The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Endangered Congregations
Strategies for Survival

Register now for fall meeting in Sumter and Camden
October 20–21, 2018

Volume XXIII Number 2 Fall 2018
In this issue

Sumter’s Temple Sinai Breaths New Life – Annie Rivers  It took a village to save this synagogue and its cemetery. The Charleston Jewish Federation, Kahal Kadishah Beth Elohim of Charleston, Coastal Community Foundation, Sumter County Museum, and Sumter locals responded to the congregation’s call for help to prepare for an uncertain future. Temple Sinai’s Jewish History Center opened on June 2, 2018, ushering in a new era for a two-centuries-old community and assuring responsible stewardship of a historic landmark.  

Eulogy for Elizabeth – Dale Rosengarten  Beloved friend and colleague Elizabeth Moses leaves a lasting legacy at the College of Charleston, Georgetown’s Beth Elohim, and in the new Jewish Heritage Center at Temple Sinai, which she helped to create.  

Turning Out the Lights – Dr. Louis A. Drucker  Imagine growing up in a town so small there aren’t enough Jews for a minyan. And then imagine families from a few rural communities coming together in 1945 to form a congregation and build a synagogue to serve the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The author describes how Temple Beth Or in Kingsstree taught him the value of education, hard work, and compassion, but it was the sense of shared history and the feeling of belonging to an extended family that made closing the doors for the last time so painful.  

Love and Loyalty: Temple Mt. Sinai in Walterboro – Paul Siegel, Gale Siegel Messerman, Penny Siegel Blachman, and Joseph Siegel  The post–World War II Baby Boomener generation was making its appearance when Walterboro’s Jews began raising the necessary funds to build a synagogue and acquire land for burials. The congregation did indeed “boom” for the next three decades, followed by a period of steady decline. Though too few for a weekly minyan, the membership swells each year for the High Holidays, as the sons and daughters who moved away return, drawn by fidelity to a community that once flourished.  

Endangered Congregations | Strategies for Survival – JHSSC meets in Sumter and Camden, October 20–21, 2018  

Growing Up Jewish in Camden – Garry Baum, Becky Baum Lourie, Cheryl Baum, and Harry Baum  Four siblings share their memories of Temple Beth El in Camden. Growing up in this small Midlands city, their connection to the congregation of their childhood is renewed each year when they meet for the High Holidays in the same sanctuary where, at one time, three generations of Baums filled half the pews.  

Holding On: Temple B’Nai Israel of Anderson – Barry Draisen, with contributions from David Draisen  Lingering over the word “Hamelech” on Rosh Hashanah in 1947 was tough on a gentle boy in the second grade. Anderson’s congregation is rooted in Old World traditionalism but its practices have kept pace with the modern world, adapting as needed and thriving in the decades following World War II. The future of B’Nai Israel, however, is threatened by changing demographics—a dwindling Jewish population and the loss of families with young children to more vibrant congregations nearby.  

Small-town Conundrum: Temple Sinai of Orangeburg – Barry Frishberg  In a small congregation the loss of one lay leader can cause a seismic shift and require exceptional dedication from other congregants to keep the eternal light burning. Despite decades of striving to sustain Temple Sinai, recruiting new members remains an ongoing challenge. Today, it seems Jewish families in this small city want either more than the congregation has to offer or no affiliation at all.  

Telling the Story – Mark Swick  The Society’s Jewish Merchant Project is up and running, documenting the generations of storekeepers who became the backbone of congregations in towns and small cities across the state. Waning Jewish populations have left synagogues struggling for survival. JHSSC’s fall meeting in Sumter and Camden will consider the plight of endangered congregations and the special circumstances—partnership with a county museum, energetic lay leadership, or sunbelt migration—that sometimes save the day.  

Letter from the President

2019 Will Mark the Society’s 25th Anniversary

As we approach our upcoming fall meeting, I think back on our conference last spring in Charleston titled “Memory, Monuments, and Memorials” and realize how many times I have recalled the words of panelists, speakers, and participants. One debate that stands out had to do with the contested use of the terminology “slave” vs. “enslaved person.” Especially memorable was the presentation by the Israeli-American architect Michael Arad, FAIA, describing how he arrived at his design for the 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, and his work on a new memorial for Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, a project recently unveiled and featured in the Post and Courier.  

Other Charleston museums recently in the news include the Medal of Honor Museum and Memorial by Israeli-American architect Moshe Safdie, FAIA, and the proposed International African American Museum, by Pei Cobb & Freed Architects. All three projects involve world renowned design firms, making Charleston a natural site to talk about memorials and museums.  

Saturday’s sessions last April culminated with a reception for the Society’s outgoing executive director, Dr. Martin Perlmutter, to whom JHSSC awarded its fifth Order of the Jewish Palmetto. Our fall meeting on October 20 and 21 in Sumter and Camden, SC, “Endangered Congregations [Strategies for Survival],” will highlight the exodus of Jewish families from small towns to larger cities in the state and across the country. “How can you keep them down on the farm after they have seen Paris?” In this case, Paris becomes Charleston, Greenville, Columbia, Charlotte, Atlanta, Houston, New York, and San Francisco—metropolitan areas with a lot to offer in terms of education, career opportunities, and Jewish life. Small-town southern Jews remain present in the remnants of their homes, businesses, and religious buildings, even if they are too few to raise a minyan.

