In Search of Jewish Spartanburg
November 9–10, 2019
The Historical Society of South Carolina
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Endowing our Future – Mark Swick – The strength and vitality of the JHSSC is evident through its meetings, public programs, archives, and special projects. Sustained by its members and its partnership with the College of Charleston, the Society has created a new endowment fund to insures its future growth and development. …….. 23

Letter from the President

It’s been a tough summer in the United States. Shootings, discord in Washington, and racist rhetoric that hasn’t been heard since the 1960s remind us of Winston Churchill’s words (paraphrasing philosopher George Santayana): “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” In the spirit of remembering our history, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina was established in 1994 to encourage the collection, study, and interpretation of South Carolina Jewish history and to increase awareness of that heritage among Jews and non-Jews. Over the past 25 years, JHSSC has developed into the largest Jewish statewide organization and worked steadily to fulfill its mission.

With the Society’s support, the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston’s Addlestone Library has recorded more than 500 oral histories and accessioned thousands of archival documents. In partnership with the College’s Jewish Studies Program and the Pearlstone/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, we offer an array of public programs and learning opportunities. Historic Columbia’s Jewish Heritage Initiative has fueled our research and fieldwork on merchants across the state and assisted in the production of the exhibit A Store at Every Crossroads, in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, through December 1, 2019.

This early 20th-century cash register from Worthmore in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is one of many merchant artifacts on display in the exhibit A Store at Every Crossroads, in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, through December 1, 2019.

Our meeting on “Memory, Monuments, and Memorials,” for example, followed the Alt Right demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia, which turned deadly. Last spring’s 50th anniversary gala was indeed a celebratory event but also engaged serious conversation among top scholars about what the future holds for American Jewry in the decades ahead. As I complete my second term as JHSSC president, I am proud of the work we are doing and confident the Society is in good hands.

Our full 2019 meeting is scheduled to take place in Spartanburg on November 9–10. The planning committee, headed by Spartanburg native Joe Wachter, has been hard at work designing the program. Spartanburg’s Jewish history will take center stage on Saturday, with a talk and panel discussion, a site visit to the old synagogue, and dinner at Temple B’nai Israel with entertainment by Cap and Collar. On Sunday we will commemorate the 81st anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Nazi “Night of Broken Glass,” with a tribute to the Teszler family, refugees from Budapest, Hungary, who developed double-knit textile manufacturing in Spartanburg.

I want to thank the Spartanburg community for welcoming us with true southern hospitality. As always, hats off to the professionals, staff, and volunteers who help us run a highly successful organization. Without them there would be no Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.

I look forward to seeing you all in Spartanburg in November!
In Search of Jewish Spartanburg

by Joe Wachtler

I was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina, at Mary Black Hospital on February 17, 1946. My parents, Joseph and Margaret Wachtler, met while both were stationed at Camp Croft, a World War II-era infantry training camp in Spartanburg County. Growing up in Spartanburg, my brother, Charles, and I were aware that we were part of a Jewish family and members of Temple B’nai Israel Congregation. When I was six years old, I started attending Sabbath services and Sunday school at what was then

Top: Greenewald’s storefront, 1930s. Middle: Postcard image of the Camp Croft Spartanburg, SC. Bottom: B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) charter members of the Temple B’nai Israel (Sons of Israel) and, two months later, the congregation purchased a lot and house located at 104 Union Street (the corner of Union and S. Dean streets) for $2,560.00, the home of local photographer, A. T. Willis.

Earlier that year, at the invitation of temple member Joseph Spigel, Rabbis Jacob Raisin of K. Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, came to Spartanburg to organize the congregation’s first synagogue. In May 1916, the board filed for incorporation under the name Temple B’nai Israel (Sons of Israel) and, two months later, the congregation purchased a lot and house located at 104 Union Street (the corner of Union and S. Dean streets) for $2,560.00, the home of local photographer, A. T. Willis.

That same religious), our youth group made up the minyan at Saturday morning services conducted by Rabbi Stauber. Every Sunday we held a brief morning service, followed by a brunch catered by our mothers and a cultural hour featuring talks by local attorneys, doctors, and college professors.

We had a debate team and participated in competitions. We also had a basketball team (with AZA emblazoned on our jerseys) in the local church league and were one of the best teams in the league each year. Our coach was Jack Steinberg. We organized social activities on a regular basis and visited and befriended other Jewish kids at weekend events in cities in Georgia and the Carolinas.

Those were special times. Some of the people reading this will remember that in 2003 we had a 40-year BBYO reunion in Spartanburg, which lasted three days. For those three days, we ate together, laughed together, and celebrated our friendships, memories, and collective history. It was truly a moving and memorable event, so much so that my wife openly cried when she saw how much like a family—a big Jewish family—we all were. Of the 50 or so kids I knew, 44 attended, traveling from far and near. Another four wanted to come but could not because they were on business outside the country or they were ill and could not travel. That stands in my mind as a remarkable statement about how much the temple meant to all of us and how much we meant to each other.

