COURAGE, CONSCIENCE, AND CONFORMITY —

SOUTH CAROLINA JEWS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

REGISTER NOW FOR SPRING MEETING IN CHARLESTON, SC APRIL 16–17

SPRING 2016

VOLUME XXI NUMBER 1
In this issue

**Entering Rivers – Millicent E. Brown, Ph.D.** – A black teen, one of two girls who were the first African-American students to integrate Rivers High in Charleston, South Carolina, found the presence of a large minority of Jewish students at the school shielded her from the hostility of the Christian white majority. 

Across the Big Water of Lake Marion: The dismantling of the segregated school system – Ernest L. Marcus – Ernie Marcus and Rachel Gordin Barnett, both raised in small-town Jewish families on either side of Lake Marion, discuss their parents’ decisions to send them to “segregation academies” after South Carolina public schools were integrated by federal order.

The Closing of Eutawville Elementary – Ernest L. Marcus – The new president of JHSSC recounts his experiences when he left the public school system at age nine and enrolled first at Wade Hampton Academy in Orangeburg, and then at Holly Hill Academy.

When the Saints Go Marching In – Rachel Gordin Barnett – In 1970, five years after the founding of Clarendon Hall, Rachel Gordin and her siblings—the only Jewish students in Summerton, South Carolina—entered the Baptist-supported, all-white refuge located on the outskirts of the small farming town.

A Southern Jewish Girl’s Very Personal Civil Rights Story – Judy Kurtz Goldman – A native of Rock Hill, South Carolina, looks back on the civil rights era of the mid-twentieth century and remembers instances of both bigotry and bravery, and a lasting lesson learned from her father, Ben Kurtz.


“I don’t run from nobody!” – Hyman Rubin III – Hyman Rubin, Sr., bequeathed a powerful heritage to his grandson, who describes the late senator’s love for America and his determination to lead the fight against injustice.

Isadore E. Lourie: Advocate for the Underprivileged – Jack Swerling – Attorney and legislator Isadore Lourie, a colleague recalls, was a strong advocate on behalf of minorities. Known for his compassion, he used his political skills and position in the South Carolina Senate to “do right” for all people, regardless of race, in the Midlands and around the state.

The Keyserling Family Compass – Billy Keyserling – Beaufort’s mayor traces his family’s shared ethics to his grandfather, William, who, by example, encouraged service to others less fortunate. William’s sons, Leon and Herbert, and Herbert’s wife, Harriet, carried on the legacy.

Milestones: 40 Pillars, 500 Members – Martin Perlmutter – JHSSC and its affiliates at the College of Charleston have gone a long way towards putting South Carolina’s Jewish history on the map. Join now and ride the wave!

Letter from the President

Since moving from South Carolina to Washington, D.C., in 1976, I would never have guessed I’d be writing to you as the new president of JHSSC. How that happened is a tribute to the richness of the experience available to those who become active in the Society. Several years ago I started writing articles for the magazine about various branches of my family in South Carolina, dating as far back as 1842. I had not had a history class since high school, so it was a little daunting, but the enthusiasm and resources offered by Dale Rosengarten, Rachel Barnett, Marty Perlmutter, Alyssa Neely, Ann Meddlin Helman, and others gave me the courage to reconnect with relatives and embark on family research projects.

As co-VP of Archives and Historical Sites this past year, I worked with Society officers and fellow board member Rhetta Mendelson on the Orangeburg portion of the fall 2015 conference. While researching Jewish life in small towns similar to Eutawville, where I grew up, I met some fascinating people, such as 90-year-old Bernie Rubenstein of Ellerbee, Orangeburg County historian Gene Atkinson, and Becky Ulmer from St. Matthews, a founder of the Ellerbee Heritage Museum and Cultural Center.

The fall meeting, “A Tale of Two Cities,” featured terrific programs and speakers. Historic Columbia co-sponsored the Columbia presentations, which covered the capital’s early Jewish history and 20th-century merchants. In the old commercial district of Orangeburg, we unveiled an historical marker commemorating the city’s Jewish merchants and notable residents. Followed by a panel discussion at Temple Sinai, where a tiny congregation is holding on despite declining membership.