Just 25 years ago, South Carolina was one of only two states in America where more citizens lived in rural areas than in urban centers. Rural roads and railroads linked the towns to each other and to major population centers. Religion tied South Carolina’s Jews together. In October we will explore what remains of families and buildings in these far-flung communities. South Carolina’s population has almost doubled over the past five decades, with that in mind, we will discuss strategies for the preservation or the reestablishment of Jewish life in small towns.  

Looking forward to JHSSC’s 25th anniversary year, I think back on our founding members, on those who have been involved since the early years, and on those who are no longer with us. We sadly add to the list of those who have lost our fellow board member and beloved friend Elizabeth Moses of Sumter. I met the Moses family through the Society, working with Robert Moses when we founded JHSSC, and with his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, on our first and second Georgetown meetings. We all miss her, and we extend our deepest condolences to the Moses family.

I look forward to seeing you in Sumter and Camden this fall. Please send me your suggestions, concerns, and ideas for future meetings.

Wishing everyone a healthy and happy New Year,

Jeffrey Rosenblum, FAIA, JHSSC President

JHSSC, a not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to the preservation and celebration of Jewish history and culture in South Carolina. JHSSC founding executive director Martin Perlmutter, poses with family members in the College of Charleston’s Alumni Hall after being awarded the Order of the Jewish Palmetto on April 28, 2018. L to r: Daniel Perlmutter, Anahita Modaresi, Teddy McBakun, Estee Perlmutter, Marty Perlmutter, Jeri Perlmutter, Jake Perlmutter, Samantha Brock Perlmutter, Karen Kaplan Perlmutter, Aaron Perlmutter. Photo: Jessica Spence.


On the cover: Temple Sinai sanctuary in Sumter, SC, and (top) detail from a stained glass window featuring Moses bringing the Ten Commandments down from the mountaintop.


The JHSSC magazine is published twice a year. Current and back issues can be found at jhsc.org
Sumter’s Temple Sinai Breathes New Life

by Annie Abrams Rivers, Executive Director, Sumter County Museum

Sumter has a rich Jewish history. The first Jewish immigrants arrived here from Charleston around 1815. From the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, there was a steady Jewish presence in town thanks to active retail, textile, and manufacturing opportunities aided by vital nearby rail lines. As in many small-town southern communities, however, the latter half of the 20th century saw the congregation dwindle. Younger generations of Temple Sinai families left for bigger cities. The ease of assimilation in Sumter contributed to the decline in congregation membership; as interfaith marriage became more common, children were raised in other faiths.

Anticipating the possibility of the congregation’s demise, Roger Ackerman wrote a long letter to his fellow members in 2005, encouraging them to prepare for the future and create something like a living will.

On a friend’s recommendation, Ackerman reached out to a collaboration between the College of Charleston, KKBE already had a strong tie to Temple Sinai. A large congregation with a robust historical consciousness, Beth Elohim was willing and eager to help Temple Sinai. Another agreement was drawn up, this time giving KKBE control over the temple board and the ultimate decision of when to turn the lights off. Temple Sinai set up two endowments with the Coastal Community Foundation: one for the Charleston Jewish Federation to use for the cemetery’s care, the other for the “care, maintenance, and operation” of the synagogue as well as support for Jewish heritage programs.

With the agreements successfully concluded, the committee did not have any additional plans. However, word got around through various news articles about the temple’s anticipated eventual closing. Local residents of Sumter without a Jewish background expressed concern and interest in helping. This led Roger Ackerman to consider turning part of the building into a museum about the Holocaust. With no permanent exhibit on the Holocaust between Atlanta and Richmond, he saw an opportunity for the temple to serve as an educational resource for the students of Sumter County and beyond.

Two years later, Sinai’s board of directors appointed a long-range planning committee composed of Roger Ackerman, Harby Moses, Robert Moses, Ray Reich, and Jay Schwartz. The committee had to face the hard questions of what to do with the historic 1913 building if Temple Sinai no longer had sufficient members to keep the synagogue going. Would it be turned into something else? Sold? They also had to secure the future care of their cemetery. In 2007, the temple’s archives were donated to Special Collections at the College of Charleston.

On a friend’s recommendation, Ackerman reached out to consultant David Samat, former president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta and current president of the Jewish Community Legacy Project. Ackerman remembers being at an ‘impasse’ until Samat visited. They decided to tackle the cemetery concern first with the Charleston Jewish Federation. After several meetings, an agreement was drawn up for the Federation to manage perpetual care of the cemetery.

