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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Letter from the President

For those of us who attended JHSSC’s 20th 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, Erid Idelsohn, Rachel Barnett, Sandra Conradi, Dale Rosengarten, and Mark Swick—orchestrated a wonderful evening of food, fellowship, and festivities. On Sunday morning, keynote speaker 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 their insightful panel, on which 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 jhsc.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 Klyde 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 “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 Poliakoff 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 jhsc.org and complete the online survey. Your responses will help us evaluate past programs and determine our direction for the future.
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 Poliakoffs, another early Jewish family in Aiken, originated in Kamen. So it is likely that these two families knew each other in the Old Country.

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 grandfather’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. Wagener, about 25 miles from Aiken itself, was 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. My grandfather was 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, set up housekeeping, however, the only other family my mother knew was the Poliakoffs. 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, South Carolina, where my mother, Ruth Kirshtein Kaplan, was born and grew up. Before they were married, my mother told my father that she wanted to have a kosher household. My father agreed to this. My mother says that the synagogue must have attracted a lot of people, so it is likely that these two families knew each other in the Old Country.

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 tehillah (the lay hazzan), was a man named Zushke Poliakoff, who wore a beard, a bowler hat, and a long tallis.

My parents met in Charleston, South Carolina, where my mother, Ruth Kirshtein Kaplan, was born and grew up. Before they were married, my mother told my father that she wanted 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
knows for sure was keeping kosher was that of my great-aunt Julia Kamenoff Wolf. I remember her as Tantche Goldie. My mother’s uncle Rev. Alter Kirshtein was the shoehet 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 Shapio’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 Iadore (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 alongside the congregation 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 a distinguished career in the South Carolina legislature and 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 daughter of Mr. H. L. Polier, and Mr. Abe Cohen, a merchant of Aiken.”

The following ceremony and reception “for about 150 guests . . . where an stalk or so was spent around the tables in pleasant conversation . . . the happy couple were 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.”

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 Aiken. The ceremony was 31 when they married. Again, Rabbi A. Polikoff, of Augusta, performed the ceremony and reception “for about 150 guests . . . where an stalk or so was spent around the tables in pleasant conversation . . . the happy couple were 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.”
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, who was well known in the area 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 to the motive was a teenage black girl, Mary Drayton, who was hired by Green and her husband 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. 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. Another witness testified that Green “was going to kill ever [sic] Jew peddler that came around and get shed of them.”

According to Drayton, Green and Dora decided to tell authorities that Green had arrived home to find Surasky making a pass at her husband, 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 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 Polliers and Suraskys. Other prominent Jewish families were the Wolfes, 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 yahrzeit, 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, Purim, and Simhat Torah, with Mr. Peraky 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 original Jewish families were the Wolves, 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.
Idda Surasky Efren sitting in front of her store on Laurens Street, Aiken. Courtesy of Sondra Shanker Katzenstein.

Mr. Persky and His Clan by Mordecai Persky

My cousin Beatrice Efren was one of the Surasky kinfolks 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. When I left a 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 in it 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 Efrens, all older than I, all possessing exceptional humor and intelligence. The Payeffs were Kiry, 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 Kiry’s gift for show-off comedy. I enjoyed that gift as it took wing in Kiry 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 Kiry were eight years older than I, 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 frunkheit (observant religions) under both Daddy and Grandma Freydl Surasky. Maybe it was my early exposure to frunkheit that makes me rebel against the automatic disbelief that’s beginning around silence.

Even at Jewishly-famous Valozychyn 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 shelter 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 discharge 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 a mood he was trying to conceal.

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, Kiry’s wit, Spencer Tracy’s movies, and the home runs of Hanks–Pankis Greenberg.
Sophie and I went home to crayons and scissors again, and for the first star. We usually spotted the Lord’s sign that Sophie, and I walked down Richland Avenue looking violated the Sabbath. Then at Saturday twilight, Grandma, she made a game of keeping Sophie and me “legal” Friday happening there, and maybe not shul unless something personal is “Mein feygaleh, mein feygaleh,” died. I sat there as Mama held his hospital room a night before he the love and forgiveness in the even rang church bells. in town eulogized him, and some legend said that every minister often rang enough gifts to cut register, there was a Nathan who customer heaped up a stack making a living. But may I add 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, “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 from 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 narrow, 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, label, and make war against its neighbors. 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, Bubbleh, 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 sight. When I knew I’d come too close to the visitor Death, who outweighs us all at once.

Yes, I am your grandson too, Grandpas Chaim Surasky and Mordecai Persky, zeydeh I never knew—Nathan’s father Mordecai dead in Valohyn years before 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 share 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 Elron, 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 levonkh”). 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 with his 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 hed ridden 212 long miles to our house from Morganton 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 lokschen (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 30th 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 Beifa, 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 (1912–1923, Max. 1106, gift of Mordecai Persky, Special Collections, College of Charleston).