No one yet knows when the first Jews arrived and settled in Spartanburg. Jacob Rader Marcus, in To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1855–1984, notes that nine Jews lived in the city in 1878. The Carolina Spartan reported in September 1888 that the city’s “Hebrew friends” met for worship.

In 1912, a congregation was formally organized in downtown Spartanburg when a small group of men met in a tailor shop owned by Abe Levin, located at 113 ½ East Main Street. Levin’s shop was above a clothing store owned by Joe Miller called The Standard Cloak Company, known to locals as “The Standard.” At that meeting Levin was elected the first president. Between 1912 and 1916, the group held services at the Herring Furniture Store (115 East Main Street), The Standard, and other downtown business establishments, including Goldberg’s and the second floor of the Floyd L. Liles Department Store, both located on Morgan Square.

Rabbi Hyman Samuel Cohen was hired in 1914 as the first full-time rabbi. He died unexpectedly in October 1916.

Top: Temple B’nai Israel’s AZA basketball team, ca. 1961. Left to right: back row, Harrold Jablon, Harry Gray, Tom Shapiro, Coach Jack Steinberg; middle row, Michael Gelburd; front row, Mark Tanenbaum, name unknown, Ben Stauber. Missing from the photo: Ed Gray, Larry Minkoff, Joe Wachtler. Middle: Postcard image of Temple B’nai Israel at the corner of Union and Dean streets, Spartanburg, SC. Bottom: The Spartanburg Chapter of B’nai’ruth Youth Organization 40th reunion in 2003. All photos courtesy of Joe Wachtler, except where otherwise noted.
of the congregation, was heavily involved in planning and designing the new building, along with Henry Jacobs, Andrew Tezler, Max Massey, Joel Tanenbaum, and Abe Smith. It was one of his most cherished memories and accomplishments. In 1971, largely through the generosity of Andrew Tezler, the congregation constructed a Sunday school building adjacent to the new synagogue.

The Dean Street building is now being used by a congregation called The Bread of Life Christian Fellowship. When I go inside, however, it still has the look and feel—even the smell—of the synagogue I remember as a child. I have not been affiliated with Temple B’nai Israel since the 1960s. Since that time, the congregation has continued to grow and prosper, and it has been served by a number of rabbis. In

Morgan Square in downtown Spartanburg, ca. 1917. From left is Greenewald’s (men’s and women’s clothing store owned and operated by brothers Moses, David, Max, and Isaac Henry Greenewald); Globe Sample Co. (a discount shoe store operated by Meyer Levite); and Spigel Bros. Jewelers (owned and operated by brothers Joseph and David Spigel).

Memories of Our Father and Temple B’nai Israel during the Youthful Time We Lived in Spartanburg

by Ben Zion Stauber, Naomi Miriam Stauber, Alvin Stauber, and Lynn “Honey” Stauber Greenberg

Ben

My father was born in Austria-Hungary in or around 1905. He would tell each of us a different date, probably because he didn’t remember what he had told us before, which became a running family joke. In those days, very few male babies were registered at the government office for fear that in 18 years they would be drafted. He also told me that every time there was a war, he changed nationalities: Austro-Hungarian, Hungarian, Romanian, and probably others he didn’t bother to share with me. Also, since births were not registered, he didn’t know the actual day he was born, but he knew it was around Shavuot. It was cold, he said, and I always wondered how a newborn remembered this.

I will share a story he told me that shows his bravery on his draft card and his feelings of devotion to Judaism. Some of the details may need a stretch of belief but he said it was true, and, knowing my father, I believe every word.

Of course it was cold, very cold in Austria-Hungary in winter. Snowing, winds, and even worse, Cossacks. A war was going on, World War I, I imagine, which works out to around his pre-bar mitzvah age. My grandfather called to Mordechai Shlomo (Max)—my father—and told him to tend to the horses and the buggy. Not long after the words were out of Zadie’s mouth, a group of not-so-friendly soldiers told Zaidie they needed the horses because their horses were exhausted. He also said that they would return Zaidie’s horses when they were done with them. Hah! Poosy! Liars! Zaidie told my father to go with the soldiers and bring his horses back home. Young Max obeyed and walked with the soldiers, gripping the reins as tight as he could. For many miles and days, he kept a watchful eye for anything that did not appear kosher. Finally, one day when the sun set and the darkness came over them, the captain of the Cossacks gave Max the full reins for the horses and told him to hop on the buggy seat. A very exhausted young man declined the offer to ride. When he was asked why, he replied, “it’s Shabbos, I can’t ride an animal on Shabbos.”