Our upcoming meeting on April 16–17 in Charleston tackles the complex relationship between southern Jews and the Civil Rights Movement. Most of us are aware of the active involvement of Jews in the desegregation struggles of the 1960s, from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching with Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma to the disproportionate number of Jewish Freedom Riders. While the majority of activists came from the North, Jewish progressives in the South also took risks and became involved. That said, most southern Jews, a small minority throughout the region, went along with the white, genteel majority and supported the status quo in race relations. It goes without saying now that no-change meant many of our neighbors would continue to suffer their inferior status with all its disadvantages. I wish I could say it went without saying then, but it did not.

We plan to explore all sides of the issues confronting the region and the nation in this explosive period. Jews in the South felt conflicted in their identity; their forebears in Europe had experienced centuries of antisemitism and outright violence, yet as southerners they were very much accepted in white society. This acceptance, however, came at a price; particularly for people in isolated rural communities. White skin privilege came with the expectation of political conformity on race issues. For Jewish families there was legitimate fear for their safety and economic well-being if they antagonized the mainstream community; the memory of Leo Frank’s lynching resonated with some, and synagogue bombings were not a hypothetical concern. Northern Jews who damored for social justice for blacks brought unwanted attention to southern Jews, whose racial views were shaped by the mores of the Jim Crow system.

Examining the thoughts and actions of South Carolina Jews during the civil rights era of the mid-twentieth century, we expect to find much to be proud of, but we also are determined to investigate aspects of the subject that make us uncomfortable.

In this issue of the Society’s magazine and at our April meeting, we will take a look at the integration of Rivers High School in Charleston and the role particular Jewish political leaders played in pushing for change.

The JHSSC is excited to welcome USC history professor Bobby J. Donaldson as our keynote speaker on Saturday, and to have the College of Charleston’s African American Studies Program as our co-sponsor. With the outpouring of grief and outrage over the horrific murders at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in June 2015, I am gratified that the Society is tackling this timely subject that just won’t go away, and has designed a thought-provoking spring program.

Hope to see you in April.

Ernest L. Marcus
Entering Rivers

Before entering Rivers High School in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1963, I am sure I had almost no knowledge of what it meant to be Jewish. In my narrowly constructed southern world, people were either “white” or “black,” and physical presentation alone accounted for the separation. But because of my parents’ involvement in civil rights struggles that allowed intermittently, although briefly, views of human interactions beyond the simplicity of my hometown, I had traveled to gatherings that brought people of good conscience and progressive social agendas together, in spite of pervasive laws and notions insisting on segregation.

Therefore, when I met Jewish students at Rivers, I knew the words to and could convincingly sing “Hava Nagila.” I could enthusiastically dance “Hava Nagila” and was amused to find that my closest locals a few blocks away. attended a more homogeneous, all-white school with Christian people to say hello to me that September 1963 day at school, sit next to me in class without pushing their chairs away in disgust, stand next to me in the lunchroom, seven were Jewish. That has always meant something to me. And the “coincidence” of the English teacher waiting until a High Holy Day when no Jewish students were present to have an impromptu classroom discussion about the existence of a “superior race” meant even more.

It would be years after my 1966 graduation before I fully appreciated the demographic circumstances that made Rivers so unique an educational institution in a typical, bigoted American city. Substantial numbers of Jewish residents relegated to “that” side of town created a sizeable enough percentage of such students attending one specific public school. Whether understood, respected, liked or not, they could be marginalized, but oppressed as were blacks because of the historic differences between the two groups. At 15 years of age, I was far from able to deconstruct the realities of ancient, global ethnic and religious legacies. It was enough to know that another group’s experiences were buffering me in subtle ways from the antagonism I would surely have met had I attended a more homogenous, all-white school with Christian ...
new “independent” schools, the white community’s answer to what was perceived by some to be the federal government’s forced mixing of the races in public schools. Wade Hampton was a well-known Confederate general and governor of South Carolina. His Democratic nomination for governor was supported by the Red Shirts, a group that sought the removal of blacks from public office after Reconstruction. Certainly the choice of school name was intended to send a message. Known as the Rebels, the athletic teams wore gray and gold, not-so-subtle references to the Old South. On Wade Hampton’s birthday, just for fun, the “Yankees” in the school were captured and held for ransom in the study hall. Graduating seniors received Confederate flag pins with “Survivor” emblazoned on them. Church and state were not as separate as I might have hoped (my older sister and I were the only Jewish children in the school). How to stay away from the baptismal water. Luckily, as a veteran of the Royal Church and state were not as separate as I might have hoped (my older sister and I were the only Jewish children in the school). How to stay away from the baptismal water. Luckily, as a veteran of the Royal

Clockwise from top left: Wade Hampton Academy (WHA) students in black face, posing as the bnymen (1969 yearbook); the “survivor” pin (1967 yearbook) bestowed on WHA graduates; masthead of May 1969 WHA school newspaper; WHA students commemorating Wade Hampton’s birthday (1967 yearbook). Previous page: the author’s 1967 WHA 5th grade class photo. All images courtesy of Ernest L. Marcus.