They then turned their focus to the temple building complex. Robert Moses suggested contacting Charleston’s Reform synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE). Since most of the original Jewish settlers in Sumter came from Charleston, KKBE already had a strong tie to Temple Sinai. A large congregation with a robust historical consciousness, Beth Elohim was willing and eager to help Temple Sinai. Another agreement was drawn up, this time giving KKBE control over the temple board and the ultimate decision of when to turn the lights off. Temple Sinai set up two endowments with the Coastal Community Foundation: one for the Charleston Jewish Federation to use for the cemetery’s care, the other for the “care, maintenance, and operation” of the synagogue as well as support for Jewish heritage programs.

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Not knowing anything about running a museum, Ackerman and Jay Schwartz approached the Sumter County Museum Board of Trustees with the idea in 2015. Considering the temple’s proximity to the museum and its significant historical value, the board quickly supported the idea but wanted to make sure it was feasible for a small museum staff to manage such an enterprise. The museum and temple boards and I decided that the social hall would make a great display area after a few renovations. Temple Sinai agreed to raise funds for the project and I promised to assist by finding grants.

The Sumter County Museum, Temple Sinai, and Coastal Community Foundation signed an agreement in December 2016 with the mutual goal to preserve the Temple Sinai building “as a historic entity with the purpose of operating it as an educational and cultural facility.” The document detailed a plan for the Foundation to manage and disburse the temple’s cash assets to ensure the maintenance of the building. The Sumter County Museum agreed to develop a historical exhibit and oversee the building’s care. Through all discussions, it was made clear that the temple would continue to be available as needed for Sabbath and holiday services as well as celebratory occasions and funerals. While it took several drafts to reach a final agreement, the signed document provides clear instructions for each party in the immediate and distant future.

Ackerman and Schwartz got busy fundraising. I secured a Connected Communities grant from Central Carolina Community Foundation. By early 2017, the project was a reality. I suggested hiring the Charleston-based company HW Exhibits, then known as the History Workshop, to help curate and design the exhibition. I had worked with its staff members on the museum’s outdoor signage and was impressed with their skills in exhibit design and fabrication. We had a great team from HW Exhibits, led by Rachel Bragg as project manager and Kelly Bozarth as designer. First, we determined the exhibit’s mission: to remember, celebrate, and share Jewish history with the people of Sumter and their visitors. While we knew we wanted a significant portion of the display to focus on the Holocaust, featuring the story of Sumter’s own Holocaust survivor, Abe Stern, we felt it was also important to tell the history of Jewish life in our town. Jews played a major role in the development of both city and county. With the Jewish population declining in numbers, it seemed more important than ever to ensure the historic memory of this portion of the people would be preserved.

In spring 2017, we hired Elizabeth Moses as Sumter County Museum’s Education and Outreach Coordinator. Moses, originally from Sumter, has deep Jewish roots in the community and had been a critical player in developing the landmark exhibit A Portrait of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life, a collaboration between the College of Charleston and McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina. She helped connect the museum to long-standing members of the congregation and their children.

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The exhibition is divided into seven sections: Discover Judaism, Finding a Place: Jewish Immigrants Arrive in South Carolina, Jewish Life in Sumter, the Holocaust, Sumter Connections to the Holocaust, a Holocaust reflection area, and Congregation Sinai.
It was a long journey to reach this point, but we are all very proud of the temple’s new life. Ackerman recalls, “We worked awfully hard. I can’t tell you how many times we met over agreements. To see the end result is delightful.”

We can’t wait to share the Center with members of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina at their October meeting in Sumter. For more information, please visit our website at www.sumtercountymuseum.org.

Eulogy for Elizabeth, Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC
delivered by Dale Rosengarten on July 25, 2018

Today we are tasked with saying goodbye to Elizabeth, youngest daughter of Harriett and Robert Moses. We ache with her death because, whether we knew her as daughter, sister, colleague, co-worker, friend, mentor, or prayer leader, she was a loved one. In all the roles she played, under all the hats she wore, she never let anyone down. Elizabeth would do for you and go as far for you as she could, and then some more.

When I first met her dad and mom in 1995, soon after we launched the Jewish Heritage Project at the College of Charleston, Elizabeth was living in Massachusetts, working as a biologist with a specialty in marine mammals. I heard about her as the younger sister of Natalie, Carol, Katherine, and Laura, as the one who loved animals and who decided to pursue her father’s religion—studying diligently with rabbis Michael Mellen and Jonathan Madgovitch and, in 1997, converting to Judaism.

As many of us know, the roots of the Moses family tree run deep. Myer Moses II in the War of Independence, Myer Moses III in the War of 1812, and Myer Moses III, a rebel in the War between the States. Elizabeth loaned an ambrotype of Myer III for the show.

On her father’s mother’s side, the Emanuel ancestors came to America on the boat popularly known as the “Jewish Mayflower”—the St. Catherine—which, in 1654, carried 23 Jewish refugees from Recife, Brazil, to the port of New Amsterdam, later called New York.

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Elizabeth was proud of her heritage and devoted to her family, but her most outstanding characteristic, in my opinion, was her commitment to truth-telling. She was one of those people—sincere, straight talk, lie, or even a half truth. She told it like she saw it and would not hesitate to point out when the emperor had no clothes.