When the soldiers were done with Zaidie’s horses, Max turned them around and, step by step, village by village, he led the horses back home. He not only knew the laws of Shabbos, he lived them at great peril. The essence of my favorite Father stories because of his obedience to the laws God gave us, and his devotion to his family. This is how my father lived his life.

Naomi

Moving from Patchogue, Long Island, New York, to Spartanburg, South Carolina, in August, 1955, was beyond culture shock. What we knew of “The South” was from movies and books. At 7 years old I was moved to a world I didn’t know existed. I was welcomed into this new community with open arms and much affection. The local Spartanburg newspaper called Daddy the “Little Giant” in its editorial page obituary and devoted a third of a page that day to describing his contributions to Spartanburg and South Carolina. Governor Richard Riley had asked Daddy to write the “Ten Commandments of Mental Health for South Carolinians” and he had been voted into the Spartanburg County Mental Health Association for years.

Somewhere in the middle of the 28 years of Daddy’s tenure in Spartanburg, faculty from Wofford College and Converse College asked him to teach them the Old Testament from the Jewish perspective. He became an adjunct professor at Converse College and taught faculty courses for years. He also taught Hebrew to the Converse student who wished to learn the Bible in the original language.

From time to time the Sisterhood held bake sales to raise money. Temple B’nai Israel’s reputation for delicious good food spread. The Temple parking lot was full of cars the day of the sale with visitors from across Spartanburg County. My mother baked eight challahs in the beginning years and cringed at the high price the women running the sale charged for her homemade challahs. Each year they asked Mother to bake more and more as there was such a calling for them. Her strudel and rugelach flew out of the tables. Everyone had a good time: there was lots of fun, lots of laughter, and the entire Spartanburg community was represented.

Twice a year Mother and Daddy would host a lunch in their home for eight to ten of the Uptown Nine Ministers: mid-February for Black History month and another significant time six months later. Mother’s menu was that of a Yom Tov dinner, including several courses and many dishes no one had previously tasted in their lives. The guests each went home with a fresh baked challah, looking forward to the next time, they exclaimed.

The four years I spent in Spartanburg before departing for college left indelibly etched memories of a minyan or two among my peers, with the shul’s morning minyan. I trotted next door, finished my breakfast (wobbled it down!), and do not remember ever being tardy for school.

I also recall a “minyan mitzvah”—some might call it “minyan mitzvah”—after we moved to Spartanburg. During Sukkot, Shavuot, or Passover morning weekday services at the synagogue’s downtown location on Dean Street, with my family in attendance, my father would sometimes send me to the hine nitzovim booth, conveniently located next door, to ask the administrative staff for permission to “yank” the Shapiro twins out of class (only for an hour or so), so we could make a minyan and thereby be

Making a minyan is a big deal in Judaism. A synagogue in San Francisco has, from time to time, invited members to a “Summons for Jewry Duty” to encourage them to attend the shul’s morning minyan. And who/what should be counted as the quorum of ten—Women? Children? The Torah scroll? A sleeping congregant? —has been hotly debated among Jewish scholars for centuries. In the reminiscences below, I present memories of a minyan or two or three where my father, Rabbi Max Stauber, was a central character.

When I was only ten years old, before our family’s move to Spartanburg from Patchogue, New York, my father would sometimes call me at home as I was preparing to go to school to serve as the tenth man for the 7:30 A.M. weekday minyan at my father’s synagogue located right next door to our house. I was glad to attend and happy I could be the tenth man. At the end of the service, I trotted next door, finished my breakfast (wobbled it down!), and do not remember ever being tardy for school. My three sons’ bar mitzvahs, and my parents’ burial services—reminiscences below, I present memories of a minyan or two or three where my father, Rabbi Max Stauber, was a central character.
able to recite certain prayers, as well as read the Torah portion for the day. This Make-a-Minyan effort was usually successful and did not seem to impair the Shapiro twins’ academic or professional success as they went on to illustrious careers in law and medicine.

When I told my parents I would be visiting them in Spartanburg during my law school semester break in 1968, my father invited me to deliver the sermon at Friday evening services. I respectfully declined because I was exhausted after end-of-semester exams. I did go to Shabbat services on Friday evening and felt relaxed there and felt my stress level diminishing. Said stress level reduction was short-lived. When it was time for the sermon, my father announced, “My son Alvin will now deliver the sermon, a D’Var Torah.” I was in shock! I was stunned! Somehow I organized some thoughts on my way up to the bimah and followed one of the guiding principles of Jewish public speaking, which is: “When in doubt, KVETCH.”

So I babbled on for ten minutes about the malaise that Jewish university students felt in the turbulence of the ’60s. After the service, I asked my father why he called on me to give the sermon. He replied, “I was confident I couldn’t do it. Why he called on me to give the sermon in the 1960s. After the service, I asked my father why he called on me to give the sermon after I had told him that I couldn’t do it. With a mischievous smile, he replied, “I was confident that you would come up with something. Anyway, you’re going to be an attorney, right? Eventually, every lawyer needs to develop the ability to think on his feet, right? Tonight I gave you the chance to develop that ability.” More smiles ... all around!