As someone who considers himself a typical Jewish liberal, it is easy to criticize the decisions of my parents. Attending two “segregation” academies is not something I feel good about. Still, I can see that it was a period of uncertainty and the Jewish community felt stuck in the middle. The identification of Jews as white gave them a much higher social standing but, at the same time, their own history as victims of antisemitism made them more sensitive to the racism around them. Not surprisingly, particularly in small towns where African Americans made up the majority of the population, the path of least resistance was to go along with the rest of the white community and avoid being criticized and even ostracized.

Holly Hill Academy’s senior officers, left to right: Vice President Ernie Marcus, President Billy Workman, Treasurer Rick Cummings, Reporter David Shingler, and Secretary Reg Mundeen, from the 1974 yearbook, courtesy of Ernest L. Marcus.

When the Saints Go Marching In by Rachel Gordin Barnett

In the spring of 1970, I was in the eighth grade, looking forward to cheerleader tryouts for our beloved Summerton High School. I had been a JV cheerleader in senior high and it was time to move up to high school. I didn’t know (nor care) about a four circuit rule that demanded total desegregation of our public schools. You see, I grew up in Summerton, South Carolina, home of Briggs v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. Being 14 years old is very time consuming, and I was truly unaware of the historic significance of this issue. But on a spring evening, my father came home from his drugstore and handed my mother a stack of forms. “Go ahead and register them,” he said. “We have no other option.” That meant my siblings and I were headed to Clarendon Hall, the private, all-white school, formed in 1965. Schools such as Clarendon Hall were established when desegregation began in the 60s. Baptist-supported, the all-white refuge was located on the outskirts of our small farming town.

I knew a few kids at Clarendon, but my friends had remained at the public school throughout the “choice” period. That is, every spring a form came home from the school district and you would select your school. We had a few African-American students in our school and, to me, this was not a big issue. We all got along—though, looking back as an adult, I wonder how those few black students felt.

I had to trust my parents. I have no doubt that Clarendon Hall was not their choice. Indeed, when the school was first formed, I vaguely recall some of the founders visiting my parents to encourage them to send us to CH. At that time, my father had no interest. This was a Baptist-supported institution and it was tough enough to be Jewish in a small town without the added potential of being proselytized on a daily basis!

As it turned out, he had little to worry about, since the opposite happened. His four children, the only Jewish kids in town, were accepted and no one tried to convert us. Even the religion teacher, a staunch Baptist, respected our religious differences. My parents, too, were accepted in the school; my mother, a teacher, took a position at Clarendon Hall teaching social studies, and my father was invited to join the school board. It was quite remarkable.

Looking back, I have fond memories of the private school. But I am not proud of the fact that we went there. A white-flight school really didn’t reflect the values that my parents instilled in us. I suppose it was more about the place and the times. Mom and Dad were fairly liberal, with a social conscience—at least for South Carolina at the time. When it came to their kids’ education, however, they just wouldn’t risk it. This was a new educational landscape, and as the white-flight school really didn’t reflect the values that my parents instilled in us. I suppose it was more about the place and the times. Mom and Dad were fairly liberal, with a social conscience—at least for South Carolina at the time. When it came to their kids’ education, however, they just wouldn’t risk it. This was a new educational landscape, and as the
Oh, when the Saints Go marching in!

Left: Sporting a halo and wings, senior Rachel Gordin demonstrates why she was voted female with the most school spirit. Right: The author’s father, David Gordin (seated) with fellow Clarendon Hall board members Henry Rickenbaker and Leslie Tindal. Photos from 1974 Clarendon Hall yearbook, courtesy of Rachel Gordin Barnett.

