

New and Noteworthy:

Temple Sinai Archives Donated to the College of Charleston

by Harlan Greene and Dale Rosengarten

The study of Jewish history is continually enriched by the appearance of exciting source materials in unexpected places. In 1947, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls near the ancient West Bank settlement of Khirbet Qumran, a new chapter opened in early Jewish history. In 2007, with the donation of the aptly named Temple Sinai archives to the College of Charleston, another rich treasury was revealed. While not as momentous as the scrolls, the materials from Sumter's historic congregation nevertheless promise to open up new vistas in South Carolina and American Jewish history.

This remarkable gift from the trustees of Temple Sinai came to the Jewish Heritage Collection in the Addlestone Library after extensive deliberations by the congregation's Long Term Planning Committee and timely consultations with officers of JHSSC. Faced with declining membership and an uncertain future, Temple leaders charged the Committee with making the best disposition possible for Sinai's archives. The decision to give the collection to the College, explained committee member Robert Moses, "was based on what was best to protect and preserve them for the long haul, while assuring their ready accessibility."

After a flurry of e-mails and phone calls, a team from the College drove to Sumter—Harlan in a College van with photographers Joe and Edie Rubin and Dale with Robert's daughter Elizabeth—and began packing the precious records. We were overwhelmed by both



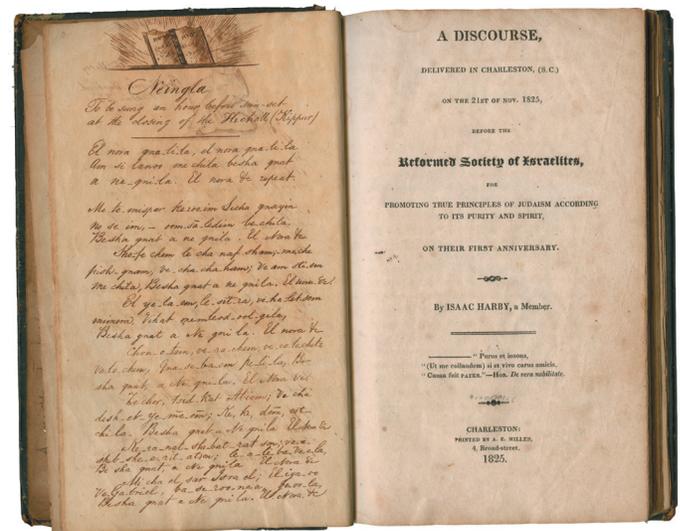
Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC, 2007.

the wealth of the collection and the heartbreakingly generous gift of its stewards, who had given so much of themselves to Temple Sinai over their lifetimes. While Sumter's and South Carolina's Jewish heritage was being saved for posterity by this selfless act, the passing of the torch reflected a sad reality. We knew, as we packed, that the collection was extraordinary and that the congregation deserved everlasting thanks.

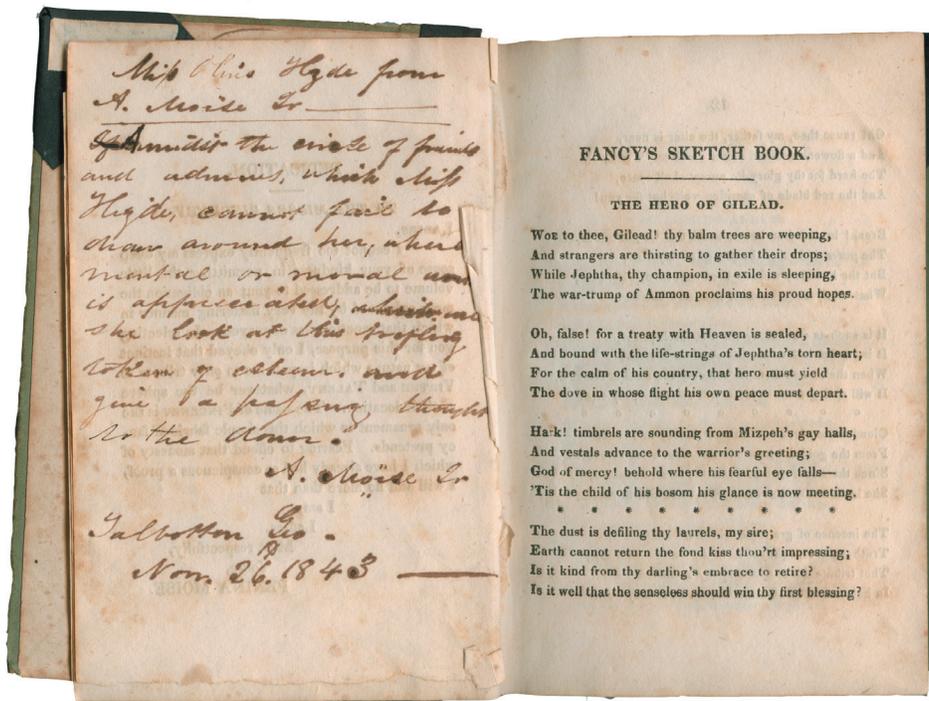
Sumter's illustrious Jewish past began in the 1820s. Early settlers included members of the Moïse and Moses families from Charleston, whose descendants gave Temple Sinai the papers of their forebears. Intellectual luminaries such as Isaac Harby, whose