My first memory of Spartanburg, South Carolina, where we moved when I was nine years old, was twirling around in the foyer of our new home at 844 E. Main Street, dubbed “the Rabbi’s Parish.” Across the street was a small outdoor market where my siblings and I were sent to pick up milk and eggs for our mom who was always baking challah and rugelach to have on hand for the endless trail of visitors to our house. The owner of the store was so southern and nice, and one day after my purchase, he said, “Ya’ll come back.” So I did, and he said “Did you forget something?” Friday nights and Saturdays we walked the one and a half miles to Temple B’nai Israel downtown for Shabbat services. Someone driving by would always stop and ask if we wanted a ride. Really hospitable.

We eventually built our new synagogue on Heywood Avenue, and I was the first to become bat mitzvah there. Years later, I was married in that same sanctuary. My fondest memories as a child were babysitting for Helga and Herb Moglin; buying clothes from Mac Massey’s store, The Kiddie Korner; getting gas at Junie White’s gas station; and walking down Main Street with my dad, visiting stores like Marion’s (Speedy Feinstein’s lady’s clothing store), Joseph H. Wachtcher, Sr.’s Elliott’s Jewelers, and Sheila Rose’s bakery. Saturday nights were filled with playing cards at the Sun ’n Sand Motel, run by Aunt Flo and Jack Price. Cooking with the women of our temple was a blast and listening to Alan Silverman play the piano for our spectacular shows leaves my heart so warm. And who can forget Mozelle Harris? There could be no function without Mozelle’s help. Our door was always open and all visitors left with a challah loaf under their arm. B’nai Israel is a warm and welcoming place and my childhood reflects that.

Honey


Price’s Store for Men: “Ends Your Quest for the Best”

by Harry Price

I was said he bore a resemblance to George Gershwin, with whom he shared New York City beginnings and Lithuanian heritage. They both died too young in 1937, and they obviously had a South Carolina connection: Gershwin’s “vacation vacation” at Folly Beach, near Charleston, to research Porgy and Bess, and my grandfather Harry Price’s random selection of Spartanburg to start his business.

Visiting his brother-in-law, J. J. Saul, in Hartwell, Georgia, Harry heard that Spartanburg “was a good town for business,” bustling from the thriving textile industry. Marketer that he was, he adjusted his business plan several times. In 1900, his first store was named The New York Bazaar, sounding sophisticated to him, but not so much to the Spartanburg market, a mere 35 years after the Civil War. By 1903, the year of Spartanburg’s great flood, with a name change and a new location on the square, Harry Price’s store for men was launched.

Harry became known for his gracious and courteous manner and he easily made friends with Mayor John Floyd, who owned the neighboring dry goods store and sold caskets from his back door. Price’s targeted Wofford College students, who would come to school from small South Carolina farming communities without proper dress clothes.

In the 1920s, sporting goods and a boy’s department were added on the second floor. In his late 90s, Mr. Robert Pickens took him to Harry Price for his first pair of long pants. “The Pie Eaters’ Club was created for local boys, circulating monthly comic books that showcased new styles.

As would be expected, Harry Price was civicly engaged. Landrum’s 1933 book of South Carolina biographies states that he was a founding member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club and affiliated with the Woodmen of the World and the Loyal Order of Moose. He was a founding member of Congregation B’nai Israel and served on the building committee for its first temple.

At the home of the bride’s parents, Harry Price married Dora Mann in 1909 in Newberry, South Carolina. Worthy of note, two future South Carolina governors were in attendance—Ibra Blackwood, a friend of the groom from Spartanburg, and Cale Blease, a friend of the bride’s father from Newberry. Each governor became notorious in his own right.

Not surprising given her German heritage, Dora Mann Price was disdainful of her husband’s Eastern European antecedents. She was also somewhat ambivalent about being Jewish. Her interest in the Temple’s Ladies Auxiliary, spurring the formation of Sisterhood, is but one example of Harry’s accomplishments.
Auxiliary was primarily to provide readily available bridge partners. After her husband's death, she remained the cashier at Price's for more than 30 years.

While Harry Price never met George Gershwin, he was able to meet another notable 20th-century American, Spartanburg was Charles Lindbergh's only stop in South Carolina on his national tour after his triumphant flight across the Atlantic. At that time, Spartanburg had the only airport in the state. Harry Price attended the formal banquet held in Lindbergh's honor at Converse College. There is an iconic photograph of Spartanburg's best attended parade. It shows Lindbergh in an open-air car riding down Main Street, Harry Price standing in the cheering crowd in front of his store with his young daughter, Anne (later Gray), and his father-in-law, Joseph Mann. There wasn't a parade when Harry Price first arrived in town, but certainly Spartanburg cheered him on.

