

Register for the
Jewish Genealogy Workshop
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THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

FALL 2008 VOLUME XIII - NUMBER 2





Ed Poliakoff, President

On the cover:

*The Sterenzys family,
Lodz, Poland, 1925.
Photo courtesy of
Joseph J. Lipton,
Columbia, SC.*



The Jewish Historical
Society of South Carolina
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From the President of the JHSSC

As your president I am pleased to report on several JHSSC projects that tangibly advance our central purpose: "... to promote the study and preservation of the history and culture of the Jews of South Carolina."

Jewish Genealogy: Explore Your Family Tree, JHSSC annual meeting, October 25–26, 2008, will offer entertaining, substantive, hands-on sessions. Read about it elsewhere in this newsletter, and register now at www.jhssc.org. Special thanks to Ann Hellman, Vice President and Chair of our Education and Publications Committee; Rachel Barnett, Chair of Program and Conferences Committee; Executive Director Marty Perlmutter; Administrator Enid Idelsohn; and all working with them to plan the meeting.

Treasures from Temple Sinai's Archives, JHSSC spring 2008 meeting in Sumter. Our meeting last May 4 at Sumter's Temple Sinai was a well-attended tribute to the historic congregation's farsighted donation of its unique archives to the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston. One of the Society's primary missions is to insure the security of manuscripts and artifacts that document our state's Jewish experience, so we took the opportunity to express our gratitude to Temple Sinai for the gift. Thanks to Robert Moses, Rachel Barnett, and others on the Sumter arrangements committee for their attention to every detail, and to curator and historian Dale Rosengarten for her presentation on Sumter's rich Jewish heritage.

JHSSC website and publications. Vice President and Committee Chair Ann Hellman has enhanced our JHSSC website, www.jhssc.org. Take a moment to review the wealth of information, including links to South Carolina Jewish institutions. And thanks to Ann, Dale Rosengarten, Joe Rubin, Eve Cassat, Enid Idelsohn, and our authors whose contributions produce the outstanding newsletter you are reading.

Archives and Historical Sites Committee. Chaired by Vice President Joe Wachter, the committee is working on two projects fundamental to the Society's existence. Under Joe's leadership we are continuing efforts to document South Carolina's Jewish cemeteries. A mass of information awaits collection and organization, offering abundant opportunities for meaningful volunteer involvement by our members. Stanley Farbstein, JHSSC's first director of cemetery documentation, has completed an ambitious survey of the Beaufort Jewish cemetery, which can serve as a model for other communities interested in preserving their past. In collaboration with South Carolina's historical marker program, the committee has also launched a new

project. The JHSSC board has authorized sponsorship of two state markers per year at sites of Jewish historical interest, beginning with Sumter's Temple Sinai and the site of Columbia's first synagogue, the latter co-sponsored with Beth Shalom and Tree of Life congregations.

Renewing and recruiting JHSSC Pillars. Pillar members are the backbone of our Society; they provide the funding that makes our programs and projects possible. Pillars commit to dues of \$1,000 per year for five years—a total of \$5,000. I urge all Pillars to renew when their commitment is fulfilled and prospective Pillars to join the effort. Our board has approved a new **Foundational Pillars** category at \$2,000 per year for corporate and foundation donors, to help create a solid underpinning for the Society's work. The Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation has become our first **Foundational Pillar**.

Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston. Building on the successes of JHSSC, the Jewish Heritage Collection at the Addlestone Library, and the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, the College of Charleston proposes to establish the Center for Southern Jewish Culture. JHSSC supports this proposal. Members interested in philanthropic naming opportunities are encouraged to contact Executive Director Marty Perlmutter.

Member involvement. I ask each of our members to get involved to the fullest extent your time and interests permit. JHSSC is now the largest statewide Jewish organization in South Carolina. Our mission is to preserve, document, and increase awareness of South Carolina's important Jewish history. That history transcends denominational, cultural, social, economic, and political differences, and serves as a unifying principle to bring people together. Contact me or one of our officers or committee chairs to see how you can help. A special thanks to the members of the Society's Board, Executive Committee, and Advisory Committee (comprised of past presidents) for their thoughtful participation in meetings and conference calls.

I look forward to seeing you at our annual meeting in Charleston, October 25–26, 2008.

With warmest regards,



Ed Poliakoff, President

ed.poliakoff@nelsonmullins.com

The Gergels of Aleksandrovka Reunited after 100 Years

by Richard Gergel

A few days following my wife's election to Columbia City Council on April 1, 2008, she received an unexpected e-mail to her campaign website from a Los Angeles attorney, Mr. Bob Ackerman. He said that he was engaged to a woman by the name of Masha Gergel who had emigrated from Moscow 11 years ago. He recounted a legend in Masha's family that several Gergel brothers had left Russia in the early part of the 20th century and reportedly immigrated to South Carolina. He wondered whether Belinda was related to one of the Gergel brothers.

I responded to this e-mail by informing Mr. Ackerman that my grandfather, Joseph Gergel, one of four Gergel brothers, had emigrated from the small Ukranian town of Aleksandrovka and arrived in South Carolina before World

War I. I also mentioned that my family was Jewish and that all persons we had previously met with the last name of Gergel were of Lutheran or German origin. I indicated that unless his fiancée's family was Jewish, it was unlikely we were related.

Shortly thereafter, Masha Gergel forwarded to me a photograph sent by her father from Moscow. The picture was from the 1930s and reportedly was a group portrait of Gergel family members living in Russia and one Gergel relative visiting from South Carolina. She inquired whether I recognized anyone in the photograph. Masha also confirmed in this communication that her family was of Jewish origin.

I did not recognize anyone in the photograph but



The Gergel family of Alexandrovka, Russia, ca. 1930. Isadore Gergel, visiting from South Carolina, is seated front right next to his mother, Celia.

thought perhaps my nearly 80-year-old aunt, Shirley Gergel Ness, might be of some assistance. I immediately took the photograph to Aunt Shirley, who had a puzzled expression on her face when she took her first look. She then left the room momentarily and returned with an aged, but identical, photograph.

After recovering from our amazement over the matching photos, Aunt Shirley shared with me a story of how her uncle, Isadore Gergel, visited his widowed mother and siblings in Moscow in the 1930s. He returned from Russia with a photograph of the family and gave it to my grandfather. Uncle Isadore was the distinguished-looking gentleman sitting in the lower right hand corner of the picture, and his mother, my great-grandmother Celia, sat in the center of the portrait. Several brothers, a sister, and other family members were also in the group. This photograph had been in my grandparents' home until their deaths and is now in the safekeeping of Aunt Shirley.

I responded by e-mail to Masha telling her that we apparently had a match! I provided my phone number and suggested that she give me a call. Moments later my phone rang with a tearful Masha Gergel on the other end. She told me stories of how she had heard from her beloved grandmother, Sara, about the Gergels who had immigrated to South Carolina, and the curiosity the family had about what



Isadore Gergel, ca. 1930.

had happened to their kinsmen.

The lack of contact had been an unfortunate consequence of historic forces outside the control of the dispersed family. The Russian Revolution had



Masha with Richard Gergel.

brought an end to my great-grandfather's prosperous grain business and the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the Ukraine prompted the family to seek refuge elsewhere. The family initially moved to Orenberg, a railroad town between Moscow and Siberia, and then to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Finally, the family moved to Moscow. As the Nazi army approached the city during World War II, the

family evacuated to Kazakhstan, but returned to Moscow as the war ended. After the war, tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States dissuaded family members from writing each other. As the years passed, deaths, fading memories, and differences in language further divided the Gergels settled on opposite sides of the globe.