Our thanks to Bella Magazine publisher Kathy Urban Huff, staff writer Anna BoylstonDangerfield, 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.aikenwivellamagazine.com/archives/, especially Dangerfield’s profiles of the Wolfs (Oct. 2011), Rudnicks (Nov 2011), Polaskoffs (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*
Panelists: Doris L. Baumgarten, Nelson A. Danish, Marvin Efron, Samuel Wolf Ellis,
Moderator: Dale Rosengarten

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.

Deadline for registration: November 7, 2014.

Hotel reservations:
Townplace 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 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 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...
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 get 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 the goodies. I am sure that my mother helped my friend's mother with the 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 Riklin Linder and I were made to 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 once a 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.
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 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.

Above: Members pose on the steps of Adath Yeshurun during the congregation’s 75th 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 (1900), Ann (1908), Ida (1913), Abe (1916), Sam (1914), and Sonny (1906). Courtesy of Rosalie Berger Rinehart.

Apples of Gold: My Life and Times

by Irene Krugman Rudnick

I t 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, “Then, the added line, ‘Please forgive me for not getting up.’” fittingly spoken is as apples of gold in settings of silver. And “Wife, Mother, Teacher, and Legislator,” and underneath with him, and she consented. Chaim Baker had ten children buying trip, he asked if he could take my father to the South from Russia with her four children and lived in New York. They often asked him where he was born, and he would entertain policeman on the beat with coffee and doughnuts. 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 Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly. The Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly.

Chaim Baker was a restaurateur. My father's mother, Ida Krugman, came to this country from Russia with her four children and lived in New York. After graduation from USC law school, where I was one of only 2 or 3 women, I was briefly employed by Dean Krugman, to her future husband, a native Charlestownian 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 Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly. The Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly. The Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly. The Synagogue where my father served on the board of trustees, and we attended services and Hebrew school regularly.

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 Manny Surasky was the president. As the 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. My son-in-law 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 Raapot, 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 Raapot, Charles and Laura Jean Rudnick, and Kathleen Tokar and her children (my great-grandchildren). 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.”
The Poliakoffs of Aiken

by Stuart Fine

J. S. Poliakoff 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 Aiken. Practically everything I know about my grandmother, Rebecca (nee Surasky) Poliakoff, is derived 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 my mother speak so often. There are the cousins Jean and Anne Poliakoff, my mother’s very good friend Dorothy Sarat (nee Surasky) Scheinfeld, the Poliers, the Suraskys, the Wolfs (most of whom I met either during my visit to Aiken or when they visited us in Baltimore), and, of course, the grandparents I never met, Rebecca and J. S. Poliakoff, 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 Poliakoff-Poliakoff 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 prayer and food, 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 home-made. 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 Poliakoff 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 also visited 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 Poliakoffs will convene in Aiken in December 2014. (I was pleased to recognize the Aiken Standard article as featured in the “a” section of the Aiken newspaper.)

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

Most Poliakoffs include an “a.” According to Gussie, when her brother Benet attended the University of South Carolina, he dropped the “a” and became Poliakoff. Subsequently, his siblings followed suit.

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

Descendants of J. S. and Rebecca Poliakoff

LOUIS was a doughty 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 Rombo 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.

LILLIE married her cousin, Milton Shapiro. They opened a store in Barberton, 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 children, Lindsay, 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 Shapiro’s youngest daughter, married Irving (Horsey) Hartman, 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...
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 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 was elected president of the Men's Club. Pete taught religious school to teenagers for four years.

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 Katz Camp in Warwick, New York. (Two of Pete and Doris's grandchildren 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 town provides so many opportunities to participate in interesting activities, stimulate your mind, keep active, and be of service to others.

Doris Lerner Baumgarten

The Baumgarten Family

May 2–3, 2015
JHSSC’s Spring Meeting to Commemorate the 70th Anniversary of VE-Day

The Jewish Heritage Collection at the College’s Adelstone 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 Rosenzweig: rosenzweig@cofc.edu or 843.953.8028.

"Surrender!" Photo gift of Gerald Meyerson. Special Collections, College of Charleston.
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 75th anniversary in 1996, with Pete leading a rousing rendition of the “Little Shetel of Aiken,” based on the traditional Yiddish song “Belz.” More than a hundred former and current synagogue members attended the event. The 90th 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 175th birthday when a thousand people visited Adath Yeshurun in one day. Where!

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 holidays and Shabbat services, forting 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.


History Is the Tie that Binds Us
by Martin Perlmutter

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 Hagadah 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.

Name(s):
Address:
City:_______ State:_______ Zip:
Phone:________________ Email:________________

Check enclosed $_________(includes annual membership)

Mail this form and your check to the address on the back cover or go to jhssc.org and click on Membership.

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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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Name: _______________________________________________________
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Phone: ___________________________  Fax:  ______________________
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ANNUAL DUES FOR 2015 (JANUARY – DECEMBER)

_____ Individual/Family Membership            $36
_____ Friend $200
_____ Sponsor $350
_____ Patron $750
_____ Founding patron $1,000
_____ Pillar ($1,000 per year for five years) $5,000
_____ Foundational Pillar ($2,000 per year for five years) $10,000

Join or renew online at jhssc.org.
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.