving Aiken's Jewish community, Pete felt it was important to contribute to the community at large. He worked to protect land and water resources as a member of the boards of the Aiken Conservation Land Trust and other conservation agencies in South Carolina, while Doris continues to serve as a docent at the Aiken County Historical Museum and as a tour guide at the synagogue.

Congregation Adath Yeshurun celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup>

anniversary in 1996, with Pete leading a rousing rendition of the "Little Shtetl of Aiken," based on the traditional Yiddish song "Belz." More than a hundred former and current synagogue members attended the event. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated in 2011 with community tours and large

gatherings of early synagogue families, such as the Wolfs and the Efrons. Doris has also organized visits from several large Jewish and Christian groups, including a tour during the city of Aiken's 175<sup>th</sup> birthday when a thousand people visited Adath Yeshurun in one day. Whew!

Being Jewish in Aiken hasn't always been easy. When the Baumgartens arrived, Sharon experienced the difficulty of explaining Jewish holidays to teachers and obtaining permission to attend synagogue rather than marching with the high school band on Yom Kippur. Adath Yeshurun doesn't have a rabbi or staff of teachers or administrative support. It is up to the members to answer questions, maintain the building, conduct services, and hire student rabbis. Yet this synagogue with 60 members fulfills the same functions as much

larger congregations, holding holiday and Shabbat services, comforting the sick, and supporting grieving families.

What is the future of the small congregation? As long as there are volunteers to carry out its mission, Adath Yeshurun will continue to serve the Jewish community and the Aiken community at large. That is our belief and our hope.



Above: Peter Baumgarten leads Congregation Adath Yeshurun in singing a rendition of "Belz," his tribute to Aiken, on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synagogue in 1996. Photo: Lowell Greenbaum. Below: an excerpt from Pete's copy of "Little Shtetl of Aiken." Courtesy of Doris L. Baumgarten.

SCHETEL OF

Aiken, my little town Aiken,  
My little home where I spent -- my childhood years.  
Aiken, my little town Aiken,  
In the great little house, with the children I used to laugh.  
Every Shabos I would go running  
and all the boys with me.  
Then throw small stones into Coker Springs--  
Underneath the acorn tree.

SCHETEL OF

Aiken, my little town Aiken,  
My little home, where we used to have such beautiful dreams.

# History Is the Tie that Binds Us

by Martin Perlmutter

*Bechol dor vador chayav adam lirot et atzmo keilu hu yatza mimitzvrayim . . .*

Each year during the Passover Seder, Jews recite these words, reminding them of the obligation to consider the Jewish exodus from Egypt as though it were a personal journey, not just one embarked upon by our ancestors. We are months away from Passover, yet my thoughts turn to this iconic passage from the Hagaddah when I consider JHSSC's mission of connecting one generation to the next through our shared history as Jews, and more specifically, as Jewish South Carolinians.

Whether rabbinic or academic, via conversation, a page of Talmud, or a scholarly tome, the goal of transmitting this communal narrative remains the same. For 20 years, the Society has collected, publicized, and celebrated South Carolina's Jewish history. We've done so by organizing biannual meetings featuring stimulating speakers and panel discussions, sponsoring historic markers, gathering cemetery records, promoting the landmark exhibition, *A Portion of the People*, and its companion video, *Land of Promise*, building a bountiful website, and, not least, producing this newsletter.

The work performed by the JHSSC is incredibly gratifying to those of us who do it—professional and lay leaders alike—and we hope that is also true for our members and friends. Our activities are not without financial cost, however. We are sustained, to be sure, by our annual membership dues, but at the end of the day 36 dollars goes only so far. We look to our Pillars to help us attain our most ambitious goals. With deep respect for those who support our mission, I invite you to become a Pillar today by pledging a thousand dollars a year for the next five years. Your gift will enable us to continue documenting our stories and the experiences of those who came before, so that our history may be preserved for those yet to come.

Yes, I/we want to become a Pillar of the JHSSC.

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Check enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (includes annual membership)

Mail this form and your check to the address on the back cover or go to [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org) and click on Membership.

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- Ellen Arnovitz, Atlanta, GA
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JHSSC Pillars contribute \$1,000 a year for five years. Foundational Pillars are institutions or foundations that commit \$2,000 a year for five years. All contributions are tax deductible.



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_____	<b>Foundational Pillar (\$2,000 per year for five years)</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

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Enroll your friends and relatives for an additional \$36 each.  
Send us their information and we will inform them of your gift.

*Make checks payable to JHSSC  
and mail to the return address above.*

**Register now for the November 15–16, 2014 meeting in Aiken.  
See page 14 for more information.**