Recent historic and technological developments have made it possible to reconnect. In the early 1990s, Masha's elder sister, Anya Gergel, presented herself to the American embassy in Moscow and applied for religious asylum on the basis of her Jewish faith. Her asylum application was approved and shortly thereafter she arrived in Los Angeles with no home and only \$1,000 in her pocket, but possessing a highly prized talent—a Ph.D. in computer science. Her first job in her new country was to set up the computer

system of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. Six years later, Masha arrived, also on the basis of religious asylum, and soon passed the California CPA exam. Both sisters are thriving in their new country, just as their great-great-uncles had at the beginning of the 20th century.

After exchanging numerous e-mails and telephone calls, Masha and I arranged for a conference call that included nearly two dozen family members in Moscow and across the United States. With Masha translating, everyone on the call, from the eldest at age 87 to the youngest at age 15, spoke. Family members shared their individual histories and filled in the years since the departure of the Gergel boys almost 100 years ago.



Anya with Richard Gergel.

We followed this wonderful conference call with a visit to Los Angeles where Belinda and I had the chance to meet and spend time with Masha and Anya. Masha now plans to attend Aunt Shirley's 80th birthday in Columbia, South Carolina, and Belinda and I are planning a trip to Moscow in the near future. The Gergels of Aleksandrovka have been reunited.

Photos courtesy of Richard Gergel.

The Desk

by Joseph J. Lipton

This is the improbable story of a desk that has been and continues to be an extended part of my life. It resided in the hallway of my parents' home in Beaufort, South Carolina. When my mother died in 1987 that desk would find its place in my home in Columbia. It is not a valuable piece of furniture in and of itself. It does not claim any special lineage or provenance. So why would it tug at my heartstrings? Because it has been for over three-quarters of a century the keeper of memories. Everything that has now grown precious with time found its way into the sheltered safety of that desk. It was the oasis where my mother would settle to read, with me at her knee, amid a rivulet of tears and trembling sobs, the Yiddish letters from her mother, her brother and sisters, and her nephews and nieces who lived in Kielce and Lodz, Poland.

In the year 2007, as I sat at the desk, the memories that it symbolized were resurrected. I reached for the pulls and opened the drawers. There they were, 75 years later, letters from the *bubbe*, the uncles, the aunts, and the cousins addressed to my mother, Helen Lipton, Beaufort, SC, and to my uncle, Gabriel Stern, Columbia, SC, written in the *mamaloshen*.

As my hand fished in the drawer it lighted upon the ubiquitous group photograph of my mother's family. Seems that practically all of my American relatives have a copy of that picture, taken in 1925, which harbored 18 relatives within its four comers. At the center of the sepia photo sits the *zayde* and the *bubbe*. Time after time my mother, while pointing to each figure, would identify each one. This exercise became for me a ritual. Today I am the only member of the clan who can pin a name to the relatives in Poland. This knowledge

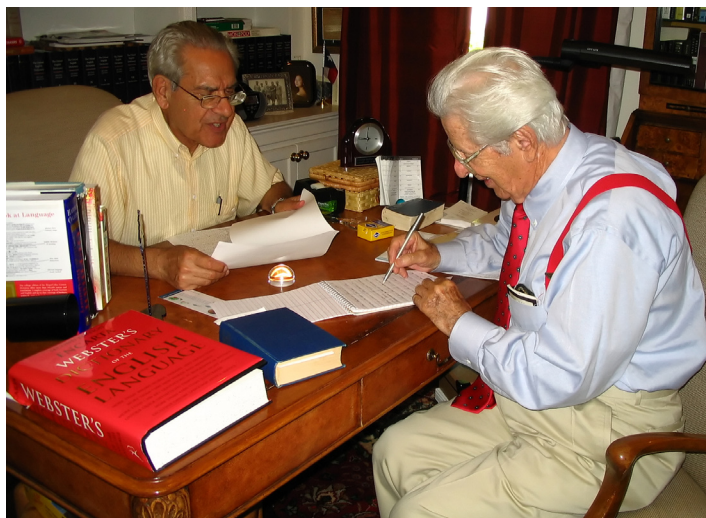


Joe Lipton and Helen Stern Lipton, ca. 1926.
Courtesy of Joe Lipton.

proved a facilitating tool in the translation process. More so, that picture fueled my incentive to translate the letters in that desk.

Across the span of time the *dybbuk* of these kin has mysteriously taken possession of me. My release from its grip is contingent upon the translation of these Yiddish letters.

Thus driven, I gently disentomb the fragile scraps of paper that awaken memories that always hovered at the rim of consciousness. As I carefully removed the faded, yellowed, tattered correspondence I thought, I, too, have grown old along with the *bintel brief* that I guarded and protected for so many decades. Oh, the ravages of time. As the Yiddish poet



Rabbi Philip Silverstein and Joe Lipton, translating a letter. Photo: Karen Tannenbaum.

GLOSSARY of Yiddish words

<i>bintel brief</i>	a bundle of letters
<i>bubbe</i>	grandmother
<i>dybbuk</i>	the evil spirit of a dead person that enters a living person
<i>mamaloshen</i>	mother tongue
<i>taam</i>	taste
<i>yente</i>	a gossip woman
<i>Yiddin</i>	plural of Yid (Jew)
<i>Yiddish shprach</i>	Jewish speech
<i>zayde</i>	grandfather

Khonon Eager wrote, "Der greste ganev is di tsayt"—the biggest thief is time.

With the *dybbuk* nipping at my heels, what to do with these letters? To whom shall I turn? Who can translate Yiddish into English? No small problem in South Carolina.

Obviously, the translator must be fluent and competent in the two languages. Obstacles are endless and varied. For example, while *Yiddish shprach* was the universal vernacular of European Jews prior to World War II, uniformity did not prevail. Diction and dialect varied from one locale to another. Then there are idioms that must be deciphered. Add to this the complications of handwriting and misspelled words.