A Southern Jewish Girl’s Very Personal Civil Rights Story

by Judy Kurtz Goldman

My father, like many southern Jews, owned a women’s clothing store. In the 1950s he hired Thelma, a black woman, to be The Smart Shop’s maid. She was so bright and engaging, my father soon promoted her to saleswoman. She continued mopping and dusting, but she also waited on customers. This made her, by many years, the first non-white salesperson on Rock Hill’s Main Street.

Nowhere is where the story gets complicated. There was only one bathroom in the store.

Late one evening, our doorbell at home rang. It was the husband of one of the women who worked in the store, and he was falling-down drunk. When my sister and I (maybe 10 and 13) heard the tumult at the front door, we rushed down drunk. When my sister and I (maybe 10 and 13) heard the tumult at the front door, we rang. It was the husband of one of the women who worked in the store, and he was falling-down drunk.

There was only one bathroom in the store.

The next evening, I overheard my father telling Mother the talk on Main Street was that Mr. Wingate had brought a gun to our front door. Why he didn’t use it, no one knew.

A decade later, in the early 1960s, Thelma (by then, strictly a saleswoman, no longer a maid) was recognized for her warm personality in a citywide vote. The Evening Herald ran a story under the headline: “Furniture Salesman, Maid in Ladies Wear Store Win Acclaim as Rock Hill’s Friendliest Employees.”

Whose decision was it to call her a maid? I’m sure it was probably still risky to broadcast her sales status. Were the editors protecting Thelma? Were the editors protecting Thelma’s customer base? Or did the editors want to rewrite history, but we can right history.” The judge: John C. Hayes III, Billy Hayes’s nephew.

After college, in the fall of 1963, I signed on to teach at the first all-white high school in Georgia ordered to admit blacks. Roosevelt High was the largest high school in Atlanta and located in one of its poorest neighborhoods. The situation was so volatile, police were stationed every day on all three floors of the building. My first morning, as part of the lesson, I asked my students to name a famous person they’d like to meet. We were assigning articles for the school newspaper. The principal’s words: “Our president has been shot.” You could hear white students cheering up and down the halls.

It was impossible to grow up in the South in the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s, and not feel the rattling effects of segregation. From the side-by-side water fountains in Friedhheim’s Department Store to the separate waiting rooms in our family doctor’s office to the whites-only swimming pool at the YMCA, prejudice was everywhere. But I learned strong lessons that night I leaned through the upstairs banisters. Those lessons were clear. Inedible. They remain as well defined for me as if they were set down in black and white.

Meanwhile, in 1961, while I was away at college, eight men from Rock Hill’s black Friendship Junior College (along with one outside activist) sat down at McCrory’s lunch counter and ordered sandwiches. They were immediately arrested for trespassing and, because money in the Civil Rights Movement was scarce, they refused bail and were sentenced to 30 days’ hard labor at the York County Prison Camp. (“Jail, no bail” soon became the strategy that re-energized the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.) The presiding judge was Billy Hayes, a longtime friend of my parents. In an odd personal twist, Billy Hayes and his wife—two years later—bought our family home. He was a lovely man, but he was on the wrong side of history.

In 2015 the Friendship Nine were invited to a ceremony in Rock Hill in which their convictions were overturned. The presiding judge did not explain their records; he wanted them preserved in the court docket so that future generations would know of the young man’s courage. His statement: “We cannot rewrite history, but we can right history.”

Courage, Conscience, and Conformity: South Carolina Jews and the Civil Rights Movement
April 16–17, 2016 ~ Charleston, South Carolina

Spring meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, co-sponsored by the College of Charleston’s African-American Studies Program

Saturday, April 16
11:30 A.M. Registration
Noon Lunch
12:45 – 1:45 P.M. Let Us Bread Break Together: African Americans, Jews, and South Carolina’s Civil Rights Struggle – Bobby Donaldson, Associate Professor of History, University of South Carolina
1:45 – 3:15 Panel Discussion – Rising to the Challenge: Jewish Politicians in an Age of Change
Moderator: The Honorable Jean Toal, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of South Carolina (2000–2015)
Panelists: Billy Keyserling, Marvin Lare, Joel Lourie, Jack Swerling
3:15 – 3:30 Break
3:30 – 5:00 Panel Discussion – Revisiting Rivers: Reflections on School Desegregation
Moderator: Jon Hale, Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, College of Charleston
Panelists: Charlie Brown, Millicent Brown, Oveta Glover, Missy Cohen Gold, Robert Rosen, Blanche Weintraub Wine
5:30 – 6:45 Cocktail reception, Albert and Robin Mercer’s residence, 110 Ashley Avenue (corner of Bull Street and Ashley)
Dinner on your own

