Revisiting the Past
Envisioning the Future
May 18–19, 2019
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A Good Living Can Be Made in Trade – Lynn Robertson  The dream of many Jewish immigrants arriving in South Carolina around the turn of the 20th century was to develop a successful selling route, acquire a store of their own, find a spouse, and raise a family. In this essay, the curator of A Store at Every Crossroads traces the roles Jewish merchant families played not only in southern cities, but in every town and hamlet along a railroad line or highway. 

D. Poliakov: 100 Years on the Square – Ed Poliakov  David Poliakov emigrated in 1893 from the dzetl of Kamien, northeast of Minsk in today’s Belarus. After short stints in several upcountry towns, he settled in Abbeville, South Carolina, where he opened a clothing store in 1900 that remained in operation for a full century.

Edward’s $5 - 10¢ - $1.00 Stores and the Kronberg Brothers – Mickey Kronberg Rosenblum  With help from his uncle Joseph Bluestein, Edward Kronberg opened the first Edward’s five and ten cent store on King Street in Charleston in 1926. Joined in the 1930s by his brothers and mother, the Kronbergs launched a 50-year expansion that led to the creation of more than 35 stores.

Lowcountry: Past and Present – Lisa Rosamond Thompson  Look, and look again, at the images in this photo essay, and at I. D. Rubin’s “New York Pawn Office” on the cover. These “doubletakings” are reproduced from the artist’s senior thesis project at the College of Charleston.

Revisiting the Past and Envisioning the Future – JHSSC Celebrates its 25th Anniversary, Charleston, SC, May 18–19, 2019

The Brody Brothers: Jewish Retail Giants in South Carolina – Harold J. Brody, M.D.  Russian immigrant Hyman Brody turned his shoe shop (est. 1918) in Sumter, South Carolina, into a department store, then tripled its floor space. When his sons joined the business, the Brodys expanded into North Carolina and opened a second store in Sumter called The Capitol.

The Furchgott Stores, since 1866 – David Furchgott, with contributions from Alison Walsh and Maurice Furchgott  – Slovakian Max Furchgott arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1865, and partnered for a time in dry goods with his brothers Herman and Leopold and businessmen Charles Benedict and Morris Kohn. The family spread out to the south, north, and west, establishing successful department stores in Jacksonville, Florida, as well as Charleston.

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A Good Living Can Be Made in Trade
by Lynn Robertson, curator, A Store at Every Crossroads

During the period of mass immigration between 1881 and 1924, the vast majority of East European Jews coming to the United States settled in urban areas, mainly outside the South. Northern and midwestern cities often are presented as sites of the typical American immigrant experience. But lives lived away from big cities are equally important to our understanding of history. South Carolina, undeniably rural and agricultural, offered Jewish “greenhorns” opportunities to experience, and integrate into, a different America.

It was here, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, that small towns sprang up across the state along railroad lines and roadways, serving as trading hubs for local farmers and businesses. They attracted a significant influx of Jewish immigrants who had some background in retail trade; life as a rural peddler was an understood path to achieving financial security and being your own boss. For many newcomers, some of whom spoke only Yiddish, the dream was to develop a successful selling route, acquire a store of one’s own, find a spouse, and start a family.

Life in business often began with a dry goods store. These establishments sold most of what farm families needed, from plows to pillowcases. General merchandise stores commonly evolved into more specialized businesses as the town grew. Jewish merchants frequently encouraged other immigrant entrepreneurs or family members to join them—part of a matchmaking strategy that recruited single men as salesmen and potential suitors.

Many towns boasted numerous Jewish-owned stores by the 20th century. In 1927, the small town of Bishopville was home to 93 Jewish residents, many of whom, such as the Levensons, had stores on Main Street.

These general merchandise stores served as community centers in small towns—destinations where both town residents and rural visitors could socialize as well as shop. The local store was a hub for news and gossip, friendships and rivalries. Customers, especially women, looked forward to acquiring not only daily necessities but also the modest luxuries displayed on the shelves.

Some early Jewish merchants established themselves as purveyors of inexpensive merchandise. Regional suppliers provided a wide variety of wholesale goods to peddlers and storeowners. The Baltimore Bargain House specialized in serving southern merchants, many of them Jewish, offering credit and prepaid freight on first orders. Arrangements like these made it affordable for would-be merchants to stock their wagons or shops and develop a clientele. In 1911, Wolfe Rubenstein and his wife, Fannie Berger, opened the appropriately named Underselling Store in Elloree. But, by World War II, they were successful enough to install a new awning carrying the more dignified Rubenstein’s above the store.

Jewish-owned establishments had a reputation for being more courteous to African-American clients, allowing them to try on articles of clothing, not a common practice in other shops. Jewish storekeepers also were more likely to extend credit to people of color. Their open-for-business policy required merchants to carefully navigate the racial norms in towns where the Ku Klux Klan operated openly. During the revival of KKK activity in the 1950s, Nathan Bass, the only Jewish merchant in North, South Carolina, both offered shelter to his customers during Klan displays and confronted his Masonic brothers on their racist views.

Small-town storeowners provided financial loans to regular customers, or became creditors in the crop lien system, where merchants furnished supplies to farmers against the sale of future crop yields. Holding the land as collateral, if years were bad, store men became landowners, and many diversified their investments by going into timber, cotton, or other crops. In this way, they started to look like so many of their fellow townsmen, managing land and worrying about the vicissitudes of weather and markets.

By the end of World War II—all the wholesale destruction of European Jewry that came to be called the Holocaust—American Jews emerged as the most affluent and influential Jewish population in the world.

Their assimilation into mainstream America was driven by the immigrant generation’s dreams of financial stability and public acceptance. Local storeowners were recognized as important contributors to day-to-day life and were increasingly invited to take part in public affairs. As their businesses prospered, Jewish merchants displayed their commitment to their adopted communities through civic and benevolent activities. Jewish women and men often served on boards and founded cultural organizations.

Perhaps the ultimate manifestation of Jewish involvement in community affairs was widespread engagement in politics. By 1900, many towns in the state could claim Jewish residents who had been elected mayor, city council member, or state legislator.
Some of South Carolina’s most powerful politicians in the 20th century came from Jewish merchant families. Sol Blatt reminisced about working in his father’s store in Barnwell. Irene Rudnick, whose family’s business was in Columbia, became the first Jewish woman elected to the state legislature. Members of other families, such as the Louries from St. George and the Kornbluts in Latta, maintained their mercantile ties while becoming politically prominent.