She also had a keen sense of humor, a deep interest in history, and a way with words.

Just as A Portion of the People began its two-year tour, Elizabeth made plans to move to Georgetown, SC. She never was a big city girl, she said, and always preferred small town life. She had heard that congregation Beth Elohim in Georgetown was in trouble, its members so few and so aged, they were talking about selling the synagogue and “turning off the lights.”

Landing a job as instructor and research technician in the Department of Marine Science at Coastal Carolina University, and finding a small house that would accommodate her and her menagerie of dogs and cats, she made the move. With persistence, intelligence, and gentle persuasion, she sought out Jewish retirees who had migrated to the Grand Strand and brought them into the fold of Georgetown’s longstanding Jewish community. Many of the newcomers had more Jewish education than the natives, but almost none knew how illustrious the Moses family was. With her drive, determination, and dedication to her extended family and her love of her native sea, Elizabeth built the membership to more than 40 families. In 2006, she took a job as feature and copy editor for the Georgetown Times and the Sun News, and late the next year became an interpreter for the SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, first at Huntington Beach State Park and then at Rose Hill Plantation, outside the town of Union. Leading tours at the home of William Henry Gist, known as South Carolina’s “Secession Governor,” may not have been Elizabeth’s cup of tea, but as in everything she did, she gave it her all.

Then in the spring of 2017, her dream job became available. She was eager to return to Sumter, to be near her beloved father, and she was ready to undertake a challenge even greater than the one she encountered at Georgetown’s Beth Elohim, to bolster attendance at Temple Sinai, whose congregation was dwindling and grey. The Sumter County Museum had entered a partnership with Temple Sinai with the goal of creating a Jewish History Center in the synagogue’s social hall. Museum director Annie Rivers needed help with the project. Elizabeth applied for the position of Education and Outreach Coordinator and was quickly hired. Over the course of a year she poured her energy into developing the exhibition gallery you now can see, just beyond the doors of this sanctuary. Temple Sinai’s Jewish History Center is a wonder to behold: an inspired re-purposing of synagogue space as an educational facility, designed with extraordinary speed, efficiency, and a sense of beauty.

As tempted more, more able to endure
As more exposed to suffering and distress,
Thence more alive to tenderness.
Alas, Elizabeth was not given the gift of time. She had more work to do, more dogs and cats to rescue, more pens to defend, more ports to visit. But in her 54 short years she created a lasting legacy—at the College of Charleston, in Georgetown, in the sanctuary where we now sit, and in the hearts of each of us. May Elizabeth’s memory be a blessing forever.
Turning Out the Lights
by Dr. Louis A. Drucker, Past President, Temple Beth Or, Kingstree, SC

Turn out the lights when you leave. It’s a simple statement that we’ve all heard. Seems reasonable, seems easy, but how do you do it? How do you do it when it’s your synagogue and you’re not only leaving, you’re closing? Such is the fate of many of South Carolina’s small-town congregations, including mine, Temple Beth Or in Kingstree, South Carolina. In February 2005, the day after my father’s funeral, I had to turn out the lights.

The congregation at Temple Beth Or taught me many things. I learned to read Hebrew. I learned the history of the Jewish people and their historic struggles with many kinds of strife. I learned how hard work and compassion for others could reward you with far more than wages at a job. I learned that not all the people in my temple were perfect, but each had a purpose and a place. I learned to be a leader of the congregation and of weekly Shabbat services. I learned how to make as much noise as possible when I heard the name HAMAN! But what I never learned was how to end it all. How could it be that I, the president of the congregation, was going to be the one to make the decision that it was time to close the doors? How, after only 60 years, did this happen? How can I go over to our cemetery and light the eternal light, the building boards, the Haggadot, the memorial, the building itself? How can I go over to our cemetery and light the eternal light, the building boards, the Haggadot, the memorial, the building itself?

I only hope you don’t have to be the person who turns out the light.

Love and Loyalty: Temple Mt. Sinai in Walterboro
by Paul Siegel, Gale Siegel Messerman, Penny Siegel Blachman, and Joseph Siegel

During the early years of Jewish religious life in Walterboro, South Carolina, dating to the early 1900s, Sabbath services were held in private homes, the Masonic hall adjoining Zalim’s Department Store, and, for a time, at the Walterboro Airfield chapel. The Torah was kept at the home of Jacob Frank. Lewis Harris, the son of Ruth Horowitz and Abram Harris, proprietors of Hayes Jewelers on Washington Street in Walterboro, was walking in the house when Lucas Street to the Masonic hall, carrying the Torah wrapped in a sheet. Various members of the Jewish community led the prayers and delivered sermons. Among the earliest members were our maternal great-grandparents, Joseph’s great-grandparents, Anna Bart and Hyman Novit. Their daughter Besie married Albert Novit, and their daughter Leona, our mother, married Anderson native Sam Siegel.