Sunday, April 17
8:30 A.M. Breakfast
9:00 Open JHSSC Board Meeting
10:00 – 12:00 Panel discussion – Against the Tide: Risks and Rewards of Rejecting the Status Quo
Moderator: Cleveland Sellers, Jr., President, Voorhees College
Participants: Jack Bass, Dan T. Carter, Bill Saunders, Rabbi Robert Seigel
Respondent: Patricia A. Sullivan, Professor of History, University of South Carolina

Hotel reservations
Francis Marion Hotel
387 King Street
Charleston, SC 29403
(843) 722-0600 or (877) 716-2121

Red Roof Inn
301 Johnnies Dodds Boulevard
Mount Pleasant, SC
(843) 884-1411 or (800) 733-7663

Special rate: $309 per night plus tax
Special rate: $114.74 per night plus tax with group number B242JHSSC

To get the special rates you must make your reservations before midnight on March 15, 2016, and mention you are with the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.

Meeting registration
Online at: jhssc.org/events/upcoming
with Visa, MasterCard, or Discover, or American Express
By check, payable to JHSSC c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29424

Meeting fee: $50 per person
Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohn@ccfsc.edu
Phone: (843) 953-3918 – fax: (843) 953-7624

“I don’t run from nobody!”
by Hyman Rubin III

Recall my grandfather, Hyman Rubin, Sr., saying more than once, always with an uncharacteristic double negative for emphasis, “My father had to run from the Cossacks—I don’t have to run from nobody!” Even as a child I took from that statement two powerful ideas: on the one hand, it showed his love and appreciation for the United States of America, a place where the son of poor immigrants could become a state senator, and a place where a prominent Jew had no need to fear persecution. On the other hand, it showed why he felt called to public service and to the fight for racial equality. Fear of pogroms might have forced his ancestors to keep their heads down, but he was free to challenge injustice, and he felt compelled to do so.

Even though he lived in a time when anti-Jewish prejudice was more widespread and acceptable than today, he would never acknowledge it as anything other than “a pinprick of an irritant.” He never excused antisemitism, but he saw its American incarnation as fundamentally different from and less threatening than the form it took in other parts of the world. It might prevent him from playing golf with other legislators at their country club, but it couldn’t stop him from becoming successful in business, winning offices of public trust, and openly challenging his community’s laws and traditions when necessary.

But if the United States was a safe and tolerant place for Jews, South Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s offered no such security for its black citizens. For my grandfather, the racial policies and attitudes of the country (and especially the South) were America’s great moral failing. He never doubted what would cause those policies and attitudes to change: leadership. He was only an amateur historian, but he had an instinctive grasp of the importance of leadership in history. When I was in graduate school the historiographical trend was to emphasize the role that social structures, economic forces, and culture played in determining historical outcomes. Since then I have noticed the scholarly pendulum swinging back towards the importance of individual decisions, and particularly toward the importance of leadership, in changing the course of events. As a historian my grandfather was ahead of his time.

Understanding that race relations and racial justice were the key issues of his era, and believing that only strong, morally driven, and fearless leadership would win the day, he did all he could to put his beliefs into action. He often told the story of his father, Joseph Rubin, knocking out the “town bully” who had attacked him. I’m quite sure his father did more than just defend himself, and his work as a private citizen and later as a legislator showed a lifelong commitment to confronting the powerful and defending the powerless. The causes to which he devoted the most energy all fill that bill: protecting the Congaree Swamp from logging, amending the state’s strict no-exceptions ban on abortion, urging state support for blind and elderly citizens. But of all these, he took the greatest pride in his fight for civil rights.

In the early 1960s he publicly advocated desegregation, as well as working behind the scenes to ensure that it occurred peacefully. One of his key contributions was his co-founding, along with University of South Carolina President Tom Jones, of an interracial Luncheon Club—the first of its kind in Columbia, and possibly in South Carolina—to bring white and black leaders together. Recognizing that these leaders were usually brought together by crisis, and had not had the chance to get to know each other before they had to resolve problems, the two believed the Luncheon Club would remedy that. My grandfather also worked closely with downtown business owners, and especially lunch counter operators, to assure them that if they began serving black customers, white patrons would still come. Meanwhile, he encouraged white Columbiaans to eat at the lunch counters, sometimes providing the lunch money himself!