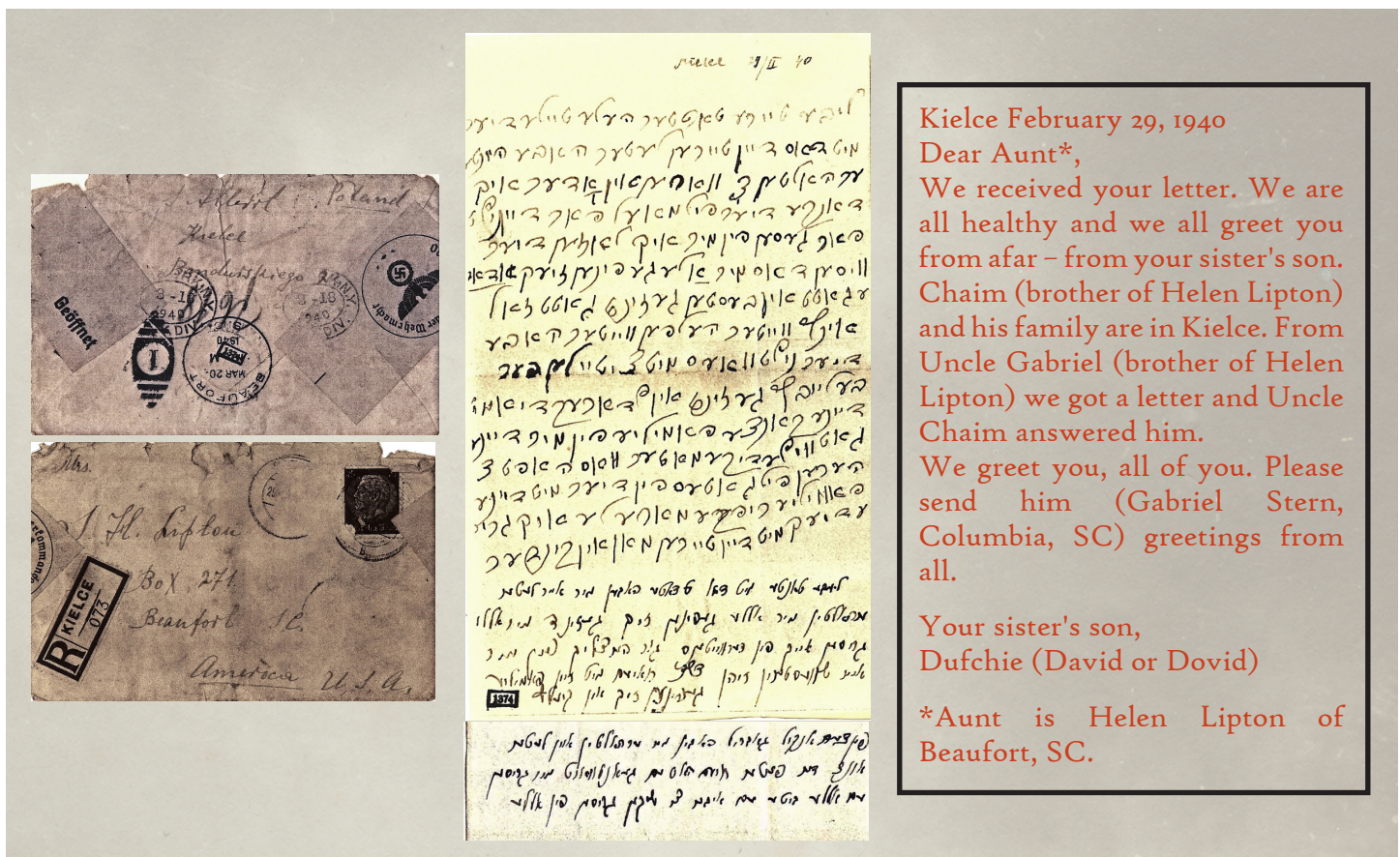
The letters in my possession were written by Polish Jews. This means that one encounters a Polish word written in Yiddish. The complexity does not end there. Because of the proximity of Poland to Germany a word from that country will find its way into the correspondence as well as an occasional word in Hebrew—all written in Yiddish. As a result dictionaries are an absolute necessity to the process. A calendar conversion table is useful to render Hebrew dates in the Gregorian calendar. Finally, the ultimate decision is whether the translation should be literary or literal. I opted to transcribe the letters literally. There is a word in Yiddish called *taam*. Loosely translated it means taste. I was fearful that a literary translation would not be true to their essence and that they would lose their style, quaintness, flavor, and *taam*.

I was indeed fortunate, perhaps lucky is the word, in

finding and forming not only a close, valued friendship but a compatible working relationship with Rabbi Philip Silverstein, who retired from Columbia's congregation Beth Shalom in 2005. With amazing skill he deftly translated the gnarled Yiddish of some 26 letters. He also has taken a lively interest in the Stern family, past and present.

There is in this cache of letters and postcards a record of the travails of one family in the decade of the 1930s. As Mark Anthony warned, "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now." Aside from family news there is the betrayal of emotions that alternate between longing and desperation, hope and disappointment, light and darkness. And then on September 1, 1939, darkness descended upon the Jews of Poland. The most devastating pogrom in Jewish history commenced.

It is now 1940 and the last letter from the blackness of Poland arrives in Beaufort from Sura Sterenzys Albirt of Kielce, Poland, to her sister Helen Lipton, dated February 29. The Germans are at this time fully entrenched and in control of the postal service. The envelope bears the Nazi seal of censorship with the invasive word *Geoffnet* (opened). A second censorship stamp reads, *Ober Commando Wehrmacht*, with eagle perched above a Nazi Swastika. Without any



Envelope front and back bearing Helen Lipton's address in Beaufort and censorship stamps, *Geoffnet* (opened) and the Ober Commando Wehrmacht eagle-over-swastika imprint (left). Letter in Yiddish dated February 29, 1940, from Kielce, Poland, to Helen Lipton in Beaufort, SC. Censor's stamp is at the lower left (center). Translation at the right, courtesy of Rabbi Philip Silverstein and Joe Lipton.

elaboration, the contents reveal an innocuous message that they are all doing well.

Prior to the last communication, the letters contain pleas for immigration papers to enable them to travel to America. In another, my grandmother Rivke Machele Sterenzys is chastising her son Gabriel Stern of Columbia for not writing, and then in the character of a *yente* she tells of an ancient aunt about to remarry. In sum, a reminder that Jewish life existed prior to the apotheosis of the Holocaust. A world where *Yiddin* created a tradition and a culture of study and learning, of literature, music, theatre, a world of day-to-day life.

To mitigate the handling and to facilitate reading, enlarged copies are made of each letter. Seated facing one another across a small desk in the rabbi's book-lined study we open a Yiddish letter for the morning translation. A solemn tranquility enshrouds the rabbi as he applies complete concentration to the task at hand. Suddenly there emanates from him a burst signifying conquest and then a smile of

satisfaction spreads across his face. "I've got it," he explodes, and I'm ready to record the first words. Suddenly the dead come alive when the rabbi intones, "Lieber tyerer tochter"—my dearest daughter. My grandmother Rivke, of Kielce, is speaking to her daughter, my mother, Helen, of Beaufort. Imagine!

I have lived with these family letters and photographs, my mother's passports, and other memorabilia for three quarters of a century. Daily I have confronted the past and the dead. Some questions have been answered but more remain and will forever remain unanswered because in youth we failed to ask questions. These letters and memories stir the heart and bring dampness to the eye. As one grows old one begins to understand the truth of Sophocles's insight, "It is the dead, not the living, who make the longest demand. We die forever."

My grandmother always closed her letters with these words, "I greet you and kiss you my dear children from the depths of my heart."

Journey to Kielce ...

These past few days I have journeyed, once again, to the city of Kielce, Poland, the seminal home of my mother, Hinda Sterenzys. Of course, I did not know her when she was dressed in that name. Some years later I would be introduced to her. After she married my father, Samuel N. Lipton, of Lithuania in 1922 and became Helen Lipton, we were formally introduced. Crude mathematics tells me that it would be some 80-plus and then some years, ago. When I entered the orbit of cognizance I remember that my mother, forever homesick for her parents and kin, would open the drawers of her writing desk and extract photos of her family. As though in a Masonic ritual, she would acquaint me with grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. The ritual became regular and on occasion it was to the accompaniment of tears and sobs. As a result I became quite adept at "tearing," employing the device to advantage when an unaffordable trinket met my fancy.

There was one photograph that my mother treasured above all others, a picture of the Sterenzys – the Stern family. She had framed this picture and placed it in a prominent location in her den where all could see. There are 18 family members in the photo; two are absent – Gabriel Stern and Helen Stern Lipton. By 1925 when this photo was made, they had already emigrated and settled in Columbia and Beaufort, SC, respectively.

Frequently, my mother would take the picture from its lodging on the wall and, in keeping with what had become ritual, attach a name to each character. As time passed I became fearful that I would forget a name. I

decided to reduce her dictation to writing. On Post-It notes I wrote the names of the family members—at least 50 years ago. It had escaped me that a rather crude list of names existed.