The cataclysmic events of World War II inspired this congregation, though it’s a different environment, where there are only two children in the congregation; when all of that and more is offered at another temple 40 miles away? When the sacrifice of every member of Walterboro’s Jewish community and communal events. Minutes of the meetings from 1947 demonstrate the dedication, concerted effort, and legal gatherings. Our mother, married Anderson native Sam Siegel. The cataclysmic events of World War II inspired this congregation, though it’s a different environment, where there are only two children in the congregation; when all of that and more is offered at another temple 40 miles away? When the sacrifice of every member of Walterboro’s Jewish community and communal events. Minutes of the meetings from 1947 demonstrate the dedication, concerted effort, and legal gatherings. Our mother, married Anderson native Sam Siegel.
Paul Siegel, president of the congregation for four decades, fondly remembers community leader Bernard Warshaw informing the congregation of attempts by Charleston synagogues to “swallow up” Temple Mt. Sinai. Paul remembers Bernard striving up to the bimah and announcing to the congregation: “we are a proud community and will not give up our identity.”

In the three decades after building the synagogue, the Jews of Walterboro maintained a vibrant religious community with as many as 50 adult members in the congregation and 15 children attending Sunday school. Although the future looked bright, the changing business dynamics of small towns in the United States presented a challenge. Once a thriving area for small businesses, many owned by Jewish families, downtown Walterboro no longer provided a fertile environment for this type of enterprise. Young people, looking for social, cultural, and economic opportunities, were drawn to urban areas. By the 1950s, U.S. Highway 301 offered travelers the fastest route between the Northeast and Florida. The South Carolina portion, completed in the late ’40s, is well inland from U.S. Hwy 15 and diverted tourists a good 40 miles west of Walterboro. Roads were better and gas was cheap. In the 1970s, with the advent of Charleston Town Square and Northwoods Mall, more and more Walterboro residents did their shopping on the outskirts of Charleston. Further damage occurred when, first, Kmart came to Walterboro, then Walmart and Super Walmart.

Sixty-six years after the founding of Temple Mt. Sinai, Jewish life in Walterboro has drastically diminished. With fewer than ten members residing in town, holding weekly Shabbat services is not realistic. However, there is still something remarkable about the Jews of Walterboro. While most of the Baby Boomers and their families have moved to larger cities, the extended families, understanding that their roots lie in this small, southern town, come together every year to worship at Temple Mt. Sinai for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Although our numbers have dwindled, our roots lie in this small, southern town, come together every year to worship at Temple Mt. Sinai for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Although our numbers have dwindled, our connections to the community formed by our parents and grandparents remains strong.

Bernard Warsman (center, in black), former president of the JHSSC, and his wife Ann, surrounded by family and fellow congregants, Temple Mt. Sinai, Walterboro, SC, ca. 2006. Photo: Alan Gardner, MD. Courtesy of Paul Siegel.

Endangered Congregations | Strategies for Survival
October 20–21, 2018 | Sumter and Camden, South Carolina

Saturday, October 20 ~ Sumter

11:00 A.M. Registration | Tour | Lunch – Sumter County Museum, 122 N. Washington Street

12:45 Box lunch provided

1:00 – 2:00 P.M. Afternoon session and tour of Beth El Synagogue

2:15 – 3:15 Endangered Congregations

Moderator: Noah Levine, Vice President, Jewish Community Legacy Project
Panelists: Garry Baum (Camerden), Barry Draisen (Anderson), Louis Drucker (Kingstree), Barry Frishberg (Orangeburg), Jack Lieb (Orangeburg), Rhetta Mendelson (Orangeburg), Paul Siegel (Walterboro)

3:30 – 4:30 Strategies and Resources for Survival

Moderator: Mark Swick, Executive Director, JHSSC
Panelists: Roger Ackerman, Temple Sinai; Rebecca Engel, Charleston Jewish Federation; Noah Levine, Jewish Community Legacy Project; Annie Rivers, Sumter County Museum; Anita M. Rosenberg, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim; Dale Rosengarten, College of Charleston; Jay Schwartz, Temple Sinai

5:00 Reception – Sumter County Museum

6:30 Dinner at Hampton’s, 33 N. Main Street – Dutch treat. Reservations are required.

Sunday, October 21 ~ Camden

Unles otherwise stated, Sunday events take place in Temple Beth El sanctuary, 1500 block, Lyttleton Street

9:30 – 10:30 A.M. JHSSC board meeting – everyone is invited!

10:30 – 11:30 Stories from Jewish Camden

Barbara Fried James, Secretary and Treasurer, Temple Beth El

11:30 – 12:30 P.M. Community of Memory: Camden’s Jews Then and Now

Moderator: Dale Rosengarten, Curator and Historian, Special Collections, College of Charleston
Panelists: Cheryl Baum, Garry Baum, Barbara Fried James, Albert Baruch Mercer, Rita Tanzer

Box lunch provided

12:45 Beth El Cemetery tour, Campbell Street near Meeting Street

Hotel reservations

Hyatt Place Sumter/Downtown
18 N. Main Street, Sumter, SC 29150
803.774.6100

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Hyatt Place Sumter/Downtown for $124/night on Friday October 19th and Saturday October 20th. To reserve a room please visit the hotel’s website, 803.774.6100 by September 20th and use the group code G-JHSSC.