By the 1970s and ’80s, many once-thriving small-town Jewish stores were out of business or soon to be. Typically, the younger generations in storekeeper families went to college, became professionals, and moved to cities. Acknowledging the reality of small-town depopulation, some prudent merchants relocated their businesses to thriving cities such as Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston.

The spirit of entrepreneurship that characterized the ambitions of early Jewish peddlers and merchants did not disappear. Retailers looked for niche markets where they could avoid competition from big box stores. Some specialized in quality goods and personalized service. Spartanburg’s Price’s Men’s Wear, established by Harry Price in 1903, offered custom-made suits to its Upstate clientele.

Others pursued new strategies for offering merchandise at bargain prices. Harry Zaglin opened the Greenville Army and Navy Store, selling military surplus, in the 1950s. The wholesale warehouse established in Charleston by Sam Solomon in 1909 passed to his sons, Melvin and Aaron, and son-in-law, Joseph Stillman, at his death in 1954. They pioneered retail discounting through customer memberships and catalogue showroom merchandising. The company that once supplied Jewish peddlers grew to include stores throughout South Carolina as well as three other states.

In the post–World War II suburban boom, main street stores migrated to shopping centers. Development of South Windermere across the Ashley River from downtown Charleston—the brainchild of attorney William Ackerman—began in 1951 and included one of the first suburban malls in South Carolina. When it opened in 1959, the Kronsberg brothers’ North Charleston Pinehaven Shopping Center, featuring their Edward’s store, was the largest retail complex in the state. Merchants in other growing cities followed the same pattern.

In the 1960s, established stores in Columbia such as Berry’s On Main maintained their Main Street presence while opening branch stores in suburban locations.

Tourism brought in a new mobile customer base. In the 1920s, with the establishment of the federal highway system, Routes 17 and 15 carried travelers down the coast. Tapping into the growing flow of New York to Florida traffic, Albert Novit, in 1937, expanded his mercantile shops in Walterboro, opening an adjacent hotel and then a restaurant. Fifty years later, Alan Schafer’s popular South of the Border, located on Route 301, with its iconic sombrero sign, only grew in popularity when I-95, with an adjacent Dillon exit, was completed through South Carolina in 1978.

The 21st century introduced online shopping and created the e-commerce customer. Stores such as M. Dumas, originally established in 1917 in Charleston by Mendel Dumas as a uniform shop for local service jobs, and Britton’s in Columbia now have professionally designed web sites for international buyers of their iconic southern men’s wear styles.

Perhaps Edward Kronsberg, in a 1949 article in the Charleston Evening Post, best summarized the history of Jewish merchants and their contribution to South Carolina: "Our business is founded on personal interest. We make friends in the community in which we establish ourselves and share our time between community activities and business." For two centuries Jews have set up businesses, engaged in civic life, and established families. From Clio to Charleston, and Greer to Greenville, Jewish merchants have been an integral part of our state’s history.
D. Poliakoff: 100 Years on the Square

by Ed Poliakoff

D. Poliakoff, the dry goods store opened in 1900 by my grandfather David Poliakoff, was in business on historic Court Square in Abbeville, South Carolina, for more than 100 years, from February 19, 1900, to August 26, 2000. David emigrated from Kamen, a town in what is now western Belarus (then part of the Russian Empire), near the border between today’s Belarus and Ukraine, in 1893, when he was 20 years old. His passport application (found last year in the State Historical Archives of Belarus) states that the purpose of his trip was to “earn money.” A few bristle whistleblower invoices addressed to “Poliakoff Brothers, Clifton, SC,” some in Yiddish, remain from the years 1900 to 1899, first in Clifton (near Spartanburg), then in Abbeville, South Carolina. In 1898–1899, he was in Aiken County. Family lore has it that David was a peddler who initially picked up McKornick, South Carolina, to open his own store and paid the first month’s rent, but quickly decided to settle in Abbeville. Years later, in a November 1937 interview for the Abbeville Press and Banner, he said he came to Abbeville after leaving his brother Samuel in Granitewille, South Carolina. Abbeville’s population had more than doubled between 1890 and 1900, perhaps a reason he decided to settle there.

The 1900 U.S. Census for Abbeville Township listed David Poliakoff as a “clothing merchant,” born in Russia in 1872, as a boarder who could read, write, and speak English. The store’s original location on Abbeville’s Court Square was “next door to [the State] dispensary,” as noted in its March 1900 ad in the Abbeville Medium. Throughout its 100 years, the store was closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In a 1920 article entitled “The Knowledge of Hebrew Not Now Confined to Preachers,” the Abbeville paper extolled its first-born. “Young Ellis Poliakoff returned this week from Anderson where for the past month he has been under the tutelage of a professor of Hebrew and ... has mastered the intricate characters of the Hebrew language.” David Poliakoff “is the proudest man you ever saw when he is listening to his son read so fluently the language of his fathers.”

Sons Ellis, Marion, Myer (my father), Arthur, and Samuel all graduated from the University of South Carolina, where over a period of more than 15 years at least one Poliakoff brother occupied the same dorm room (#48) at Burney College, according to an October 29, 1935, article in the USC Gamecock. All the brothers served their country during the World War II era, three overseas. Ellis was a distinguished physician who served the people of Abbeville County his entire professional career, excepting wartime service. Marion was a gentleman merchant who established a top-line men’s apparel store in Walhalla, South Carolina. Arthur (Bud) was a beloved pharmacist in Atlanta and a discerning collector of Western paintings, along with a monetary bequest, establishing in Abbeville one of the most significant public collections of this genre. Readers are invited to visit the collection in person or online at http://poliakoffcollectionwatermark.org/

Daughter Eva Poliakoff, who later was a school teacher and lived with her husband and family in Marblehead, Massachusetts, graduated from Agnes Scott College, where her roommate was Rosa From of Union, South Carolina. Eva and Rosa became roommates at the suggestion of Eva’s brother Myer, who had met Rosa at Jewish dances in Columbia. Rosa was the daughter of Israel and Bertha From, immigrants from Lithuania. Israel was a successful merchant—“I. From, Dry Goods and Notions” was a household word in Union—and Bertha a religiously observant homemaker. After graduating from Agnes Scott College, Rosa became a teacher in Atlanta, while Myer completed his degree at USC and returned to Abbeville to work with his parents in the store, eventually taking over its management. On February 20, 1940, Myer Poliakoff and Rosa From were married at the From residence in Union. As his business grew, David Poliakoff had moved the store twice, settling in his third and final location in 1935 in the northeast corner of Court Square at Washington Street, located on the site where John C. Calhoun’s law office once stood. It was constructed in 1873, only eight years after the horse-drawn entourage of Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, and others in the fleeing Confederate war cabinet came up Washington Street from the train station to the Square, en route to the Abbeville residence where the last meeting of the cabinet was held.