Spartanburg Stories

To learn more about the lives and careers of notable Jewish people who are part of the history of Spartanburg, see Joe Wachter's upcoming "Spartanburg Stories" at jhssc.org. Profiles will include:

- Anna Kramer Blotcky, life-long music and voice teacher, recognized as a skilled contralto in the world of opera
- Harold Cohen, whose World War II partnership with Creighton Abrams earned them the moniker "Roosevelt's Highest Paid Butchers"
- David Max Eichhorn, U.S. Army chaplain who conducted services at Dachau after the concentration camp was liberated in 1945
- Dr. Love Rosa Hirschmann Gantt, first woman to graduate from medical school in South Carolina and Spartanburg in 1914 and 1920, and was nominated five times for the Nobel Prize
- Dr. Joseph Mann (inset).

Hotel reservations
Spartanburg Marriott
299 North Church Street, Spartanburg, SC 29306
800.527.6465
Special rate: $129 per night + tax
To get the special rate, make your reservation by 5:00 p.m. on October 17 and mention Group JHSSC2019.

Meeting registration
Or by check: payable to JHSSC
c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program
96 Wentworth Street
Charleston, SC 29424
Meeting fee: $60 per person
Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohne@cofc.edu
Phone: 843.953.3918 ~ fax: 843.953.7624

In Search of Jewish Spartanburg
November 9–10, 2019 ~ Spartanburg, South Carolina
All events take place at Temple B'naai Israel, 146 Heywood Avenue, unless otherwise noted.

Saturday, November 9
11:30 A.M. Registration and lunch
12:00 P.M. Welcome - Jeffrey Rosenblum, JHSSC president
12:30 – 1:30 In Search of Jewish Spartanburg
Joe Wachter
2:00 – 3:30 Hub City Reminiscences
Moderator: Joe Wachter
Panelists: Dot Frank, Allan From, Gloria Goldberg, Andy Poliakoff, Harry Price, Gary Smiley, Sandy Smiley, Ben Stauber
4:00 Tour of former Temple B'naai Israel, 191 S. Dean Street (a short drive from current synagogue)
6:00 Reception, buffet dinner, and entertainment by Cap and Collar
For more than three decades Rabbi Yossi and Pastor Paul have brought their musical talents, charm, and humor to their respective pulpits. Joining forces in 2003, they perform a mix of traditional folk, country, and original songs that serves as a bridge among faiths and peoples.

Sunday, November 10
9:00 A.M. Membership meeting and executive committee elections—everyone is invited!
Coffee and bagels will be served.
10:30 - 12:00 From Budapest to Spartanburg: The Teszlers, Textile Giants in the American South
Moderator: Diane Vecchio, Professor Emeritus, Furman University
Panelists: Mr. Oakley Coburn, former Head of the Library Department & Archives, Wofford College, and Dr. Charles D. Kay, Professor Emeritus, Wofford College
The Froms of Union: Merchants on Main Street for 100 Years
by I. Allan From

On Friday, October 7, 1927, the front page of the Union Daily Times featured a picture of Israel From and an article about his life in Union. "To tear loose from the land of your Fathers, leave all of the surroundings of the childhood's happy days and jump from Lithuania, in Northern Europe to Union, South Carolina, is no little jump," the story began.

"Then to realize that you are burning all of your bridges behind and that you are landing in a strange country without money or knowledge of the language, nothing between you and darkness but your own determined efforts, requires unbounded confidence in your capabilities and plenty of physical energy."

Israel From was born in Lithuania in 1878; his wife, Bertha Kessler, was born in 1879. They knew each other growing up and fell in love. Israel immigrated to Worcester, Massachusetts, in the 1890s and lived with relatives, possibly one or more of his brothers. (Eventually three of his brothers, his sister, Eva, and his parents all settled in Worcester.) By 1900, Bertha had joined him and the couple were married.

What brought the Froms to Union? The tale is a typical one of chain migration. Bertha's cousins Hyman and Phillip Berlin lived in Worcester, about an hour's drive from Union. They peddled in the countryside and then moved to Union, peddling in Baltimore, the brothers dairy farming and a stint in Georgia. Sarah From married Joe Freedland in Union County how in 1907. They ran a fine clothing store for more than six decades.

My grandfather was proud of their Jewish heritage and faith and never shied away from telling their neighbors in Union County how much Judaism meant to them. In Lithuania Bertha's mother had taught Hebrew and Bertha was well versed and observant. She learned to properly salt meat so it was edible. She served chickens raised in the backyard and slaughtered according to the laws of kashrut.