The same forces that threatened to boycott integrated lunchrooms also tried to take control of Columbia’s city council in 1963, advocating a “segregation ticket” to roll back the changes that had been made. (Lunch counters were desegregated in 1962, but the “white” and “colored” signs were not removed until later
in 1963.) My grandfather was on the opposing “integration ticket,” whose victory led to the end of legal segregation in the city. In these efforts and in his many public speeches opposing discrimination and advocating goodwill, Hyman Rubin, Sr., showed he was not afraid to take unpopular stands in defense of freedom and equality. He received plenty of hate mail (including death threats, as I later learned), but to him that only proved he was on the morally right side. If those who opposed him were motivated by hate, it only showed the weakness of their cause. He was completely dismissive of their threats.

Isadore E. Lourie: Advocate for the Underprivileged

Some years ago the Alabama Bar Association dedicated a monument in Monroeville to the ideals personified by Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird. To mark the ceremony, author Harper Lee wrote a letter to the bar association, which in pertinent part said, “Your profession has always had some real life heroes—lawyers of great courage and uncompromising integrity who did what was right when right was an unpopular and sometimes dangerous thing to do.” Such a man was Isadore E. Lourie, my mentor and hero, whom I had the privilege of working with in his law practice from 1973 to 1983. A large percentage of our practice involved representing African Americans and other minorities from the Midlands of South Carolina. Our clients trusted Senator Lourie to be a zealous advocate for their cause. They knew by his words, actions, and deeds that he had a sense of compassion for the less fortunate and the privileged members of society. He cherished the trust that people put in him and his goal was to give a voice to those who had no voice. Senator Lourie wanted to improve the quality of life for the people he served in his law practice and in the legislature. Our firm was an oasis for minorities facing legal problems. Isadore Lourie was born in 1932 in St. George. He entered the University of South Carolina in 1951, and was admitted to the South Carolina Bar in 1956. He married Susan Reimer in 1959, and they had three sons—Lance, Joel, and Neil. Senator Lourie advised his skills as a legal advocate and leader and combined them with his talents as a politician to influence the path of legislation from 1962 to 1992. Susan was his partner in his political quests, as well as in life.

Isadore Lourie in the South Carolina Senate chamber with Bishop Fred James (l) and Bishop A. C. Jackson (2) on the occasion of the swearing-in of Bishop Jackson’s son Darrell Jackson in December 1992. Senator Jackson, who succeeded Senator Lourie, is standing behind the desk with his campaign manager, Joel Lourie. Isadore E. Lourie Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

When my mother Harriet Keyserling passed away in 2010, I took the liberty of calling her close friend Marty Perlmuter to ask how I should deal with her “Jewish” identity when making arrangements for her burial and what I knew was going to be a huge celebration of her life. Mother rarely went to Friday night services, did not light Shabbat candles, or even have a tallit. She went to Women’s Auxiliary, and did not have a lot of patience with the rabbis in Beaufort. At the same time she was devoted to Israel, contributed liberally to Jewish causes, and whenever a smart new family moved to Beaufort from New York, she would ask, “Do you think they are Jewish?”

Fortunately, Marty gave me a way out when he said, “Don’t worry about Harriet and Judaism; she is a prophetic Jew.” While the characterization was new to me, it sounded and felt good, and I have used the phrase to characterize not only my mother, but also my father, his brother, my grandfather, and everyone else in the close family. When speaking about civil rights it would therefore be short-sighted to speak only about Harriet Keyserling, as my grandfather William, who arrived here in 1888 as a young man running from the night, out to the islands to help the African-American families who held on. William helped found Beth Israel Congregation, though he rarely attended services. He died from a massive heart attack while presenting the keynote address at an international UJA conference in New York. His last words were, “It is time for the young people to take over.”

William’s eldest son, Len, followed that same compass. After graduating from Columbia University and Harvard Law School, he became one of the young architects of the New Deal. As legislative assistant to U.S. Senator Robert Wagner, he helped draft the National Industry Recovery Act of 1934, the National Housing Act of 1935, the Wagner National Labor Relations Act of 1934, portions of the Social Security Act of 1935, and the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. He wrote an essay upon which the Full Employment Act of 1946 was based and served as a member and then chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under President Truman.