Myer ran D. Poliakoff’s for almost half a century, in later years with Rosa’s help. Like his father, he was a life member of the Abbeville Masonic Lodge. He was an officer of the local development board, a 17-year member of the school board, and a longtime board member, treasurer, and ardent supporter of the Abbeville County Library system. His portrait, a gift of former store employees, hangs in the Library’s Poliakoff Art Gallery and Meeting Room.

D. Poliakoff was an Abbeville institution, where a visit to the store and a welcome from the Poliakoff in charge was a custom for generations of Abbevillians. It was not unusual for a resident to be outfitted at Poliakoff’s as a child and employed there as a teen, then return as a parent for proper fitting of his or her children. Myer and Rosa were regular attendees at apparel shows at the merchandise marts in Atlanta and Charlotte. My sisters, Doris and Elaine, and I grew up in Abbeville, about a mile from the store, where we helped out after school and on weekends. Store specialties included the expert fitting of children’s shoes—with Myer routinely declining the sale if he was not satisfied with the fit—and women’s and children’s apparel. At merchandise shows, Rosa frequently selected women’s apparel with specific customers in mind. Myer Poliakoff died on August 10, 1985. Rosa took up the reins and ran the store with paper work assistance from their children.

Myer and Rosa Poliakoff were strong advocates for maintaining the 19th-century charm of Abbeville’s Court Square, a frequent subject for artists. A 1987 painting by Oscar Velasquez, AWS, later reproduced as a postcard, makes artistic reference to Myer (with bow tie and red vest) and Rosa in front of the store. A 1990 Location Agreement with the Twenty-First Century Film Corporation, for which the filmmaker paid D. Poliakoff $200, permitted interior and exterior shots of the store during production of Sleeping with the Enemy, starring Julia Roberts. In 1995, NationsBank TV ads featured Rosa Poliakoff and the store interior.

D. Poliakoff building after renovation, Washington Street view, Abbeville, SC. Photo by Ed Poliakoff.
Still family-owned, the D. Poliakoff building was renovated a few years after the business closed, renewing its heart-pine flooring, high retaining on its corner sidewalks its pre-electric era translucent panel vault lights and grate-covered basement light wells. The building’s front parapet and side wall still display “D. Poliakoff” in the large letters once common on storefronts.

The store’s 90th anniversary was celebrated in April 1990 at a public event near the Square. Speakers included former Governor Dick Riley, former Congressman W. J. Bryan Dom, and state senator Billy O’Dell, who presented the congratulatory resolution adopted by the General Assembly. State Senator Isadore Lourie was the keynote speaker, praising the generation of Jewish immigrants who established businesses in the South around the turn of the century. “I shall always stand in awe of that generation,” he declared, adding that he hoped the descendants of those Jewish immigrants would remember their forefathers’ twofold heritage and be proud of it: “To be the sons of the covenant between God and Abraham … and proud to be Americans.”

Today, 105 West occupies the Poliakoff building on Albee’s Court Square. Photo by Eli Poliakoff.

The full version of the Poliakoff and Kronsberg articles, with images of historic documents and photographs, can be found at http://merchants.jhsoc.org/merchant-stories/

Edward’s 5¢ · 10¢ · $1.00 Stores and the Kronsberg Brothers

Miriam Stoller Kronsberg, widow of Edward Kronsberg—grandfather and namesake of the man who founded Edward’s—emigrated from Ukraine to Baltimore, Maryland, in 1888, with her nine-year-old son, Abraham, her three sisters, and a half brother. Abraham grew up in Baltimore and as a young man became a cigar maker. In 1902, he married Lena Jacobson, a Lithuanian immigrant and daughter of Meyer Jacobson and Rose Rockell Mervis Jacobson. Their first son, Edward, was born the following year in his grandparents’ home in Portsmouth, Virginia. Edward contracted polio as an infant and, for his whole life, he walked with a limp.

About the time Edward was born, Abraham moved the family to Tilghman Island, Maryland, where he opened a clothing and dry goods store. They were the only Jews on the island and, despite the logistical difficulties, Lena kept a kosher home, getting meat by boat from Baltimore, but mainly

On April 29, 1990, Greenwood’s Index-Journal, in an article entitled “90th Anniversary: Not a Swan Song for Rosa Poliakoff,” praised Rosa’s observation that what separated D. Poliakoff from other stores for most of the century was personal service and attention: “We always say you can’t come into the store without being greeted by a Poliakoff . . . people like to be remembered by their names.”

Rosa Poliakoff was determined D. Poliakoff would reach its 100th anniversary in February 2000. She died October 26, 1999 and was buried alongside her beloved Myer in Aiken’s Sons of Israel Cemetery. Family and devoted staff kept the store in business until after the anniversary was reached, and D. Poliakoff closed its doors for good on August 26, 2000.

Lena Kronsberg, ca. 1900, and Abraham Kronsberg, ca. 1905. Courtesy of Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum.

The store’soriof the newly organized Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. A congratulatory letter from Senator Bill Clinton was presented to Rosa Poliakoff.

Expansion within South Carolina began in 1930 with the opening of the Bamberg store. Milton and Macey, both of whom had graduated from Johns Hopkins University, moved to Charleston, in the ’30s to work for Edward’s, and Lena followed. Stores were added in Walterboro (1936) and Conway (1938). World War II put a stop to further expansion, but in 1947, the Reynolds Avenue store at the entrance to the Charleston Naval Base was completed. In 1949, one of the most significant stores in the Edward’s chain was opened in Charleston’s King and Morris Street. The large modern building was launched with lots of fanfare and newspaper coverage. The 15,000 square feet of store space accommodated 34 departments, including a frozen custard bar, fresh baked goods, shoe repair, fresh flowers and plants, and goldfish and pets. More than 15,000 people attended the grand opening. Two thousand five hundred orchids were flown in from Hawaii for souvenirs and were gone in two hours. There had been nothing like this store or its unveiling on the Charleston peninsula before. Lena, now secretary of the organization, opened the doors for the crowd. In attendance were all the Kronsberg brothers: Edward, founder and president; Macey, first vice-president; Meyer, second vice-president; and Milton, treasurer.