Meeting registration

Online at: jhssc.org/events/upcoming

With Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express

Meeting fee: $50 per person

Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohn@cofc.edu
Phone: (843) 953-3918 / fax: (843) 953-7624
Growing Up Jewish in Camden
by Garry Baum, Becky Baum Lourie, Cheryl Baum, and Harry Baum

Garry

When I was growing up in Camden, South Carolina, in the 1960s and ’70s, the city had a population of around 8,000. Now it is about 7,000. But while the city itself has lost some residents, Kershaw County has really ballooned. The Jewish population of Camden was thriving when my siblings, Harry, Cheryl, Becky, and I were children, but it was starting its descent. Many kids, like me, left Camden after high school and did not return.

There were a few Jewish families in Camden with children: the Karashes, Schreibers, James, and others. We would see each other at Jewish functions. My brother, sisters, and I were socially friendly with all of them. One of my earliest memories associated with Judaism was my brother Harry’s bar mitzvah. It was a big event and many of our out-of-town relatives attended. The celebration took place at the Holiday Inn in Lugoff, which may have been one of the few hotels in the Camden area and probably the only one that could hold the large crowd that attended.

Growing up Jewish in a small town was different from being raised in a city that had enough Jewish families to fill a synagogue and maintain a youth group. Most of my friends were not Jewish. They really didn’t understand my religion, but they were always so friendly. My classmates learned more than I did about our Jewish heritage; I never learned much. Our class, which consisted of me, my brother Harry, and the Schreibers, were the Karesh kids, we were very small—about eight altogether—so we had some Hanukkah bush made of tree branches and gum drops. We usually had a “Hanukkah bush” made of tree branches and gum drops. We usually had a “Hanukkah bush” made of tree branches and gum drops.

At home my family celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, but the headmaster, Chuck Owens, was a good friend of my Camden grandmother, Minnie Tewell Baum, and he always excused us so we could attend services.

Besides opening every fall for the High Holidays, our active Jewish congregation held some Friday night services at Temple Beth El on Lyttleton Street. Behind the small sanctuary is an annex that housed a Sunday school. While we were growing up, however, there were not enough children to warrant weekly classes, so my brother, sisters, and I were driven to Temple Sinai in Sumter every Sunday morning. After Sunday school, we were treated to lunch at one of the restaurants in town.

Our home was next to the temple and served as the place for oneg after Shabbat services. My mom, Ann Briskin Baum, would have coffee and such for the Jewish families that would stop by.

Our house also served as a landing spot for a number of relatives. They would either come for a visit on their way somewhere, or they would plan a vacation and stay with us for a few days. We had a large dining room table that accommodated several guests at various meals; of course, there was a kids’ table as well. My grandmother, Minnie, whom we called Nannie, would make the best chopped liver and that is when I learned to like it. To this day, all others are judged by hers.

Leon Schlosburg (wife Traxie) was our lay rabbi when I was little. Sometimes we would meet at one of Camden’s restaurants after services, and on a couple of occasions congregation members gathered to celebrate Hanukkah together; I remember spinning the dreidel with the other children. After Leon died, my dad, Bernie Baum, became the temple’s lay leader and conducted services for many years. When he and my mom moved to Myrtle Beach in the late 1980s, Jay Tanzer (wife Rita) led services. I remember Jay would also give a thoughtful and informational “sermon.” I always made it a point to return to Temple Beth El for High Holiday services. I still do.

Becky

When I was growing up in Camden there were maybe 20 Jewish families who belonged to Temple Beth El—down from around 100 families in 1927. Our house was right next door to the temple, which, by the way, used to be St. Mary’s Catholic Church, built in 1903. I remember going to temple as a young girl for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There would always be a visiting, retired rabbi to conduct the services. Eventually, my father, Bernie Baum, took over leading the prayers for the holidays. My dad was not a rabbi; he owned Fox Pawn Shop, which was on Broad Street in the heart of downtown Camden. After he and my mother moved out of Camden, Jay Tanzer served as lay leader and he continued in that role for a number of years. Then my younger brother, Garry, took over, and he leads services twice a year for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I still go home with my family for Rosh Hashanah.

My siblings and I went to Sunday school classes in Sumter, though one temple in Sumter. I remember my sister, Cheryl, driving us there every Sunday and how I never wanted to go. My older brother, Harry, had a bar mitzvah at Temple Sinai, and Cheryl and my younger brother, Garry, and I were confirmed there.

At home my family celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, and Hanukkah, but I don’t remember having a Shabbat meal on Fridays or lighting Shabbat candles as a child. The first time I lit Shabbat candles, we were having a meal with my husband’s parents, Susan and Idaourie. I remember thinking how special that felt and tried to do it often with my children when they were young.

I loved growing up in a small southern town and being Jewish was just that. I was Jewish and my friends were not, but that was okay. Life in Camden was good.