After his years in government service, Len founded and funded the non-profit Council on Economic Progress, and conducted extensive studies for civil rights and labor organizations. In collaboration with his wife, Mary Dublin, he worked on the rights of women and minorities. Leon was one of the principal organizers of the labor/Jewish/African-American coalition that, throughout the 1960s, championed civil rights for all. W

The Keyserling Family Compass

said to have defied the town fathers and taken Clara Barton and the Red Cross, in the dark of the night, out to the islands to help the African-American families who held on. William helped found Beth Israel Congregation, though he rarely attended services. He died from a massive heart attack while presenting the keynote address at an international UJA conference in New York. His last words were, “It is time for the young people to take over.”

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senator Lourie’s most lasting contributions is in the area of race relations. Early in his career he befriended the two great African-American civil rights leaders in Richland County—Reverend C. J. Whitaker and Reverend I. DeQuincy Newman. They both reciprocated the commitment, force, and energy Isadore Lourie and, together as a team, they began to change the racial landscape. With Senator Lourie’s help, African Americans were appointed to boards and commissions from which they were formerly excluded. They obtained employment in state and county offices, and they began to have a more significant role in politics. In 1972 these men helped elect the first African American to the South Carolina House of Representatives—J. S. Leeby Johnson and Jim Felder.

Praise for the senator has come from friends in high places. Alex Sanders, Isadore Lourie’s desk mate in the senate, and former president of the College of Charleston and chief judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals, reported: “During the tumultuous time of the ‘60s, Isadore was one of the most meaningful voices that connected black and white people.” Governor Dick Riley, who served in the state senate and as secretary of education under President Bill Clinton, described his friend’s impact on South Carolina: “Much of the major legislative accomplishments of the past quarter century are due to the leadership and caring of Isadore Lourie. He’s been there with his colleagues when the values and strength were needed.”

And Fritz Hollings, governor and United States senator, succinctly summed up Senator Lourie’s career: “He was the most progressive lawmaker our state has ever known.”

The Keyserling Family Compass

by Billy Keyserling

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And Fritz Hollings, governor and United States senator, succinctly summed up Senator Lourie’s career: “He was the most progressive lawmaker our state has ever known.”
My father, Herbert, and Leon were separated in age by the Great Depression. Their dad had lost most of his wealth when he had to sell land to pay farm debt during the crisis and could afford tuition only at the College of Charleston. As a student my father sold his blood for spending money. Nevertheless, as early as his internship at the Medical University of South Carolina, Dad was in the field day and night helping those who otherwise would not have had medical care.

During World War II, Dad joined the navy and, on short notice with no combat training, was deployed to Guadalcanal with the first marine division. At a young age he learned that no notice with no combat training, was deployed to Guadalcanal in the field day and night helping those who otherwise would not have had medical care. Nevertheless, as early as his internship at the Medical University of South Carolina, Dad was in the field day and night helping those who otherwise would not have had medical care.

In 1972, when I ran the McGovern campaign, Harriet said she could not help me. But she and her housekeeper, my second Keyserling on the Penn School Board—another exemplar of the family’s moral compass, Herbert chose as his life partner Harriet Hirschfeld, a well-educated “New York Jew,” who for years failed to fit into our small southern environment, and public education. Though not necessarily hers by birth, she followed that same compass William carried with him as he ran from oppression in the Old Country and put to use by blood, she followed that same compass William carried with him as he ran from oppression in the Old Country and put to use by blood, she followed that same compass William carried with him as he ran from oppression in the Old Country and put to use by blood, she followed that same compass William carried with him as he ran from oppression in the Old Country and put to use by blood.

In 1974 Mother became the first woman elected to serve on county council. There she championed the cause of creating a statue to honor Robert Smalls, former slave turned Union navy captain, then state senator and U.S. congressman. She won, but the county would not allow the statue to be erected on public property, so it was placed at Tabernacle Baptist Church on Craven Street, said to have been Small’s home church. It is, to my knowledge, the only piece of publicly commissioned art in Beaufort County.