The 1950s brought many changes. Macey retired from Edward’s and went to Florida to open his own store and work on his MBA. Meyer moved to New York and became Edward’s resident New York buyer. Milton, who had started in the business as an assistant store manager and later became a store manager, assumed the position as General Manager of the Distribution Warehouse, the first of which was a small building at 237 East Bay Street in Charleston, across from what is now the Harris Teeter. In 1951, the Kronsbergs opened a store in Byrnes Down, West Ashley, Charleston, and in 1952, launched the first of two stores in Mt. Pleasant.

The 1960s brought many more. The first Kroger store opened on King Street to house the large new building at 240 King Street. Edward lived with the Bluestein family and attended the College of Charleston. In 1926, with Joseph’s help, Edward opened the first Edward’s five and ten cents store on King Street, next door to Bluestein’s.

In 1958, they acquired a store in Georgetown, the first of two, and two years later, they opened a store in Sumter.

In 1959, the Kronsbergs built Pinehaven Shopping Center, the state’s largest, in Charleston Heights. It contained 23 stores, including an Edward’s, and had a mammoth

Top: Kronsberg brothers, ca. 1937, l to r, Macey, Milton (standing); Edward, Meyer (sitting), courtesy of Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum. Middle: Edward’s opening, 1949, corner of King and Morris streets, Charleston, SC. Special Collections, College of Charleston. Bottom: Pinehaven groundbreaking, 1949, l to r, Edward Kronsberg, Milton Kronsberg, and Max Leber, Special Collections, College of Charleston.
parking lot. Maxwell Lehrer of Charleston, who had been an important leader of the Edward’s organization for many years, was chosen to manage the shopping center. Although Edward pioneered the new development and was responsible for it, the privately owned corporation did not have sufficient money to invest; rather, the partners raised capital for Pinehaven through a public stock offering.

In the 60’s, when Edward’s sons Avram and Buddy joined the business, most of the stores measured between 5,000 and 10,000 square feet and were modeled after Woolworth’s. Between 1963 and 1969, a huge expansion took place, including an increase in the square footage of the stores. Stores were opened in Aiken, Orangeburg, Greenwood, Laurens, North Augusta, Myrtle Beach (the second store), Lake City, and another in Charleston in the new James Island Shopping Center. With the addition of so many stores, it became necessary to build more warehouse space, so plans were made for a new 80,000-square-foot warehouse and 18,000 square feet of office space to be located in a building that could be seen from I-26 in North Charleston.

In 1970, the Kronsbergs inaugurated a store in Greenville, South Carolina, and the following year stores were opened in Newberry and Georgetown (a second store), as well as in the new Ashley Plaza Mall, West Ashley, Charleston. In 1971, they also opened a small store in the Harbor View Shopping Center on James Island, which was intended to serve as a prototype for future neighborhood stores. Not long after the Harbor View opening, Avram was named president and Edward became chairman of the board.

Under Avram and Buddy’s management, the new South Carolina stores were built even bigger. In 1972, they opened the biggest store to date—60,000 square feet—in Dillon, followed the next year by stores in Florence and Summerville.

Edward's stores were described as “junior department stores.” In 1973, Edward’s store opening in Charleston in the new Ashley Plaza Mall, West Ashley, Charleston. In 1971, they opened stores in Union, Hilton Head, Camden, Easley, and Mt. Pleasant. Finally, they decided to venture out of state—Georgia—opening first in Savannah in 1975 and Brunswick in 1977. Around the same time, there had been a storm in Laurens, South Carolina, and the Edward’s store there was inundated, with no flood insurance on the building. All the stock was lost and the store needed a major renovation. The corporation was not able to insure the building because of the flood, and after the renovation, it flooded again.

In spite of national competition, the new executives continued to open additional stores in the Palmetto State. Between 1973 and 1974, they built new stores in Union, Hilton Head, Camden, Easley, and Mt. Pleasant. Finally, they decided to venture out of state—Georgia—opening first in Savannah in 1975 and Brunswick in 1977. Around the same time, there had been a storm in Laurens, South Carolina, and the Edward’s store there was inundated, with no flood insurance on the building. All the stock was lost and the store needed a major renovation. The corporation was not able to insure the building because of the flood, and after the renovation, it flooded again.


The telling of this great American success story would not be complete without noting that Edward Kronsberg built the business from a single location to a conglomerate of more than 35 stores while giving his all to both the Jewish and gentile communities. His brothers and business partners Macey and Milton also were active in organizations that might not exist today without their hard work. They all loved Charleston and felt the city had been good to them. In return they gave, not only financially, but in countless hours invested in a legion of civic, cultural, and religious organizations.

Lowcountry: Past and Present
Lisa Rosamond Thompson, known professionally as Lisa Rosamond, is a senior at the College of Charleston majoring in History and Studio Arts and minoring in Jewish Studies. After taking a course at the Yachshik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, she found herself drawn to further study of Jewish religion and culture.

Lisa Rosamond Thompson’s senior thesis, Lowcountry: Past and Present, reflects her love of photography and history. Inspired by the works of visual artist Shimon Attie and photographer Sergey Larenkov and her fascination with Jewish culture and community, she searched books, databases, the internet, and JHSSC magazines for vintage photographs of Jewish storefronts and shopkeepers in Charleston. Once she located an old image, she photographed the same site as it appears today, aiming to capture the same angle as in the old photograph. In the Simons Center photography lab, Lisa used Adobe Photoshop’s Layers to superimpose a portion of the historic image on the new photo. Lining up the angles was challenging and required technical skill, while the decision about how to blend past and present offered her the opportunity to select which aspects of each era to feature.

Through this method of layering the past on the present, Lisa expresses her appreciation for those who have come before and hopes to spark an interest in history in people who may be otherwise indifferent to it.
Among the many awards she has received, Rabbi Schindler was named National Jewish Book Award in Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice. (2018), which was a finalist for the Good for Synagogues, Jews, and America University of Munich to offer courses in American Jewish studies. He became the first Allianz Visiting Professor at the Ludwig-Maximilians Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium (fall semester 1993). For a semester in 2004, Jerusalem (1983-84) and then at the Catholic University of Leuven and His curricular and research interests are primarily in the intersection of Development and Social Justice at Queens University of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice, Queens University, Charlotte, NC, and Rabbi Emerita, Temple Beth El, Charlotte, NC. How Judaism Became an American Religion and What the Future Has in Store


Hotel reservations
Francis Marion Hotel
387 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403
877.756.2121
Special rate: $319 per night + tax
To get the special rate, make your reservation by 5:00 p.m. on April 17 and mention Group JHSSC2019.