It came to my knowledge that Zosia Stern Nowak had identified family members in the photo for Lilly Stern Filler. I requested a copy of that work from her, which was mailed to me, obligingly, along with copies of Yiddish letters from Chaim Stern of Poland (Ben Stern's father) to his sister Helen Stern Lipton of Beaufort, SC. Thus, between the two sources I was able to pin a name to family members in the photo.

Let me say that it is not without a good deal of agony, sorrow, and sadness that I confront this photograph and visit with my family of Kielce, once again. It is wrenching because decades ago I was in the company of the *bubbe* and the *zayde*, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

It was 1930 when my mother took her two sons, Morey and me, to Poland. There, we stayed with Chaim and Hadassah. They would be the parents of cousins Zosia, Yoel, Fella, and Ben Sternzys – Stern. It was a different world, a different time, and a different place. Preparations were already underway for the turmoil that was to come. Hitler was on the rise. But what does a child know from philosophy and geopolitics. Instead, I studied and observed family members, mimicked their ways, visited Mottel the tailor, ate *kartoffeln mit smetana* (potatoes with sour cream) and *kochte ayer* (hard-boiled eggs), and reveled in their attention, even picking up a few Polish words.

Jewish Genealogy Workshop: Profiles of Speakers

Charleston, October 25 - 26



Stephen P. Morse

In the “old days,” genealogical research was done by traveling great distances and then searching dusty archives or scrolling through microfilm. The advent of the World Wide Web has changed that. Today much of the data useful to genealogists has been put on websites and can be accessed from the comfort of home.

Unfortunately, many genealogical websites are not easy to navigate and even those that are don’t offer enough versatility. Steve Morse discovered these limitations back in April 2001, when he tried to use the new Ellis Island website to find the ship record of his wife’s maternal grandfather. He had found records of all the other grandparents the old-fashioned way, using physical

microfilm rolls at the National Archives, but this one piece of data eluded him. Unfortunately the new website didn’t help, and he was still lacking information for grandpa-in-law.

But Morse quickly discovered an alternate way of accessing that website and by doing so found the record he sought. He went on to analyze other websites and develop alternate routes into them as well. He also created his own databases and programs to facilitate genealogical research. Collected together under what is called the One-Step website, Morse’s method has continued to evolve over the years, and now contains more than 150 tools divided into 14 categories, from performing genealogical searches, to making astronomical calculations, to entering last-minute bids on eBay.

During the workshop, Morse will give both an overview of his One-Step site and also describe how to use some of its specific resources, such as Ellis Island records and U.S. census results. If you want to get started before the conference begins, you can find out “how to” at stevemorse.org.



Karen S. Franklin

CosmoGIRL! featured Karen Franklin’s son as a “hunk of the month” online, but the only way Karen could get noticed in the fashion rag was to give advice to teens on how to trace their family histories (you can find the article in the August 2008 issue). This is one of many times when Karen’s family research has taken her to unexpected places.

For more than 20 years Karen served as director of the Judaica Museum of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale and was president of a variety of organizations, including the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies and the Council of American Jewish Museums.

Working with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, and the Origins Unknown Agency in the Netherlands, Karen has used family research to solve cases of Nazi-era looted art, resulting in the

restitution of paintings, Judaica, and books. She is currently a guest curator of an exhibition on the Morgenthau family scheduled to open next year at New York Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

Karen’s interest in her own family began when she was in college. Home on vacation, perusing a trunk in the basement with her father, she found a letter from Albert Einstein to her grandmother. Einstein was helping a distant cousin of Karen’s in Germany to get an affidavit to the United States. The year was 1939. It took almost two decades of searching to learn the fate of the cousin, who indeed succeeded in finding refuge in America, but died in the 1950s.

As a professional researcher for families, Karen has helped countless people trace their origins, and, in the process, developed a toolkit of useful techniques for beginner and advanced genealogists. During the annual meeting, Karen will present “Tracking the Winter Family,” a dramatic tale of how she found the European roots of a Southern Jewish family—and the sole copy of a 300-page family history—in a remote village in Germany. Stories about four Civil War veterans, an “Embalmer on the Plain” (a Jewish homesteader in South Dakota), and cousins-in-common with the client will persuade even the most skeptical that pursuing family history can be fun.

Conference participants will have the opportunity to begin or continue their research with the Franklin-Morse team in a hands-on workshop session. Come prepared with your family tree, and don’t forget the stories!

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina ~ Annual Meeting
Charleston, South Carolina

Jewish Genealogy: Explore Your Family Tree

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2008

11:00 am Registration

Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center (96 Wentworth Street)

12:00 pm Luncheon

1:00 pm Stephen P. Morse *One-Step Webpages: Genealogical Search Tools*

The One-Step website started out as an aid for finding passengers in the Ellis Island database. Shortly afterwards it was expanded to help with searching in the 1930 census. Over the years it has continued to evolve and today includes over 100 web-based tools divided into 13 separate categories. This presentation will describe the range of genealogical search tools available and give the highlights of each.

3:00 pm Karen S. Franklin *Tracking the Winter Family*

Karen will discuss how she found the European roots of a Southern Jewish family in a remote village in Germany. Stories about four Civil War veterans, an "Embalmer on the Plain" (Jewish homesteader in South Dakota) and cousins-in-common will demonstrate search techniques.

4:15 pm Stephen P. Morse *What Color Ellis Island Search Form Should I Use?*

In April 2001 the Ellis Island ship manifests and passenger records went on-line. A few weeks later the One-Step Ellis Island website was created to make this resource easier to use. This talk will describe the evolution of the website from both a historical and a practical perspective, and provide a lens for navigating through it.

5:30 pm Reception

Marlene and Nathan Addlestone Library
Third Floor, Special Collections
205 Calhoun Street (at Coming Street)

Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and cocktails, view the treasures of the Jewish Heritage Collection, and see the new genealogical library donated by Sandra G. Shapiro in memory of her parents, Annie and Sam Garfinkel.

**Reception sponsored by Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP and the
Pearlstine Family Fund of the Coastal Community Foundation.**

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

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**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2008**

**9:00 am Breakfast and Open Board Meeting**

Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center

**10:00 am Stephen P. Morse *Playing Hide and Seek in the US Census***

Even before the 1930 Census was unlocked on April Fool's Day 2002, researchers began wondering how they were going to locate people's records. The lack of indexes presented a real challenge. Several solutions to this problem have since evolved. The One-Step Census website presents an aid for finding records. A similar aid exists on the NARA website. And commercial websites have developed extensive indexes which are available for a fee. The One-Step website has since been expanded to include 1910, 1920, and 1940 censuses as well. This presentation describes and contrasts these various solutions of searching in these census years.

**11:00 am Hands-On Research *Using Computers at the College of Charleston***

The Franklin-Morse team will utilize their expertise and College of Charleston computers to guide participants in their personal research, using Steve Morse's One-Step tools, Jewishgen.org, Ancestry.com, and developing strategies to solve a variety of research problems using all of Franklin's and Morse's secret weapons. Wireless is available for those using their own laptops.

**1:00 pm Luncheon**

**2:00 pm Do your own assisted research in the College of Charleston computer lab**



To start your search, check the following sites:

**stevemorse.org** A site that directs you to other genealogy web sites and provides an easy interface for searches. Free.

**ellisland.org** Ellis Island Port of New York Passenger Records, 1892–1954. Free.

**castlegarden.org** America's First Immigration Center, a database of information on 10 million immigrants, 1830–1892. Free.

**jewishgen.org** Site includes: Family Finder, Jewish Worldwide Burial Database, Family Tree of the Jewish People. Free, but you will need to register.