Harlan Greene, Dale Rosengarten, Elizabeth Moses, and Robert Moses packing the archives, September 2007.



Isaac Harby's prayer book manuscript and Discourse, 1825.



Penina Moïse, *Fancy's Sketch Book*, 1833.

daughter Octavia settled in Sumter, and Penina Moïse, who refugeed there with her sister and niece during the Civil War, are well represented in the collection.

The Temple's gems include a manuscript prayer book penned by Harby and bound together with the discourse he delivered before the Reformed Society of Israelites in 1825 on the first anniversary of the organization. Here was a cornerstone of the American Reform movement: handwritten prayers, in Hebrew and English, of the first Reform services held in America, and an extremely rare first edition of Harby's *Discourse*. We also were thrilled to find a letter Harby had written to John C. Calhoun in 1816, a published copy of Harby's play *Gordian Knot*, written in 1810 before his 19th year and corrected by his own hand, and the original script of *Tutoona, or the Indian Girl*, a drama composed by Isaac's brother George Washington Harby and performed in New Orleans' American Theater in 1835.

We discovered files of clippings of poems and prose that Penina Moïse published in period newspapers, scrapbooks she compiled, and an 1856 printing of the hymnal she helped create for Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, with her annotations and corrections in the margins. These will make wonderful companions to the original edition of Moïse's most important collection, *Fancy's Sketch Book* (1833), recently donated to the College library by Hamilton College in New York.

Included in Temple Sinai's archives is a commonplace book assembled by Penina's brother Abraham Moïse, Jr., a Harby's protégé who led the reformers to victory

over KKBE's traditionalists in 1841. Of special interest are Moïse's notes on political clippings he pasted in the book and multiple copies of *Selections from the Miscellaneous Writings of Isaac Harby and a Memoir of his Life*, published soon after Harby's death.

The collection also documents various institutions established by Sumter's Jews, such as the first Hebrew Cemetery Society, the Benevolent Society, the Sumter Society of Israelites, Temple Sinai, and the Sinai Sisterhood. We marveled over the minutes of the Sinai Culture Club (1910–1911), a copy of the

rare and short-lived periodical *The Saint Charles*, files of correspondence about refugee funds being raised in the 1930s and '40s, and the wooden spindles used to hold a Torah that were salvaged from a European synagogue destroyed in the Holocaust.

Now housed in the temperature and humidity-controlled vaults of Special Collections at the College of Charleston library, the materials have been sorted and placed in acid-free folders and archival boxes. Library staff have begun the process of creating an inventory, describing and cataloguing the holdings, and making them available to scholars and students. No matter what the future holds for Temple Sinai, the congregation can rest assured that its past is in good hands.

For Those Who Live in the Sun

In 1950, the Charleston Jewish community celebrated its bicentennial with an historical pageant entitled *For Those Who Live in the Sun*, written by author Sam Byrd. We have programs, photographs, and other information about the play in our archives, but we have not been able to turn up any piece, parcel, or printout of the script. Dozens of people participated in the play. If anyone has a copy or knows where one is, please contact Harlan Greene at greenh@cofc.edu.