Meeting registration
By check, payable to JHSSC c/o Yashik/Ardell Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29424
Meeting fee: $60 per person
Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohn@cofc.edu
Phone: 843.953.3918 – fax: 843.953.7624

Recharging Judaism: How Civic Engagement is

Rabbi Judith Schindler is the Sklute Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice at Queens University, Charlotte, NC, and Rabbi Emerita, Temple Beth El, Charlotte, NC. How Judaism Became an American Religion and What the Future Has in Store


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Many business careers are stories of father-son relationships with the father originating the business and the sons carrying the torch after the father’s death. This is the history of the Brody Brothers Dry Goods Company, founded in 1917 by my grandfather Hyman Joseph Brody (1876–1946) as a simple shoe store in Sumter, South Carolina. Hyman and his brothers and sisters, children of Mordechai Schuster and Ruth Palevitz Schuster, settled in New York briefly after emigrating from Russia, but within a few years Hyman moved to the South on advice from friends.

Hyman Joseph Brody (née Schuster; family lore has it that “Brody” was on a sign at the New York docks and was adopted because it was easier to pronounce than Schuster), a native of Kletzk, Russia, immigrated to the United States in 1906. His wife, Bessie Lampert Krashinishelsky Brody (1882–1967), immigrated in 1913 with their children Sam, Raymond, William, Leo, Abram, and Jake. After Hyman and Bessie reunited, they moved to Anderson, South Carolina. Over time, the family grew, adding four boys—Reuben, Julius Samuel (“Sammy”), Morris, and Alex—and one girl, Ruth. Hyman set up shop as a cobbler and shoemaker when the brothers arrived in Anderson in 1913. Five years later they moved to Kinston, North Carolina, and established a second Brody’s Department Store. The Kinston store collaborated with the Sumter store in buying, selling, and public relations as the brothers built their enterprises.

The original Brody’s was so successful that, in 1934, the brothers opened a higher-end store at 37–39 North Main Street called The Capitol Department Store. Three years later The Capitol moved to a more central location at 12 South Main Street. Remodeling to keep abreast of the times, the Brodys expanded the store into two adjoining properties. They also joined Independent Retail Buying Syndicate, enabling them to offer, at affordable prices, nationally known brands usually sold at much larger department stores. The Capitol became known as the largest Jewish-operated dry goods store in South Carolina at the time.

Convinced that Sumter was destined to grow and that its future was bright, Hyman did his utmost to expand the business. The shoe store became Brody’s Department Store, located at 8 West Liberty Street; in 1929, its foot space was tripled to include 10 and 12 West Liberty Street. All the Brody brothers worked in the store and contributed to its success. The two oldest siblings, Sam (1901–1986) and Raymond (1902–1992), helped their father and stayed in retailing for their lifetimes. With financial support from his brothers, William (1904–1974) moved to Philadelphia and became a physician. Throughout his life, he remained in close touch with the family, providing medical advice when needed. In 1928, Leo (1906–2003) moved to Kinston, North Carolina, and established a second Brody’s Department Store. The Kinston store collaborated with the Sumter store in buying, selling, and public relations as the brothers built their enterprises.

An outstanding attribute of the company was good employee relations and good working conditions managed by local owners. Indeed, the tradition continued after World War II when the youngest brother, Alex (1922–1997), having returned from the war and attended college, became the manager of the original Brody’s on Liberty Street in Sumter. He devoted his life to Sumter retailing, and the Alex Brody Pavilion on Main Street was erected in his name.

The Brody Brothers (1920–2012), the only daughter of Hyman and Bessie Brody, married Dr. Stephen A. Greenberg and moved to Florence, South Carolina, 40 miles from Sumter. She was a constant presence in the Sumter stores and, during World War II, she ran the department store in Greenville while her brothers served in the military.

When she wasn’t tending to her two sons, Philip and Stuart—both physicians who have been active in and served as board members of JHSSC—she was a stalwart for her brothers. The Brodys raised their families and contributed materially to the growing Jewish community of Sumter by constructing a religious school adjacent to Temple Sinai, dedicated in 1956 as the Brody Jewish Education Building.

The Brody Brothers Dry Goods Company of Sumter was the pivotal point from which the North Carolina Brody brothers catapulted. As long as retailing was in operation, the Brody brothers and cousins worked together for mutual continuity and excellence to serve the public good of the Carolinas. Thanks to the children of the Brody brothers, that legacy continues today with the Alex Brody Pavilion in Sumter, contributions to Sumter’s Temple Sinai Jewish History Center, the Ethel Brody Scholarship at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, the aforementioned Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University in Greenville, the Brody Brothers Auditorium at Kinston High School, and at Duke University in Durham: the Brody Scholarships, the Brody Theater, the Café at the Nasher Art Museum, and the Charlotte Brody Discovery Garden.

After Reuben’s untimely death in 1963, the Brody family sold The Capitol Department Store to Alden’s of Chicago.
The reasons for their leaving are unknown. By all appearances, the store became part of the new Brody’s On Main Department Store, managed by Alex and his son Mark. The store carried a higher priced line of women’s wear than the Brody’s Department Store. Brodys on Main closed after Mark departed Sumter about 1988. Abram Brody Shoes remained for another ten years—still owned by the Brodys—and was sold around 1999, ending the reign of the Brody retail giants of Sumter.

In a 1959 essay written by my parents, Sara and Abram Brody, in honor of the 25th anniversary of The Capitol Department Store, they remarked that the growth of the Brody business “gives inspiration to individual ownership in today’s great economic structure of chain stores and large combines.” K-Mart, the first chain to come to Sumter, opened in the early ’60s, signifying the decline of locally operated stores. It’s interesting that K-Mart—owned by Sears, which is also liquidating—is set to close in March 2019. After 50 years of rise and decline, the chain store is now eclipsed by Amazon and the internet.

The Furchgott Stores, since 1866

by David Furchgott, from family records and the meticulous research and editing of cousin Alison Walsh, aided by the personal recollections of cousin Maurice Furchgott

Brothers Herman Fürchtgott (1841–1912) and Max Fürchtgott (1844–1921) migrated from Nitra (in present-day Slovakia) to New York City in the early 1860s. The reasons for their leaving are unknown. By all appearances, the Fürchtgotts were a well-established family spread across a region from Vienna to Budapest and into the hinterlands of what is now Slovakia. Upon arrival, the brothers Americanized their family name to Furchgott.

After a brief few years of acculturation in New York, they moved to Charleston in 1865 as the American Civil War ended, where they were joined by their brother Leopold (1852–1928). The turbulence in central Europe at that time had been volatile as well, so it is curious that their father, Abraham Isaac, and his wife, Marie (née Herzog) Fürchtgott, saw all three of their boys emigrate nearly at once, leaving them with their four daughters. Their amount of sales mark this as one of the largest dry-goods houses in the South. . . . All members of the firm are practical men in the business, and are courteous, painstaking gentlemen; and, it need not be added, honorable, reliable business men, of which Jacksonville and Charleston have every reason to be proud.”