**ancestry.com** Essential to 19th Century American research for census and immigration records. Membership required, but you can get a short-term trial, or one-month membership to begin. May also be available at local libraries.

**google.com** You'd be surprised what you can find. Free.

**americanjewisharchives.org** American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. A great deal of AJA's material is in the card catalog, which is not online. The archives' staff is wonderful, so don't hesitate to write with a specific inquiry. Even better—visit AJA's new facility in Cincinnati! Free.

**cjh.org** Center for Jewish History, New York. Online access to combined index of Partner Collections (American Jewish Historical Society, YIVO, Leo Baeck Institute). You can download valuable fact sheets from the Genealogical Institute. Free.

**library.cofc.edu** Our own College of Charleston resource, listing catalogued Jewish Heritage collections and an extensive oral history archives. Free.

## Jewish Genealogy: Explore Your Family Tree

### JHSSC Annual Meeting

Charleston, SC

October 25 - 26, 2008

**Deadline for registration is October 15.**

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Friend \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

I request meals that are: [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Kosher

Name(s) on name tags \_\_\_\_\_

Cost for the weekend is \$90.00 per person for JHSSC members

\$35.00 additional per family for non-members

**Total Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Return form with check to:**

*JHSSC/Jewish Studies Center*

*96 Wentworth Street*

*Charleston, SC 29424*

*or*

Register online at **www.jhssc.org** using your credit card.

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# The Historical Significance of Jewish Cemeteries

by Joseph Wachter

**History matters:** In many cultures, children are taught history to help them understand who they are, as individuals and members of a group, by learning where they came from. Certainly the value of knowing one's history is an accepted tenet of Judaism, whether defined as a religion, culture, or civilization.

Today's modern society has in many ways turned its back on the past. We live in a time of rapid change, a time of progress. People tend to define themselves in terms of where they are going, not where they came from. The past seems outdated and irrelevant and is only vaguely perceived and understood. This ignorance is not the result of a lack of information but rather the result of indifference. History just does not seem to matter much. Fortunately, there have always been individuals who understand that history is important and set themselves the task of documenting its remains.

**Barnett A. Elzas:** In 1903, Dr. Barnett A. Elzas, then serving as the rabbi at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, published a booklet entitled, *The Old Jewish Cemeteries at Charleston, S.C., A Transcript of the Inscriptions on Their Tombstones, 1762–1903*. In his introduction he noted that Charleston had three Jewish cemeteries whose origins pre-dated the 19th



Rabbi Barnett A. Elzas, 1867–1936. Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston.

century and whose grave markers and stones bore inscriptions of great historical interest. He pointed out that one of the three—the cemetery on Coming Street—was the oldest Jewish cemetery in South Carolina, purchased and owned by Isaac de Costa, the first *hazzan* of Beth Elohim. He further noted that De Costa

originally intended the cemetery as a burial place for family members only, but later decided it could serve as a burial ground for the Jewish community at large, and conveyed the property to Beth Elohim in 1764 for 70 pounds. Realizing the importance of preserving the information inscribed on the grave markers and stones, Rabbi Elzas wrote the following:

*The virtue of tombstone records for the purpose of the historian is not yet fully appreciated. Some day, when it is too late, we shall awake to a sense of our neglect. Apart from its own intrinsic value, the following record is printed in hope that others may be led to do likewise.*

**Jewish cemeteries in South Carolina:** I have had the good fortune to visit many, though not all, of South Carolina's Jewish cemeteries, and have come to realize they are more than just collections of carved stones or tablets. Jewish burial grounds are hallowed in several respects. Each cemetery is a unique and integral part of the history, culture, and religious background of the Jewish community it belongs to. Irreplaceable landscapes and tangible reflections of our heritage, cemeteries contain a wealth of information that needs to be preserved.

Customs and rituals associated with burying our dead have changed tremendously over time. In bygone days, friends and family members would routinely perform many

of the activities associated with death: preparing the body for burial, building a coffin, digging the grave, and burying the deceased. Death was dealt with on a very personal basis. In observant communities this is still true. However, for many today, the bereaved are more like visitors at the final rites. Jewish communities still assist with funerals in many ways, but



Tombstone of David Lopez, builder of KKBE, Coming Street Cemetery, Charleston, SC. Jewish Heritage Collection.





*Hebrew Benevolent Association Cemetery, Camden, SC.  
Photo: Bill Aron.*

increasingly families and congregations have relinquished traditional functions to commercial funeral homes.

Cemetery maintenance also has been handed over to hired personnel whose weed trimmers, insecticides, and lawnmowers can inflict damage on markers and stones. Contrary to what many people think, cemeteries and their markers do not last forever. Gravestones deteriorate with

age. Some have weathered to the point that they are almost illegible. Air pollution and acid rain cause stones to decay and blacken, and in some cases, to erode so that the inscriptions are erased. Cemetery vandalism is no longer uncommon. Nature takes its toll in graveyards that are abandoned and go unattended, where trees and overgrown plants may undermine the sturdiest of monuments.

***Your invitation to get involved:*** In accord with the JHSSC's mission to document and conserve South Carolina's Jewish history, board member Stanley Farbstein initiated a statewide cemetery survey in 2004. The Society's Committee on Archives and Historical Sites is continuing the effort to identify Jewish cemeteries across the state, record the inscriptions on stones, and publish the information on the JHSSC website. Fruits of this labor can be viewed by going to [www.jhssc.org](http://www.jhssc.org) and clicking on "SC Synagogues, Cemeteries and Community Centers."

More work, however, remains to be done, and volunteers are needed. We owe it to past, present, and future generations to follow the lead of people like Rabbi Barnett A. Elzas and take note of the history that is literally writ in stone in our Jewish cemeteries. By so doing we affirm that history matters. We need people like you to answer Rabbi Elzas's call and do likewise.

### **The JHSSC Cemetery Project To volunteer, please contact:**

**Joe Wachter**  
JHSSC Vice-President  
Archives and Historical Sites  
4505 Camellia Drive  
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

843.449.6259 (Home)  
843.449.2000 (Office)  
Email: [jhw@48th.com](mailto:jhw@48th.com)

Putting the results of cemetery surveys on the Internet gives people all over the world the ability to search for family members. Become a part of preserving our past. Help with the cemetery project and sign up for JHSSC's genealogy conference in Charleston, October 25-26.



*Sol Breibart giving a history lesson in the Coming Street Cemetery, Charleston, SC. Photo: Bill Aron.*



# Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin and Zionism in Charleston, 1915–1945

by Solomon Breibart



Jacob Salmon Raisin. Jewish Heritage Collection, ca. 1915.

This year the State of Israel is celebrating its 60th anniversary. In May 1948, a hope became a reality—the result of epic efforts by worldwide Jewry over 50 years. Zionists around the globe overcame immense political, economic, geographic, and social obstacles to establish a Jewish state in what was then called Palestine. Among this multitude, Jacob S. Raisin served the cause in his own way.

Jacob Salmon Raisin, the descendant of a long line of rabbis, was 18 years old when Theodor Herzl published his famous book *Das Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) in 1896 and launched the modern Zionist movement. Jacob had been brought to the United States in 1892 by his father; the rest of the family was brought over by 1894. Their home town was Nieswizh (now Niasvizh, Belarus), a Polish/Russian community known as a center of Jewish secularism, or *haskalah*. The elder Raisin, a learned man and teacher, was considered an “enlightened man,” dedicated to promoting nationalism among Jews, secular education, and Hebrew as the official Jewish language. In his autobiography, Max Raisin, Jacob’s younger brother, wrote that he and Jacob were greatly influenced by their father’s ideas.