Israel From & Son. "I. From" became "I. From & Son." Mary From married Harry Antopolsky from Augusta, Georgia; along with other family members, they operated one of the largest hardware stores in Georgia. Sarah From married Joe Freedland of Wilmington, North Carolina, where the family ran a fine clothing store for more than six decades. Rosa From married Meyer Poliakoff and was actively involved in running D. Poliakoff Department Store on the square in Abbeville, South Carolina, a business that spanned the 20th century.

The Berlins told Israel and Bertha Kessler From, ca. 1907. Below: The From family, Worcester, MA, ca. 1921. Israel From is seen on right holding son Harry on his lap, with his wife, Bertha, standing at his right shoulder. Courtesy of Alan From.

My father, Harry, the last of six children, married Edith Small of Asheville, North Carolina, and opened Harry From's on Main Street in Union. The store sold men's, women's, and children's clothing and shoes, mostly to lower and middle class whites and African Americans. My father always said, "Treat everyone with respect. Money is not white or black, it's green." My grandmother rarely worked in the store; according to Israel, he could hire people to sell goods but couldn't hire someone to rear his children. Bertha was deeply religious. Both she and Israel were proud of their Jewish heritage and faith and never shied away from telling their neighbors in Union County how much Judaism meant to them.


The Berlins told Israel and Bertha, then living in Worcester, about opportunities in Union, and the Froms moved there around 1901. Israel began peddling in the northern part of Union County in an area called Pea Ridge, walking from house to house selling clothes, clothes, kitchen items, and sewing machines. In 1899 he opened a dry goods shop on Main Street. Soon thereafter he welcomed his brother Solomon Fram who had been a cobbler in the Old Country and who now opened a store across the street in Union.

From, From, From: The family's original name was From; sometimes pronounced "From" in Europe. Hence Israel became From in America, where the name was sometimes pronounced and spelled From. There were five brothers and one sister, Eva. Among the brothers, three became From, one From, and one From. Two Froms and the From stayed in Massachusetts; one From and one From ended up in Union, SC.

Belk's Department Store was the first merchant on Main Street to allow people of color to try on shoes. I asked him how African Americans bought shoes in other stores and he explained they would measure the length of their foot with a string, go to the store and ask for a shoe of that length. I was proud to hear my immigrant grandfather had treated all people with respect.

My aunt Rosa Poliakoff, in an oral history recorded in 1995, claimed the only time she heard her parents disagree was when Bertha wanted her children to stay home from school for all Jewish holidays and Israel wanted them to go to school, except on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My father won this discussion. All the children attended college except my father. Ellis went to Clemson, Lena, Mary, and Sarah attended Winthrop College, and Rosa matriculated at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. My father was headed to Georgia Tech, but when his father died his last year in high school he decided to stay home and work in the store with Ellis.
Memories of my Childhood in Union

by I. Allan From

Even though the only Jewish families in Union while I was growing up were that of my father and his brother, I experienced a wonderful childhood. I was born in Union in 1950 and can remember growing up in a large house on South Street. My grandfather Israel From had purchased this home in the early 1920s from a prominent banker in town. The house was big, painted white, with a wrap-around porch. This is where my father and his brother and sisters spent most of their childhood.

To the best of my memory, the house had three bedrooms downstairs, along with two kitchens, and there were five bedrooms upstairs. Having a milk and meat kitchen made things easier for my grandmother and was probably a major reason why this home was purchased. Obviously, with six children, the family needed a much bigger home than the two-bedroom house where they lived before.

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they never thought of me as a Jew, but as another person who happened to be Jewish. Many of them have also told me, they don’t understand anti-Semitism, as I was the only Jew they knew growing up and was just like them.

On occasion, I would attend church with my non-Jewish friends and was always made to feel welcome. On Christmas mornings, I remember getting up early and going to visit several of my friends to help them open their Christmas presents. It was just part of growing up. My parents had no problems with my ecumenical activities. We talked constantly about being Jewish. My parents encouraged me to engage with my Christian friends, but made sure I maintained my Jewish beliefs and values. I believe they thought this is fine now, but you are going to marry a Jewish woman. I surprised them by marrying two Jewish women, but not at the same time.

When I was young, we joined Temple B’nai Israel in Spartanburg where I attended Sunday school and Hebrew school. My mother was from New York City and did not drive, so my parents would hire teenagers to drive me to Hebrew school in Spartanburg several times a week. On Saturdays I would take the bus from Union to Spartanburg, where a family friend would pick me up and take me to temple. After attending services, I would go back to the rabbi’s house, have lunch with him and his wife, and then have a private Hebrew lesson.