Max Furchgott returned almost yearly to Europe on buying trips and to visit family. In fact, his first two sons, Herbert and Lionel, died in 1882 in the fifth cholera pandemic while visiting Nitra. They are buried in the Jewish cemetery there. Tragedy didn’t end for the Furchgott family and its businesses. They also lived through the devastating Charleston earthquake of 1886. It was the largest earthquake ever to take place on the east coast, with almost all the buildings in the city either flattened or damaged. Max Furchgott led a number of major charitable efforts to help with the recovery, but he moved his family to New York for several years. There the children attended religious school at Temple Emanuel.

In 1887, soon after the earthquake, Kohn, Furchgott, & Benedict constructed a glamorous new building at 259 King Street on the site of their damaged store. Finding little success, Max moved to New York the following year, apparently to join his family, and then returned in 1901 to establish M. Furchgott & Co. Dry Goods at 265 King Street. In 1907, he moved the store to 240–242 King Street, advertising as being “in the bend of King Street.” Three years later, the business was renamed M. Furchgott & Sons. The “& Sons” were Arthur, Melvin, and Oscar Furchgott. The location is now part of Charleston Place, a hotel and high-end shopping center that occupies a whole city block.

Herman left Charleston and moved west, first to Denver where he operated several business ventures, including at least one similar retail dry goods department store. He later moved to St. Louis and finally to Chicago, where he died in 1912. Herman had one son and seven daughters.

Both the Charleston and the Jacksonville stores were considered innovative: they were the first to have elevators, the first to have women sales clerks and home delivery by automobile. Also, they were among the first to have telephones and to serve black customers.

Clockwise from top: Furchgott banner advertising “Ladies Ready To Wear Garments” and “Dry Goods Matting, etc.,” hangs over King Street, Charleston, SC, 1901, in this postcard reproduction of Morton Bradfield Paine’s photograph, Special Collections, College of Charleston. Kohn, Furchgott, & Benedict, 259 King Street, Charleston, SC, with 1887 carved in the pediment, courtesy of George LaGrange Cook Photograph Collection, South Carolina Library, University of South Carolina. M. Furchgott & Son, 242 King Street, Charleston, SC, courtesy of the Furchgott/Furchgott family.

firm became Kohn, Furchgott, & Benedict (Kohn became a partner in 1881). Kohn was also from Austria with the same likely connections to the Fürchtgotts as Benedict. Around 1875, a store was briefly operated in Atlanta, but was sold in 1878 to the Kardy Company. Webb’s Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida of 1885 said of the firm: “Their amount of sales mark this as one of the largest dry-goods houses in the South. . . . All members of the firm are practical men in the business, and are courteous, painstaking gentlemen; and, it need not be added, honorable, reliable business men, of which Jacksonville and Charleston have every reason to be proud.”
Following the 1921 death of Max Furchgott, the sons took over M. Furchgott & Sons. The Charleston store lasted through the first few years of the Great Depression with Melvin Furchgott at its helm. His brothers opened smaller stores elsewhere, Arthur first in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and then briefly in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and Oscar later in Florence, South Carolina.

In Jacksonville, Furchgotts of Florida thrived under Leopold’s leadership. He moved to New York, retaining the position as head of the company and passing the management to his brother-in-law, Frederick Meyerheim. The main store in Jacksonville was six stories tall, with 60,000 square feet of floor space (they once expanded to include the building next door). By the 1940s, it was known as the largest department store in the Southeast. The Jacksonville business also had three mall locations in the 1960s and ’70s and a location in Daytona Beach, all of which were closed by the mid-1980s. The main store building is still standing as a testament to the heyday of Jacksonville’s downtown and to the Furchgott family businesses.

**Rails to Retail: Mercantile Pioneers in St. Stephens**

by Deborah Lipman Cochelin

Long before Jews arrived in today’s northern Berkeley County, the area south of the Santee River served as a refuge from religious persecution for a portion of the French Protestants actively pursued by the English Proprietors of Carolina after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The Huguenots, as they came to be called, some of whom had been wealthy landowners in France, were drawn to Carolina by the promise of religious freedom and large estates advertised in glowing terms by the Lords Proprietor, who envisioned profits from trade generated by an agricultural colony. By the mid-1700s, dozens of rice plantations, cultivated by enslaved Africans, had been established along the Santee.

In this region, about 50 miles north of Charleston, a town grew up around historic St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, erected in 1767, now a national landmark. In 1871, the town was incorporated under the parish name of St. Stephens, which was officially changed to St. Stephen in 1952.

Northern Berkeley County has remained rural since the days of the Huguenot planters. Today, St. Stephen and nearby towns are economically depressed and thinly populated. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the region profited from South Carolina’s extensive network of railroads.

**Furchgott’s Department Store, Jacksonville, FL. Courtesy of metrojacksonville.com.**

Sawmills sprang up near rail lines, and Charleston merchants saw opportunities to build shops in towns like Moncks Corner, about 30 miles from Charleston, and Bonneau, another 10 miles farther north. According to Maxwell Clayton Orvin’s history of Moncks Corner, the names of Jewish merchants who set up shop in Berkeley County just before the turn of the 20th century include Solig (Zelig) Behrmann (whose nephew was Ben Barron, founder of Barron’s Department Store in Moncks Corner), Sol Lurie, Louis Glick, Sol Goldberg, Mendel Dumas, Frank Read, Isaac Read, and Abe Read.

Not until about 1900 did the first known Jewish merchant settle in St. Stephens. Gus Rittenberg (brother of Sam Rittenberg and my great-uncle) arrived in the town with a young wife, Henrietta (Hennie) Behrmann, who had emigrated in 1893 from Russia, and three very young children, Anita, Corinne, and Walter. In the 1910 census, Gus was identified as a merchant with a general store, and the number of his children had doubled, now including Morris (Maurice), Arthur, and Rose. Also listed as members of the Rittenberg household and workers in the store were two brothers, Herman and Isadore Sanditen, Russian immigrants related to Gus’s sister’s husband, Samuel Sanders (Sanditen).

Around 1910, the enterprising Gus Rittenberg built a sawmill on his land not far north of St. Stephens Station, on the west side of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad’s track, with a spur that would enable him to ship finished lumber to growing markets.