In 1976 Harriet was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, the first woman from Beaufort to serve in the legislature. For 16 years she was a well-educated “New York Jew,” who for years failed to fit into our small southern environment, and public education. Though not necessarily hers by birth, she followed that same compass William carried with him as he ran from oppression in the Old Country and put to use by blood.

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina has had a tremendous impact in its relatively short history. Our accomplishments include the Jewish Heritage Collection and the Addleston Library, which, in collaboration with McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina, produced the landmark exhibit and book A Portion of the People; the recording of hundreds of oral histories; a statewide survey of Jewish burial sites; the erection of several historical markers; an informative and attractive website; the bi-annual publication of this remarkable magazine; and bi-annual meetings—all of which have created a vibrant JHSSC community.

The new Pearline/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston, with its emphasis on research, teaching, and community outreach, assures the College’s long-term commitment to Jewish history, and by extension, to the activities of the JHSSC. The Society has helped put South Carolina’s Jewish history on the map, and in so doing, has created a “buzz” across the nation and made the Jewish South a destination for scholars, journalists, genealogists, and just plain tourists. College of Charleston faculty and JHSSC stalwarts Adam Mendelsohn, Dale Rosengarten, and Shari Rabin have helped create a new exhibition and book titled By David’s Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation’s Founding to the Civil War that includes substantial material from the American South and features the work of Charleston-born artists Theodore Sidney Moise and Solomon Naranjo Carvalho. The exhibit will be on display at the Princeton University Art Museum from February 13 through June 12, 2016, and is open to the public free of charge.

Closer to home, JHSSC recently received a $5,000 grant from the Stanley Furbstein Endowment at the Coastal Community Foundation (CCF) to develop its Jewish cemetery records and to include the exemplary Beaufort burial records on its website. The late Mr. Furbstein cared deeply about South Carolina Jewish cemeteries, and was instrumental in starting JHSSC’s statewide survey of burials, and single-handedly compiled information on Beaufort’s Jewish cemetery. It is fitting his generous bequest to CCF will fund work he himself initiated.

2016 is the year we hope to realize one of the goals our Past Presidents Council set in 2014. The council committed the Society to raising 40 Pillars of Membership—those who pledge $1000 a year for five years—and 50 dues-paying memberships. We are close on both counts and need your help to make it happen this year. Renew your membership, give a gift membership, become a Pillar. Do it now!

Above: Leon Keyserling (5) meets with Coretta Scott King, August 1976.
Handwritten on back of photo: “Conferences in Atlanta on H H Bill . . . auspices Martin Luther King Center for Social Change.”
Below: South Carolina Representative Harriet Keyserling talks with fellow politicians Richard Riley and Nick Theodore.
Keyserling Family Papers, Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Milestones: 40 Pillars, 500 Members
by Martin Perlmutter

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Pillars
Susan and Charles Albman, Charleston, SC
Ellen Aronovitz, Atlanta, GA
Doris L. Baumgarten, Aiken, SC
Eric and Candace Bergelson, Greer, SC
Betsy Brody, Coral Gables, FL
Harold Brody, Atlanta, GA
Alex and Dynan Cohen, Darlingston, SC
Manuel and Harriet Cohain, Manasota Corner, SC
Barry and Ellen Draisen, Anderson, SC
David and Andrea Draisen, Anderson, SC
Lowell and Barbara Epstein, Charleston, SC
Harold L. Fox, Charleston, SC
Steven Gold, Greenville, SC
Phillip and Patricia Greenberg, Florence, SC
Stuart and Rebecca Greenberg, Florence, SC
Ann Meddlin and Max Hellman, Charleston, SC
Alan and Charlotte Kahn, Columbus, SC
Sue and Jerry Kline, Columbus, SC
Michael S. Kogan, Charleston, SC
Ronaldr Kramer, Bryan Mawr, PA
Allan and Jeanne Lieberman, Charleston, SC
Susan R. Lourie, Columbus, SC
Susan Pearlstine, Charleston, SC
Edward and Sandra Polikoff, Columbus, SC
Alan and Anne Reyner, Columbus, SC
Debra C. Ritter, Columbus, SC
Benedict and Brenda Rosen, Myrtle Beach, SC
Robert and Sylvia Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
Jeffrey and Mickey Rosenberg, Charleston, SC
Sandra Lee Rosenblum, Charleston, SC
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Join or renew online at jhssc.org.

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

Register now for the April 16–17 meeting in Charleston
See page 10 for more information.