Zionism was not met with the overwhelming support its founders had anticipated. In both Europe and America, Jews of diverse factions advanced a variety of reasons, some religious, some political, against the establishment of a Jewish state. With the outbreak of violent anti-Semitism in Russia in the 1880s, East European Jews had become increasingly desperate and anxious to leave. The only viable haven at the time was the United States. In America, despite their intense preoccupation with making a living and adjusting to the new environment, and despite opposition from all sides, the immigrants founded Zionist clubs and small organizations based on European models.

The Raisin family was a part of this great migration.

Adapting to their new home, Jacob in 1900 and his brother Max in 1903 earned degrees from the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College (HUC). Both were ordained as rabbis in Reform Judaism. In those days, the Raisins found that “Hebrew, Zionism, and love of peoplehood were simply not components of American Reform Jewish thought.” Jacob later recalled that his support of Zionism endangered his standing at HUC. In fact, the college was described as “the citadel of anti-Zionism.” Some of its faculty had been active in drafting the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885 that outlined the principles of classical Reform Judaism, one of which was the rejection of the concept of a Jewish state.

Jacob Raisin’s diaries and scrapbooks, which were donated in 2007 to the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston by his daughters, Mordenai Hirsch and Rachel Raisin, contain ample evidence of the rabbi’s activities on behalf of Zionism. An item from his early days in Port Gibson, Mississippi, his first pulpit, mentions that he spoke on Zionism to the local chapter of the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ), the forerunner of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). When attending conferences of the strongly anti-Zionist Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), he stoutly defended the idea of Jewish statehood, along with such pro-Zionist Reform rabbis as Richard Gottheil, Stephen Wise, and Max Heller. He wrote frequently to Anglo-Jewish publications supporting the cause.

When Raisin became the rabbi at Charleston’s Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE) in 1915, he found a congregation faithful to the classical Reform pattern promulgated in the Pittsburgh Platform. Rabbi Malcolm Stern, in his insightful examination of the role of the rabbi in the South, concluded that “to be outspokenly Zionist before World War II in a Southern Reform congregation took courage on the part of the rabbi.” Raisin’s pro-Zionist stand may have been a contributing factor, in his early years at KKBE, to the opposition which arose annually when his contract came up for renewal. Members of the congregation were uncomfortable with his advocacy for a Jewish state, fearing that their loyalty to the United States might be challenged.

Shortly after his arrival in Charleston, Raisin became a member of a local Zionist group, B’nei Zion (Sons of Zion). Its earliest surviving records date from 1917, but it is likely that the movement in Charleston began even earlier. When Zionists across America debated whether to affiliate with



the ZOA or the World Zionist Congress (WZC), the question raised such heated discussion in B'nei Zion that Raisin felt compelled to write a letter to the opposing factions urging them "to leave personalities out and join in unity." In 1924 the conflict was resolved and it was decided to become a district of the ZOA. That same year the chapter began using the newly organized Jewish Community Center on George Street and met there until 1930, when the JCC disbanded. Thereafter, meetings were held at Brith Sholom.

No congregants from Reform KKBE joined Raisin in the ZOA; its ranks were filled with members from Charleston's Orthodox synagogues, Brith Sholom and Beth Israel. Nevertheless, Raisin served as district chairman and vice-chairman, and was active on various committees. In 1932, he attended a meeting of the World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, and then traveled to Palestine for a week—with special dispensation from KKBE's board to take two additional weeks of vacation time to make the journey. Also with the trustees' permission, Raisin visited several communities in the Carolinas to speak on behalf of Zionism. It appears that KKBE's attitude toward Zionism had somewhat softened, and so had that of the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis.

For most of the 1920s and '30s, the Charleston District struggled to be relevant, putting energy into raising money for Palestine and building local support. Membership peaked at about 110 in the early 1920s, but by 1936 the chapter had become "a one-man Zionist district," kept alive by the energy of Joseph Goldman. No information has been found thus far to explain the decline of Charleston District ZOA. The author's conjecture is that the local, long-established lodges of B'nai B'rith and the Masonic Order, and the newly organized Kalushiner Society (1922), filled more adequately the perceived social needs of the immigrant generation for

officers follow.  
A report on Jewish Relief War Sufferers of this city was given by Rabbi J. Loeb. A total of \$9000.00 was collected during year 1917 one half of that sum was raised by the so called uptown section. It gives pleasure the Committee to note the equality of the amount collected from our side so called "uptown Jews" we are not rich in wealth or in money, but we are rich in nobleness in ideals in self sacrifice, hope was expressed to double the sum for year 1918. It was past to give a rising vote of thanks for the

*From the minutes of B'nei Zion Society, Charleston, SC, December 29, 1917. Rabbi Loeb reports \$9,000 collected for Jewish relief from the Jewish community, half from "uptown Jews." and half from "our side." Jewish Heritage Collection.*

help in adjusting to the Charleston community. Meetings, which rarely attracted more than 10 members, were held at the Daughters of Israel Hall on St. Philip Street, next door to synagogue Brith Sholom. The district raised money for the United Palestine Appeal until the United Jewish Appeal took over fund-raising for overseas philanthropies in 1937.

In its infamous 1939 White Paper, the British government revoked the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which had favored the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Just as the Nazis' war against Jews in Europe was intensifying, the British aimed to limit, then stop, immigration of Jews to Palestine. KKBE joined with other community organizations in protesting that perfidious policy. Its board "ordered that a cablegram be sent to Prime Minister Chamberlain requesting that the Balfour Declaration be upheld." In the end, Nazi atrocities transformed practically all Jews into ardent Zionists. Although the Charleston District of ZOA did not at first feel the impact of this turn of events, the organization did experience a strong revival in the post-World War II era.

While the local ZOA faltered in the 1930s, the Charleston Chapter of Hadassah flourished. Organized in 1921 by Mrs. Jacob S. Raisin—and we can reasonably assume that Rabbi Raisin had some influence on this development—by 1938, the chapter had 142 members and boasted that it was "the largest women's group in the city." Besides the usual activities on behalf of Palestine, the local chapter in the course of time sponsored a Junior Hadassah group and two Young Judea clubs, and remains an energetic presence in Charleston to this day.

With Jews the world over rejoicing over Israel's 60th anniversary, it is sad to note that Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin, who died in 1946, did not live to enjoy the thrill of seeing, hearing, and reading about the founding of Israel as a nation.

| Memberships of 1921 |              |             | 275 |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-----|
| Goldman             | 567 King St  | Paid \$6.00 |     |
| Mrs. " "            | " "          | 6.00        |     |
| S. " "              | " "          | 6.00        |     |
| Sam Rittenberg      | 55 Broad St. | 6.00        |     |
| Mrs. " "            | 94 Huger     | 6.00        |     |
| S. Spivak           | 405 King     | 6.00        |     |
| Louis M. Schimmel   | 55 Broad     | 6.00        |     |
| Dr. Jacob S. Raisin | 14 Krays Sq. | 6.00        |     |

*Page from the Charleston ZOA minute book confirming Dr. Jacob S. Raisin as a 1921 member having paid \$6.00 dues. Jewish Heritage Collection.*



# Midlands Merchants: The Jews of Orangeburg and Vicinity

by Alyssa Neely

German Jews began settling in Orangeburgh (as it was originally spelled) in the early 1840s, once railroads connected the village of fewer than 400 to Charleston and Columbia. By 1853, the town's population had more than doubled. Originally established as an Indian trading post called Edisto, the settlement was renamed in honor of King George II's son-in-law, William IV, Prince of Orange, by German-Swiss immigrants in the early 18th century. Situated on hilly ground near the Edisto River, Orangeburg was surrounded by a well-populated farming region. Cotton production, together with the railroads, helped to make many 19th-century farmers in the district wealthy.