Disaster from the railroads struck again early on a Sunday afternoon in March 1918. Shortly after a freight train of 36 loaded cars passed through St. Stephens, a fire was discovered on the roof of a house, which jumped to adjoining buildings and burned until most of the row was destroyed, including Gus Rittenberg’s store. The railroad company was held liable for damages in the amount of $69,000, in what was considered to be St. Stephens’ worst fire.

By the time of the 1918 fire, the Rittenbergs were maintaining homes in both St. Stephens and Charleston. Corinne graduated with distinction from Ashley Hall that year. Gus and Hennie first appear in the Charleston city directory in 1917 and, over the next few years, some of their children are listed as well, including Edward, born in 1916. The 1917 directory shows Gus is in business—Southern Jute Products, 154 East Bay Street— with his brother Sam, who had served in the state legislature in 1913–1914 and was running Carolina Advertising Agency. A year later, the brothers established another company, Rittenberg Wood Yard, at Meeting Street near Magnolia Crossing. By 1920, Southern Jute and Rittenberg Wood disappear from the city directory, and subsequent listings note that Gus is a general merchandiser and merchant, perhaps a reference to his St. Stephens store. He died in 1924 in a car accident near Moncks Corner.

In February 1920, the U.S. census lists my great-grandparents and their children living in St. Stephens: Rachel (Rae) Rittenberg Sanders (Gus Rittenberg’s youngest sibling), her husband, Sam Sanders (listed as a naturalized citizen from Russia, a general merchant, and a former book peddler in Brooklyn, New York), and the children, Sara (Lipman), Hilbert (Bert), Wilfred, Leonard, and Charlotte (Karesh).

Above: Wilfred E. Lipman, the author’s father, with his parents, Sara Sanders Lipman and Max David Lipman, ca. 1928. Left: Gus Rittenberg’s store ledger, with entries dating to 1916, includes pages tracking purchases from wholesaler Baltimore Bargain House. Special Collections, College of Charleston.
Max Lipman, my paternal grandfather, was working as a bookkeeper for Mendel Dumas in Bonneau when someone suggested that he meet a young lady teaching at the public school in St. Stephens. The day he visited the school, however, the teacher was a substitute. He peered into the schoolhouse window thinking the substitute was the young lady he was to meet. Max asked her for a date, and the rest is history. Max Lipman and Sara Sanders were married from 1922 until Sara’s death in April 1981. Their wedding was officiated by Rabbi Jacob Raisin of K. K. Beth Elohim in Gus Rittenberg’s home on Huger Street in Charleston, as recollected by a very young guest, Henry Rittenberg (1918–2012), son of Sam Rittenberg. During the time the Rittenbergs lived in St. Stephens, it is believed they kept the Sabbath and observed other Jewish traditions.

Arthur (Adolph) N. Lipman may have learned of opportunities in St. Stephens when attending his younger brother Max’s wedding. By 1922, he had served in the navy during World War I and was working in sales for I. M. Pearlstine & Sons in Charleston. Like Max, Arthur was born and raised in Ridgeeland, South Carolina, to Bavarian parents, Solomon and Theresa Krapf Lipman, who had immigrated to America in the early 1880s. Arthur arrived in St. Stephens in 1925 and opened a mercantile business; after a fire destroyed the store, he went into furniture—Read & Lipman—with Paul Read.

Arthur also worked at Paul’s general merchandise store. Paul’s wife, Fannie (Fanny) Lief (1868–1958) and later brought over his Latvian-born son, Daniel, and his wife’s mother, Dina Lief. Four more children were born to the Reads in South Carolina: Riva, Ludwig (Ludie), Joseph (Joe), and Paul. Paul sold everything from farm supplies to groceries, clothing, and dry goods. The Read family expanded with the birth of their first child, Robert. This time, the residence was burned down but was rebuilt in 1931, coinciding with the birth of their first child, Robert. This time, the residence was built behind the store, as was a warehouse for storing supplies and dry goods. The Read family expanded with the birth of two more children, Frank and Sallie Kate.

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Sam Solomon emigrated from Russia in 1902 when he was 17 years old. Seven years later, he opened his own business in Charleston, South Carolina. Eventually, that business grew to 15 stores in four states and became known for pioneering a novel retail format and mounting the first legal challenge to South Carolina’s Sunday closing laws.

In 1902, Sam Solomon came to New York City with his father. Eventually, all six of Sam’s siblings immigrated to America, settling in Charleston, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, New York, and Chicago.

In 1909, at the age of 24, Sam opened the business that would become Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers at 526 King Street. Sam distributed general merchandise to retail outlets, focusing on dry goods and toys. Although it had several addresses on King Street over the years, by the 1940s Sam’s store was located at 484 King Street. In 1912, Sam married Sophie Prystowsky, who had wide family connections in the city; Sophie’s father owned E. Prystowsky and Sons—Mike Sam and Jake’s at 525–527 King Street (later the Father–Son Store). As with many Jewish businesses at the time, the entire family was involved in the operation of Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers. Sam and Sophie’s five children—Naomi, Aaron, Muriel, Frances, and Melvin—all helped in the store.

Sam was a man of strong faith. He was a charter member of Beth Israel synagogue and an active and long-time member of Brith Sholom Beth Israel after the congregations merged in 1954. Following the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, he made the store’s facilities available for packing and shipping literally tons of food and clothing to Israel.

In 1947, Sam Solomon opened Regal’s Department Store at 501 King Street. He opened a second location on Reynolds Avenue in North Charleston. In 1960, both locations were sold. Sam Solomon died on February 8, 1954, and ownership of the store passed to his two sons, Melvin and Aaron, and to his son-in-law, Joseph Stillman.

Novel Business Format

In November 1953, just months before Sam’s death, the store moved to a modern, custom-built, air-conditioned building at 338–340 East Bay Street. The business became known as Sam Solomon Company and changed from a wholesale to a retail discount operation and catalog showroom, while continuing to serve retailers in the Carolinas and Georgia. In 1962, the East Bay facility more than doubled in size to 50,000-plus square feet. Retail customers at Sam Solomon Company had to have a membership card to enter and shop, but there was no charge for the card. Operating on a membership basis allowed the store to offer discounted prices. The store sold broad lines of nationally advertised and other brand merchandise, including jewelry, electronics, small appliances, toys, sporting goods, housewares, giftable, health and beauty aids and, until 1968, clothing. A popular feature of the store was its large color catalog, which grew to roughly 500 pages. Sam Solomon Company was a founding member of the Merchandisers’ Association, Inc., an organization based in Chicago and composed of similar catalog showroom businesses. The association members cooperated in the preparation of a standard catalog used by all members and customized for each business.