Rabbi Max and Mrs. Stauber were wonderful people and I was very happy and busy in our hometowns. We spent many Saturdays together when he got back. My sister and me over to his house when other college students came home. We were part of his family. When my mother died in 1970 at the age of 48, Reverend Blumer and his family were on vacation. Rabbi Stauber and the Spartanburg community had been very supportive of my sick mother, but the Blumers gave her much needed support as well. A member of Reverend Blumer’s congregation called him to let him know that my mother had died and Reverend Blumer called my father. He said he would be coming home for the funeral. My dad told him not to come, that he had very little vacation time and that we would get together when he got back. Reverend Blumer insisted upon attending and my father told him, if you come you will participate. So on May 31, 1970, Rabbi Stauber and Reverend Blumer conducted my mother’s funeral service.

I was in sixth grade, we moved from the old family home to a new one in Union next door to First Presbyterian’s parsonage. A new minister moved in and my parents became good friends with him and his wife. They socialized, I played with their children, and I shot one-on-one basketball with Reverend Blumer. He played to win as he was a proud graduate of the University of Kentucky. At Christmas he would invite my sister and me over to his house when other college students came home. We were part of his family. When my mother died in 1970 at the age of 48, Reverend Blumer and his family were on vacation. Rabbi Stauber and the Spartanburg community had been very supportive of my sick mother, but the Blumers gave her much needed support as well. A member of Reverend Blumer’s congregation called him to let him know that my mother had died and Reverend Blumer called my father. He said he would be coming home for the funeral. My dad told him not to come, that he had very little vacation time and that we would get together when he got back. Reverend Blumer insisted upon attending and my father told him, if you come you will participate. So on May 31, 1970, Rabbi Stauber and Reverend Blumer conducted my mother’s funeral service.

Nine years later my father married an Episcopalian woman. When he died in 1993, the funeral was conducted by the next-door Presbyterian minister, the Episcopalian priest, and a Chabad rabbi. I like to say that my family had all the bases covered. I have always felt there was no better place to grow up than Union. When my mother was sick the community came out to visit and care for her. People in Union respected us for who we were and a difference in religion was really never a problem. I sometimes think how fortunate I was to grow up in a small town and enjoy the advantages of knowing I was the same as the others but only with a different religion. The Froms certainly blended into and loved our community.

The Teszlers of Budapest and Spartanburg: Pioneers in Textile Engineering

by Diane C. Vecchio

I n 1959, Andrew Teszler, a Holocaust survivor and a graduate of North Carolina State University, pitched an idea to David Schwartz, the president and CEO of Jonathan Logan, Inc., one of the country’s leading manufacturer of women’s apparel. Teszler’s idea was to start the first double-knit garment operation in the United States. After a feasibility study, the two men agreed on a vertically integrated manufacturing facility, producing double-knit garments from fiber.

Schwartz sent Andrew to Spartanburg to organize the Butte Knit Division for parent company Jonathan Logan. The mill opened in 1960 and eventually became the largest manufacturer of women’s clothing in the world and the first company to produce double-knit fabric in America.

Andrew was the eldest son of Sandor and Lidia Teszler, Hungarian Jews who survived the brutality of the Holocaust and the communist take-over of their country. Fleeing their homeland, first to England and then to America in 1948, the Teszlers found a refuge and prosperity in the textile industry that so powerfully shaped Upstate South Carolina.

Andrew’s father, Sandor, studied textile engineering in Germany, graduated in 1925, and returned to Budapest to work in a knitting factory. Sandor and his brother Joseph, who
was also a textile manufacturer, opened a plant in Belgrade in January 1941, during the Nazi take-over of Europe. The brothers operated factories throughout central Europe and Sandor admitted that "we lived in a dream world, never believing that deportation could happen to us."  

On April 6, 1941, Germany declared war on Yugoslavia. Sandor and his family continued operating the plant under the watchful eye of a German officer. Eventually, the family's luck ran out. The Teszlers, along with hundreds of other Jews, were relocated to Budapest. Miraculously, Sandor and Lidia were saved by Carl Lutz, of the Swiss Consul, who credited with saving thousands of Hungarian Jews. Sandor's brother, Joseph, was not so fortunate. He and his family lost their lives in the Holocaust.

After Hungary was liberated by the Soviets, Sandor rebuilt the business, but the communist-controlled Yugoslav government seized the factory, claiming he had collaborated with the Germans during the war. Sandor and Lidia fled to Great Britain to join their two sons who had been sent there earlier. In January 1948, Sandor and Lidia immigrated to New York where another Teszler brother, Alakos, had established a textile factory. Alakos made Sandor a partner in the business. Andrew and his brother, Otto, enrolled in the textile engineering program at North Carolina State University, recognized as a world leader in textile education and research.

In 1961, Sandor and Lidia sold their textile plant in New York, moved to Spartanburg and launched Shannon Knits, a mill in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. A Jew who had experienced the humiliation of segregation in Europe, Teszler refused to abase the racial segregation that dictated life in the South. In his factory there were no segregated bathrooms, water fountains, or dining areas. Even before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Teszler boasted: "My plant was fully integrated, with thirty percent of my workers being black." ** Sandor eventually sold Shannon Knits and started working with Andrew at Butte, while Otto worked for another Jonathan Logan subsidiary in Shannon, Ireland.