*Theodore Kohn, from A Sketch of the War Record of the Edisto Rifles, 1861 – 1865, W. V. Izlar.*

Ten-year-old Theodore Kohn, one of the town's first Jewish residents, emigrated from Germany in 1850 with his parents and a brother and settled in Orangeburg the same year. Kohn served in the Edisto Rifles during the Civil War. In the post-war period he became a respected businessman and an important contributor to civic affairs, serving as a town alderman, a founding member of Edisto Bank, and a major force behind the creation of Orangeburg's public schools. Dubbed the "Father of Orangeburg graded schools," he was also a member of the Masonic Shibolet Lodge, serving as its treasurer

for more than two decades.

When he first arrived in Orangeburg, Kohn worked for his uncle, Deopold Louis, an established merchant and possibly the earliest Jewish settler in town. In 1868, Theodore and a friend opened a general merchandise store, Ezekial and Kohn. Their association appears to have been brief, however, since a year later Theodore's brother Henry joined him in a mercantile business, Theodore Kohn and Brother. Later, Henry broke away from Theodore to open his own store.

Born in Orangeburg in 1850, Henry made his mark on the community as a founder of the Young America Fire Company and a Mason. In partnership with his wife, Matilda Baum Kohn, he organized and led the Orangeburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

Henry and Matilda directed the group of amateur musicians for almost 50 years. Henry, himself a violinist and a violin instructor, was admired for his dedication to bringing music to the city.

**Shopkeepers, Tradesmen, and Land Owners:** After the Civil War, Orangeburg dropped the "h" at the end of its name and incorporated as a city. Cotton farming continued to be the county's economic mainstay, supplemented by a diversity of food crops, including corn, oats, wheat, rye, rice, potatoes, pecans, and peanuts. The nearby towns of Bowman, Branchville, St. Matthews, Elloree, Eutawville, and Blackville all attracted Jewish settlers. Many of the newcomers were landsmen, hailing from the same part of the Old Country, or were linked by marriage.

Simon Brown (Braun), a shoemaker, immigrated to the United States from what is now Poland around 1849 with his wife, Philapena Asher (Aschen) Brown, a Jew of Sephardic descent. Initially, they joined Pena's brothers in New Jersey, but left the state after Simon became involved with anarchists. For reasons unknown, the Browns chose to settle in Blackville, which by 1878 was home to approximately 40 Jews. The Browns sent their children by train to Sabbath school at the Reform Temple in Augusta, Georgia, which Simon may have helped to found. He and Pena were buried in the family plot in Augusta.

How long Simon continued in the shoemaking trade in Blackville we do not know, but at some point he opened a store in Blackville called Simon Brown's Sons, touting "Globo de Oro—the New Golden Centered Cantaloupe" among the goods for sale. He also became a substantial landowner and, according to one descendant, owned slaves in the years before the Civil War. By the time of his death in 1906, he had acquired 5,000 acres.

St. Matthews, originally Lewisville, attracted a handful of Jewish families in the post-bellum period. In 1878, six years after



*Kohn's store, established by Theodore Kohn in 1867. Photo ca. 1917, from Orangeburg Revisited, G. Atkinson.*





*Lipman Rich's clothing store on the right, Russell Street, 1928. Photo from Orangeburg, G. Atkinson.*

its incorporation, the town was home to some 19 Jewish residents. Jewish businessmen in 1889 included M. Jarecky, J. H. Loryea, and P. Rich. Brothers Moritz and Lipman Rich of Germany had settled in Charleston before moving to St. Matthews. Moritz's grandson Lipman P. Rich, born in 1894 in St. Matthews, moved to Orangeburg with his wife and daughter and opened a clothing store. When the business failed during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Lipman went to work for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Rich's clothing store was one of several Jewish-owned stores in Orangeburg in the early 1900s, as East European immigrants joined their predecessors from Germany. Downtown store owners included the Abrams, Beckers, Bernsteins, Finkelsteins, Furchgotts, Hurwitzs, Levines, Manheims, Marcuses, Mirmows, Rubensteins, Silvers, and Wilinskys.

Small towns across the region also attracted Jewish shopkeepers. Nathan Blatt (Minnenblatt), while peddling out of Charleston, learned that Blackville was ripe for a new merchant and decided to set up shop there. Alexander Goldiner ran a store in St. Matthews; the Nussbaums in Branchville; the Nesses in Denmark; and the Pearlstines in St. Matthews, Branchville, and Olar. Louis Link, who was born in St. Matthews and raised in Orangeburg, became a peddler. His father Solomon, a Russian immigrant, had been an Orangeburg merchant in the late 1800s. Joseph J. Miller of Elloree and Mordie Rubenstein of Orangeburg, competitors and good friends who often ate lunch together, each ran a store in Elloree.

Like small-town Jewish storeowners in other parts of the state, midlands merchants tried hard to integrate into society and often attained elected office. Harry N. Marcus, for example, was mayor of his hometown, Eutawville, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. The World War II veteran was a Mason, a Shriner, and owner of Marcus Department Store, a business started by his father in the first half of the twentieth century. Irving Benjamin, who owned a department store in Bowman, served for 30 years as a councilman, and was a member of the Masons and the American Legion.

The Jareckys and Sol Wetherhorn were cotton factors in St. Matthews. H. M. Kline was a junk and used car parts dealer.



*West Russell Street, Orangeburg looking toward the square and courthouse, ca. 1927. Courtesy of Marcelle Furchgott.*

Evelyn Marcus, whose mother was a Rich, in 1920 became the first woman in Orangeburg County to be admitted to the Bar. Evelyn's choice of a professional career was a harbinger of the path future generations of Jews from Orangeburg and neighboring communities would take. Jewish-owned stores on the main streets of midlands towns would gradually close their doors as the owners retired with no one in the next generation willing to stand behind the till. One resident, born in Orangeburg in 1922, reported that the Jewish population in town had peaked in the early 1900s and was in decline when her generation was coming of age. In 1996, Barshay and Marcus Clothing Store, the sole remaining Jewish-owned store in Orangeburg, closed its doors.

***Societies, Cemeteries, and Synagogues:*** The first Jewish organization in Orangeburg, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, was established in 1885, with Theodore Kohn acting as president. The following year, the group purchased land for a cemetery, where, over the next quarter century, members of the Bamberg, Blatt, Fenchel, Jarecky, Kohn, Link, Marcus, Rich, Sorentrue, Wald, Wetherhorn, and Wolfe families were laid to rest. Of the 21 burials during this period, nine were small children.

A copy of a printed program for a "Confirmation Service at B'rith Sholim" on May 19, 1918 at 4:30 p.m. provides evidence of Orangeburg's first Jewish congregation. The name the group chose may have come from Charleston's Orthodox synagogue Brith Sholom, where King Street merchants Lipman Rich and his son Philip were members and officers before they moved to St. Matthews, but the leadership was classical Reform. Jacob S. Raisin, rabbi of Charleston's Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, officiated at the confirmation (a distinctly Reform practice) and is listed in the program as superintendent of the Sunday school. The confirmation teacher was Mrs. Sol Kohn, the second grade teacher was Mrs. J. P. (Blumah Sorentrue) Moseley, and Henry Kohn served as president.

Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Robert Furchgott, who moved from Charleston to his mother's hometown of Orangeburg in 1929 at age 13, was a member of Orangeburg's last confirmation class. Robert's mother, Philapena Sorentrue, was a descendant of Simon and Philapena Brown. His father, Arthur Furchgott,





*Robert Furchgott receiving Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine from Carl XVI Gustaf, King of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden, 1998. Courtesy of Marcelle Furchgott.*

came from a family of successful German Jewish merchants; in the 1920s he found himself struggling to make a living in Charleston. He tried his luck in Orangeburg but the drop in cotton prices during the Depression years made it difficult to get ahead, and in the mid-1930s the family moved again.

The religious practices of Orangeburg Jews tended to be fairly relaxed. Congregants followed the Reform tradition and offered Sunday school classes, with Kate Marcus

instructing. Rabbi Samuel R. Shillman of Sumter officiated at the confirmation of Robert and his cousin Edward Moseley, reportedly the last confirmation ceremony conducted in Orangeburg. Observant Jews typically traveled to Charleston or Columbia for the High Holy Days. Some families simply conducted services at home. Edward V. Mirmow, Jr., born in 1930 in Orangeburg, attended Sunday school sporadically and for a short time only; for some reason, he reported, "it didn't last." Mirmow estimated that as much as half the Jewish population did not attend worship services. Others, often through intermarriage, became practicing Christians.

The ease and frequency with which intermarriage occurred reflects the harmonious nature of Jewish-Christian relations in the area and the paltry number of potential Jewish spouses. Jewish residents participated fully in the social life and civic affairs of Orangeburg. They belonged to the Elks Club, the Orangeburg Country Club, the Young Men's Business League, the Junior Service League, the Camellia Garden Club, and the Rotary Club.

Merchant Joseph J. Miller had no living relatives when he died in 1980, but he was surrounded by a family of friends. Born in Philadelphia, he had come to Elloree in 1946 by way of Augusta and Sumter and bought a department store. Upon retiring in 1973, he established the Joseph J. Miller Foundation to support "religious, scientific, literary or educational charities." In his will, he left his savings to four Elloree churches, Orangeburg's Temple Sinai, Charleston's Brith Sholom Beth Israel, Savannah Hebrew Day School, and various charities.

Edward V. Mirmow (Mirmowitz), Sr., born in New York City to Russian immigrants, moved with his family to Orangeburg in 1901 when he was a year old. He lettered in football and baseball at the University of South Carolina and remained a big Gamecocks



*Eddie Mirmow at the lower right, a sports enthusiast, organized the Orangeburg High Indians Booster Club, 1947. Photo from Orangeburg Revisited, G. Atkinson.*

fan throughout his life. After World War II, Mirmow founded the Orangeburg Indian Boosters Club to support high school sports and organized the city's American Legion Post 4 baseball program, serving as athletic director for ten years. In 1948, Mirmow Field was named in recognition of his contributions to amateur baseball.

In the 1950s, with an influx of Jews into the midlands and a surge in births as GIs came home, Orangeburg Jews organized again, this time to build Temple Sinai. It is possible that this new congregation, which had been served by Rabbi Shillman in the past, named their temple after Sumter's Temple Sinai. A *News and Courier* article reports that their Christian friends and neighbors helped to make it possible. The building, which was completed and dedicated in early 1956, seats a hundred and houses a hall, a kitchen, and space for a Sunday school on the lower level. J. J. Teskey, previously of Savannah, served as president of the board of directors and as lay leader. Member families, many of whom had young children, came from Orangeburg and surrounding towns as well. Temple Sinai's membership may have reached a peak of 15 to 20 families during this period.

The small congregation never had its own rabbi. To conduct services on the High Holy Days, Temple Sinai engaged visiting rabbis or student rabbis. Rabbi David Gruber of Columbia's Tree of Life conducted worship services once a month into the sixties. Disagreements over whether to use Conservative or Reform prayer books and personal animosities prevented the formation of a unified congregation. Sunday school classes were held during the Temple's early years, serving the small number of young families who were part of the post-World War II baby boom, but the congregation's viability became more tenuous as the children left for college and settled elsewhere.

Today, Temple Sinai's remaining three or four members meet one Saturday morning a month for worship, led by a lay reader originally from New York. Somehow, the tiny congregation has managed to retain the Temple building. High Holy Day services are a "hit or miss proposition," according to one member. The endangered congregation likely faces the same future as the Jewish-owned stores that once lined the streets of Orangeburg.



# Pillars and More Pillars

*by Martin Perlmutter*

## Of Blessed Memory ...

**T**he Jewish community of South Carolina lost one of its foremost pillars when Jerry Zucker passed away on April 11, 2008, at the age of 58. Jerry Zucker was a self-made man of incredible talent and drive. Born in Israel to Holocaust survivors from Poland, Jerry arrived at Ellis Island as a toddler in 1952. He spent most of his adult life in Charleston, where he founded Intertech Group, his holding company, and with his wife Anita raised a loving family. Jerry knew his Jewish roots and celebrated them. Giving back was a cornerstone of his being; his life exemplified the centrality of Tzedakah and the responsibility of wealth. Mourning the loss of such a giant, it is helpful to remember that the Jewish way to honor the dead is to pick up the work he or she left unfinished. May Anita and all of Jerry's extended family find comfort among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

**T**he Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina relies on its Pillar membership level to provide financial support for its operations, which includes assistance to both the Jewish Studies Program and the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston. The Society has been fortunate in having so many people step forward to assure that its projects are funded, its endowment stays intact, and its regular membership dues remain affordable. Support from Pillars has been crucial for the Society's continuing documentation of cemetery records and our new campaign to encourage members to research their own family histories.

This year, JHSSC is reaching out to Jewish charitable foundations across South Carolina. These organizations were established by individuals who were part of the fabric of Jewish communal life in South Carolina, and who would be pleased by the Society's efforts to keep their history alive. Modeled after our Pillars' initiative, Foundational Pillars commit to pay \$2,000 per year for five years. We are happy to announce that the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation has signed on as our first foundational pillar. Please let us know of other prospects to whom we might apply.

## PILLARS of the SOCIETY (2008)

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| John and Marcie Baker        | Columbia, SC     |
| Doris Baumgarten             | Aiken, SC        |
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| Bunny Daitch Bernstein       | Mt. Pleasant, SC |
| Harriette Kraft Ehrlich      | Jacksonville, FL |
| Carolee and Harold Fox       | Charleston, SC   |
| Meri Gergel                  | Columbia, SC     |
| Richard and Belinda Gergel   | Columbia, SC     |
| Dr. Mark and Judith Green    | Charleston, SC   |
| Phillip H. Greenberg         | Florence, SC     |
| Reuben Greenberg             | Charleston, SC   |
| Ann and Max Hellman          | Charleston, SC   |
| Alan and Charlotte Kahn      | Columbia, SC     |
| Michael Kogan                | Little Falls, NJ |
| Susan Lourie                 | Columbia, SC     |
| Frieda and Jack Margolies    | Charleston, SC   |
| Rose Mark                    | Beaufort, SC     |
| Albert and Robin Mercer      | Owensboro, KY    |
| Leon and Karen Ortner        | Charleston, SC   |
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| Benedict and Brenda Rosen    | Myrtle Beach, SC |
| Raymond and Sandra Rosenblum | Charleston, SC   |
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| David Wallace                | Columbia, SC     |
| Anita Zucker                 | Charleston, SC   |

Harvey and Mimi Gleberman, o.b.m.

Anne Oxler Krancer, o.b.m.

Jerry Zucker, o.b.m.

## FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR (2008)

The Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation, Charleston, SC

Yes, I/we want to become a Pillar member of the JHSSC. In doing so, I/we commit to dues of \$5,000 over a period of 5 years.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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