Sam Solomon Company’s showroom on East Bay Street and in all of its locations had a different feel from other catalog showrooms. There were no clipboards or one-item displays. Just as in a department store, customers bought most items directly from the showroom floor using shopping carts. The store also carried merchandise that was not included in the catalog.

Challenger to the Sunday Blue Laws

In April 1962, a law restricting sales and other business operations on Sunday became effective in South Carolina—commonly known as the Sunday Blue Laws. Since its founding, Sam Solomon Company had closed on Saturday in observance of the Jewish Sabbath and had been open on Sunday. On Sunday, May 6, 1962, and again the next Sunday, the chief of police and a detective came to the store and presented an arrest warrant forAaron Solomon, who was identified as the manager of the store. The warrant charged Aaron with a general violation of the Sunday Blue Laws and for selling two baby strollers. Because the parties recognized that the violation was intended to be a test case of the Blue Laws, Aaron was placed only under “technical arrest.” A local court convicted Aaron on both counts and fined the store $50 for each violation. Sam Solomon Company quickly appealed the conviction to the South Carolina Supreme Court, arguing, among other points, that the Blue Laws violated the religious freedom guarantees of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and similar provisions in the South Carolina state constitution. As Aaron told the press: “We feel certain it was not the intention of the lawmakers to force us to profane our own Sabbath and observe someone else’s.”

In 1965, the South Carolina Supreme Court upheld the conviction, holding that the Blue Laws did not further Christian beliefs or discriminate against other faiths, but merely established a uniform day of rest for all citizens. Sam Solomon Company then appealed the state ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the court dismissed the case of the Blue Laws. Since its founding, Sam Solomon Company had closed on Saturday in observance of the Jewish Sabbath and had been open on Sunday. On Sunday, May 6, 1962, and again the next Sunday, the chief of police and a detective came to the store and presented an arrest warrant for Aaron Solomon, who was identified as the manager of the store. The warrant charged Aaron with a general violation of the Sunday Blue Laws and for selling two baby strollers. Because the parties recognized that the violation was intended to be a test case of the Blue Laws, Aaron was placed only under "technical arrest." A local court convicted Aaron on both counts and fined the store $50 for each violation. Sam Solomon Company quickly appealed the conviction to the South Carolina Supreme Court, arguing, among other points, that the Blue Laws violated the religious freedom guarantees of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and similar provisions in the South Carolina state constitution. As Aaron told the press: "We feel certain it was not the intention of the lawmakers to force us to profane our own Sabbath and observe someone else’s." In 1965, the South Carolina Supreme Court upheld the conviction, holding that the Blue Laws did not further Christian beliefs or discriminate against other faiths, but merely established a uniform day of rest for all citizens. Sam Solomon Company then appealed the state ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the court dismissed the case of the Blue Laws. Since its founding, Sam Solomon Company had closed on Saturday in observance of the Jewish Sabbath and had been open on Sunday. On Sunday, May 6, 1962, and again the next Sunday, the chief of police and a detective came to the store and presented an arrest warrant for Aaron Solomon, who was identified as the manager of the store. The warrant charged Aaron with a general violation of the Sunday Blue Laws and for selling two baby strollers. Because the parties recognized that the violation was intended to be a test case of the Blue Laws, Aaron was placed only under "technical arrest." A local court convicted Aaron on both counts and fined the store $50 for each violation. Sam Solomon Company quickly appealed the conviction to the South Carolina Supreme Court, arguing, among other points, that the Blue Laws violated the religious freedom guarantees of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and similar provisions in the South Carolina state constitution. As Aaron told the press: "We feel certain it was not the intention of the lawmakers to force us to profane our own Sabbath and observe someone else’s."
claiming, in effect, that the question was a matter of state law (although three judges disagreed). Sam Solomon Company paid the fines and continued to close on Saturdays for as long as Aaron Solomon remained with the business.

Expansion throughout the Southeast
In 1971, the business opened a second store on Rivers Avenue in North Charleston. This store was roughly double the size of the store on East Bay Street. The following year, Sam Solomon Company went public, with Melvin Solomon as its president. By 1981, Sam Solomon Company operated 11 stores in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. After several months reorganizing under the protection of Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code, Sam Solomon Company merged with Service Merchandise in 1982. At the time, Service Merchandise was the second largest operator of catalog showrooms in the country.

What Makes a Merchant?
by Mark Swick, Executive Director, JHSSC

While my love for South Carolina is tied to our state’s remarkable Jewish history, it is not a history that I claim as my own. I am From Off—my people come from Michigan and Illinois, and I grew up in Maryland. So how did a reformed Yankee connect to the mission of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina? The answer can be found in the pages of this magazine and the story not told herein of my great-grandfather Meyer Rosenblum, a Swedish immigrant who operated The Hub Clothing Co. in Iron Mountain, Michigan, for most of his professional life. I am no descendant of the Palmetto State, but I proudly trace my lineage to a hard-working Jewish merchant deeply embedded in his community.

I wrote in the pages of our fall magazine about the significance of Jewish merchants to the communities in which they lived and worked. Those words further confirm the stories in this issue: Jewish merchants operating on main streets across the state became, with their families, the backbone of small congregations, reaching their peak as the post-World War II Baby Boomers came of age. When that generation moved away to pursue higher education and occupations elsewhere, the Jewish populations of small towns began to wane and congregations faltered.

Such was the case with my grandmother and her siblings, who left Iron Mountain for The City as soon as they could. But the stories of my merchant patriarch remain vivid in memory, like hundreds of similar narratives that they could. But the stories of my merchant patriarch remain vivid in memory, like hundreds of similar narratives that inform the work the Society has undertaken in our Jewish Merchant Project and its inaugural exhibition, A Store at Every Crossroads. To pursue the accounts in this issue of the Poliakoffs, Kronbergs, Brodys, Furchgotts, Rittenbergs, and Solomons is to better understand what life was like for ambitious Jewish immigrant families of the 19th and 20th centuries—not only in South Carolina but across the nation. Few projects could be more synchronized with the Society’s mission than that.

JHSSC has been membership-supported throughout the organization’s proud history. As we look towards the next 25 years, our financial success rests on creating a robust endowment and sustaining our Pillar memberships—so that in 2044 we can celebrate the 50 years of success. I hope you will join us this May in Charleston to commemorate the Society, our achievements, and the many, many people who have helped us arrive at this happy time.
Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

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ANNUAL DUES FOR 2019 (JANUARY–DECEMBER)

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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 address above.

Register now for the May 18–19 meeting in Charleston. See page 15 for more information.