Cheryl

I n school, I gave my friends cards and presents at Christmas time. There was no one to give Hanukkah cards to and my schools did not recognize Hanukkah as a holiday. We never had a tree to put our presents under like my friends whose families celebrated Christmas.

The sanctuary at Temple Beth El has not changed much. We do have air conditioning and heat now. Before that, we had large fans to cool us off. We have an annex in the back of the temple where the children—when there were enough for a class—went to Sunday school. My classmates learned more than I did about our Jewish heritage; I never learned much. Our class, which consisted of me, my brother Harry, and the Schreibers, were the Karesh kids, we were very small—about eight altogether—so my family sent us to Temple Sinai in Sumter for Sunday school.

In the 1960s and early ’70s, our temple had a nice crowd of about 40 people. Now we only have about ten families. We open up only four times a year for evening and day services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

My father, Bernie Baum, became our rabbi after Leon Schlosburg died. Now my brother Garry Baum leads our services and we have different people read from the Torah. A
member takes the Torah home after services to keep it safe.

It was not hard living in Camden with such a small Jewish community. That’s all I know. I still live in Camden and I love it. Opening the temple for our holidays is very exciting. Now we have families coming from large cities to celebrate with us. They say it’s because we are small and they would rather come to a small temple instead of one of the larger ones.

**Harry**

During the 1960s I remember having Temple Beth El next door to the house where I grew up in Camden. That was good about 14 days a year, because those were days when the congregation gathered for services. Temple was very formal, but also—little did I know at the time—very English. Hebrew was never spoken, except for the Sh’mat and the Bar’chu, which were recited from memory, not read. We had a rabbi from Sumter come during the school year once a month, on Sunday afternoons, to lead Shabbat services. During the High Holidays, the president of the congregation led the services—that is, the part in English. We would take out the Torah but never open it. As a child all I remember was being told to be quiet.

Sunday school meant going to Sumter every week—a 70-mile round trip. At the beginning, a high school student, Steve Zagoria, was hired to drive us. When he graduated it required an unhappy parent. Then three of us—David Karesh, Harry Kline, and me—had our bar mitzvah. We became the Hebrew experts. Even if we said something wrong, who knew?

Today the reality is the size of the congregation at Temple Beth El continues to shrink. I remember three generations of the Baum family—our grandparents Minnie T. Baum and Morris and Cille Briskin; Minnie’s sisters, Rose Israel and Augusta Simons; Uncle Norman Baum; and my parents and siblings—taking up the entire right side of the temple, while the rest of the congregation was on the left. Many of us have moved away. Today, we have fewer than ten dues-paying families. Once we invited some friends of mine from a local Baptist church, who were interested in attending a service, and they outnumbered the Jewish people.

My brother, Garry, is in charge of services. Without him and Barbara Freed James, who is temple secretary and treasurer, we would not exist. I hope more Jewish people come to Camden so we can keep the temple alive for many years to come. It would be a shame for it to close.


Left: Norman Everett Baum’s confirmation certificate, Temple Beth El, Camden, SC, May 24, 1936. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Top: Harry Maurice Baum’s bar mitzvah cake, created by Sura Wolf Wengrow of Columbia, SC, and Harry’s thank you note. Mrs. Wengrow made elaborately decorated cakes for many bar and bat mitzvah celebrations, and other occasions. She compiled an album filled with photographs documenting her creativity. Courtesy of Sura’s son Arnold Wengrow and daughter Roberta Wengrow Karesh.

Baum Brothers Store, ca. 1890, Camden, SC. Three Baum brothers emigrated from Schwersenz, Prussia, settled in Camden and, in 1850, opened a mercantile store. All were soldiers in the service of the Confederacy. Marcus Baum lost his life to friendly fire in 1864. After the Civil War, Herman and Mannes operated what their sign described as “The Mammoth Store” at 1000 Broad Street. In 1902, Baum Brothers stocked buggies, groceries, dry goods, and hardware. Special Collections, College of Charleston.
Holding On: Temple B’Nai Israel of Anderson

by Barry Draisen, with contributions from David Draisen

My earliest recollection of going to shul in Anderson was around 1947. I was about five years old. The service was held in a room over a grocery store on East Whittier Street. I remember looking down out of the window at the children walking to town when school at McCants Junior High was over for the day. I don’t remember anything about the service but I do remember that my new wool suit itched terribly and I was very uncomfortable. The next year we had our own synagogue. There was no air conditioning back then, the wooden pews were hard, the sanctuary was crowded with a lot of big loud people I didn’t know, and my wool suit still itched. The cantor was Nahum Rosenblum and he made each Hebrew word he chanted last forever and ever. I remember he would spend an eternity on just the one word “Hamelech.” I remember he would spend an eternity on just the one word “Hamelech.” I remember going to Sunday school with many other kids up until the time of my own bar mitzvah. Flo Fleishman, Nahum Rosenblum, and others led the drive to build the synagogue that presently stands on Oaklawn Avenue in Anderson. It was built at that time because Mr. Siegel wanted his grandson Ronnie Bern to have his bar mitzvah in a “proper” synagogue. At the time bar and bat mitzvah candidates were Conservative but High Holidays were Orthodox. In the late ’70s, the congregation shifted to Reform services. We briefly joined the Reform Movement and still use the Reform Gates of Prayer as our prayer book on Shabbat.