The meteoric rise of Andrew's company was phenomenal. From 1960 to 1976, Butte was the largest employer in Spartanburg County with over 3,000 workers in a racially integrated facility. Tragically, in May 1971, at the age of 40, Andrew Teszler died of a massive heart attack. Teszler had been a devoted civic leader and his generosity impacted the Spartanburg community. He purchased the first intensive-care heart unit for Spartanburg General Hospital, donated money for the education building at Temple B'Nai Israel's groundbreaking ceremony, Heywood Avenue, Spartanburg, SC. With him are (l to r) Henry Jacobs (co-chair architectural committee), Mayor Robert Stoddard, Joseph Wachter, Sr. (president), Ray Lillard (architect), Joel Tanenbaum (architectural committee), and Rabbi Max Stauber. Photo from Spartanburg Journal, February 28, 1963. Courtesy of Temple B'nai Israel.

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After Andrew’s death, followed by the passage of his wife in 1981 and his son Otto in 1990, Sandor coped with his loneliness by attending classes at Wofford College. There, he forged a close relationship with students who affectionately called him “Opi,” for grandfather. Teszler remained engaged with the community as a member of Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, and as a trustee of the Charles Lea Center. In 1997, Wofford College awarded him an honorary doctorate and, at the age of 93, he was named Professor of the Humanities by a vote of the faculty.

After his death at the age of 97 in 2000, Wofford created the Sandor Teszler Award for Moral Courage and Service to Humankind in his memory; a fitting memorial to a Holocaust survivor: the perseverance, righteousness, and kindness guided his life.

The Teszlers were survivors. They survived the Holocaust and the Soviet take-over of Hungary. They immigrated to America where their leadership in the field of textile manufacturing revolutionized the production of women’s clothing and provided employment to thousands of people.

They gave back to America through philanthropy that spanned the community from Temple B’Nai Israel to Wofford College and the city of Spartanburg.
Endowing our Future

by Mark Swick, Executive Director, JHSSC

The seeds of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina were planted in fertile soil more than 25 years ago. Our founding president, the late State Senator Isadore Lourie, along with several compatriots, saw a pressing need to preserve the record of South Carolina’s Jewish communities and their shifting demographics. In 1994, they proposed the creation of a new historical society dedicated to the mission of promoting the history and culture of South Carolina’s Jewish communities through research, preservation, documentation, and education.

Twenty-five years later, I can testify that JHSSC is in very good shape. The Society is strengthened by the robust manuscript and oral history archives housed in the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College’s Addleston Library, as well as the public programs and research facilitated by the Pearlstein/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. We maintain a multi-faceted website, jusc.org, featuring statewide records of Jewish cemeteries and memorial plaques, a full run of our biannual magazine, and our newest and arguably most ambitious effort to date, the Jewish Merchant Project.

The Society also benefits from a strong relationship with our host institution, the College of Charleston’s Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program. The College provides critical funding and other support for JHSSC’s mission.

Our goal, and our challenge, is to build on the achievements of the past 25 years, and to find new ways to engage new audiences. Our strategy is to focus on three key areas: creating new resources, educating new audiences, and developing new partners and supporters.

Creating New Resources

We have already made significant progress in these areas. We have created a new website, jusc.org, which serves as a clearinghouse for our research and educational materials. We have also launched a new online journal, the JHSSC Journal, which features articles on a range of topics, from Jewish history to contemporary issues.

Educating New Audiences

We have also worked to reach out to new audiences, including students, teachers, and community leaders. We have developed a range of programs, from lectures and workshops to online courses and webinars.

Developing New Partners and Supporters

Finally, we have been working to build new partnerships with organizations and individuals who share our mission. We have formed collaborations with other institutions and organizations, and we continue to seek new ways to engage with our community.

Our goal is to build on the achievements of the past 25 years, and to find new ways to engage new audiences. Our strategy is to focus on three key areas: creating new resources, educating new audiences, and developing new partners and supporters.

Our vision is to create a dynamic, inclusive, and inclusive society that values and celebrates the history and culture of South Carolina’s Jewish communities. We are committed to making this vision a reality, and we invite you to join us on this journey.

Thank you for your support, and we look forward to sharing our progress with you in the future.
Join the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Name: ___________________________________________

Address: ___________________________________________

City: _____________________________ State: ________ Zip: ___________________

Phone: _____________________________ Fax: _____________________________

E-mail Address: ___________________________________________

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Join or renew online at jhssc.org.

Enroll your friends and relatives for an additional $36 each.
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Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to the address above.

Register now for the November 9–10 meeting in Spartanburg. See page 13 for more information.