Many improvements have been made to the sanctuary, which can seat 150 people. We installed air conditioning in the mid-to late ’50s, replaced the carpeting, and added padding to the pews. We replaced the old 1940s roll-out windows with 12 beautiful stained glass windows, and we recently added stained glass doors to our ark in memory of Alvin Fleishman, reportedly Anderson’s first bar mitzvah. The ark now houses three Torahs. The original was brought over from Kiev by my grandfather Zalman Poliakoff. We also have a Holocaust Torah from a community in Czechoslovakia that we traditionally use for the afternoon service on Yom Kippur.

In recent times, Dr. Robert Kimmel, Dr. Peter Cohen, and Mike Krupswaw have provided bar and bat mitzvah training. Lay leaders conduct services every Friday night, and Dr. Kimmel leads services for the major holidays, as well as several Shabbat services.

The membership of our congregation has stayed fairly steady over the past ten years. At its peak Temple B’nai Israel served 36 member-families, a number that now stands at 25. The demographics are a cause of concern. When we had 36 families, most members were in their 30s and 40s and there were about 50 kids. Now there are almost no children—in the 1990s our Sunday school classrooms were converted to one large area for break-the-fast meals and Passover Seders. Our membership ranges in age from 60 to 80.

I’m not sure what the future holds for Temple B’Nai Israel of Anderson. While the general population of the Anderson area is growing, the number of Jews is declining. We do lose some potential members, especially those with young children, to Temple of Israel, Beth Israel, and Chabad in Greenville. New industry is coming to Anderson all the time and there is a major push to build hotels, parks, and a convention facility in the Lake Hartwell recreational area. We have some new members, recent retirees who have moved to our area from other parts of the country. Maybe if we hold on long enough, a retirement community like the one Del Webb built near Bluffton will come here and bring with it sufficient numbers of Jewish residents to spark a revival in our congregation.

Small-town Conundrum: Temple Sinai of Orangeburg

by Barry Frishberg

When we moved to Orangeburg in 1981, Lillian Goldberg, our next door neighbor, invited us to Friday night services at Temple Sinai, which were conducted by her brother Mordie Rubenstein. It wasn’t until a few years later that we finally accepted the offer. During our first visit we were warmly greeted by the dozen or so congregants. They welcomed our three-year-old daughter and newborn son, expressing joy about seeing children in the synagogue again.

In 1956, after years of fund raising and holding services in family homes, Temple Sinai was built at its current site on Ellis Avenue, in a residential neighborhood. By the 1980s, Temple Sinai’s membership—like that of many synagogues in small southern towns—was shrinking. As children grew up they moved out of town seeking employment elsewhere; parents were aging and some passed away. There weren’t enough younger people to replace them in the congregation. At that time, a minyan was unusual for Friday night services, and most of the congregation attended services conducted by a part-time rabbi, including—to my surprise—several non-members. One gentleman was an accountant who was Jewish but converted to Unitarianism and attended a church in Columbia, South Carolina. While claiming no affiliation with Temple Sinai, he said he felt a tie to Judaism and he had the expertise to help us liquidate the assets.

There were two primary opinions on how to proceed. The first was we should sell the building and distribute all assets to other places of worship in Orangeburg. The rationale was that these churches helped us when we were raising money to build Temple Sinai since they thought bringing a synagogue to Orangeburg would complete the major institutions of religious worship in the area. The second strategy, endorsed by most of the congregation, was to continue as we had in the past; no one, however, was willing to assume the leadership position.

Approximately 30 people attended the business meeting, including—to my surprise—several non-members. One gentleman was an accountant who was Jewish but converted to Unitarianism and attended a church in Columbia, South Carolina. While claiming no affiliation with Temple Sinai, he said he felt a tie to Judaism and he had the expertise to help us liquidate the assets.
Finally, a compromise was proposed: three members would alternate conducting services, so as not to put a big burden on one person. In addition, instead of Friday nights, services would be conducted on Saturday mornings to accommodate the elderly members who preferred to drive in daylight. The last and most significant change was the decision to hold services only on the first Saturday of the month. Our thinking was that members would be more likely to attend regularly if the obligation was less demanding.

That year was a resounding success. Attendance was high and most members expressed satisfaction with the renewed fellowship. Unfortunately, at the end of the year, two of the lay readers moved out of state, leaving me with the responsibility of running services. Over the last two decades, new members, David Farr in particular, have shared the leadership of the synagogue.

From about 1988 to 2000, things went smoothly. Since former members were leaving me with the responsibility of running services. Over the last two decades, new members, leaving me with the responsibility of running services. Over the last two decades, new members,

Barry Frishberg, lay leader of Temple Sinai, Orangeburg, SC. Rosh Hashanah 2010. Photo: Larry Hardy. Courtesy of The Times and Democrat (Orangeburg, SC).
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See page 11 for more information.