

Newsletter of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

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Next Board Meeting

Board members will convene in Charleston at the College of Charleston (President's Board Room, Randolph Hall) on Sunday November 6 at 1:00 PM for a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC). In addition to general business of the association, the board will discuss programming for the upcoming annual meeting. Ms. Marcia Zerivitz, Executive Director of the Mosaic Museum in Florida, will give an overview of the successful efforts of Florida's Jewish community to establish a museum. All officers and members of the board of directors should notify President Lourie if they cannot attend.

New Members

Our membership keeps growing with new members each week. Please urge your friends and neighbors to join the JHSSC. It's still possible to become a Founding member (\$500) or a Founding Patron (\$1000). Other membership categories include: Individual (\$35) and Sustaining Member (\$100). For further information, contact David Cohen, Treasurer (953-5530)

Focus on Collecting

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina has designated the Robert Scott Small Library at the College of Charleston as its repository for manuscripts and archives related to the history of Jews in the state. The librarians at that institution have agreed to process and make available to scholars, students, genealogists, and the general community those materials acquired on behalf of the JHSSC.

The College library recently received a significant collection from Temple Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim including the Temple organizational and business records as well as the papers of individuals such as Thomas Tobias, Penina Moise and Francis Salvador. (A forthcoming issue of the newsletter will describe this collection in detail.)

While not all collections may be as old as the KKBE material, many people may be surprised to learn how wide-ranging the interests of archivists are. All aspects of Jewish life in South Carolina should be represented in these collections. The archivists would like to acquire the records of Jewish organizations like burial societies, synagogues, schools, community centers and charitable endeavors. The records of Jewish owned businesses and family papers are

also excellent resources.

The JHSSC encourages individuals and organizations interested in donating papers to contact the Special Collections Department of the Robert Scott Small Library (953-5530).

Mark Your Calendar

The 2nd Annual Meeting of the JHSSC will be held in Charleston over the weekend of March 17-19, 1995. Details about speakers, tours and related events will be sent to members in January 1995. Rooms have been reserved at the historic Barksdale Inn located two blocks from the College of Charleston. Members interested in reserving rooms should contact M. Perlmutter (953-5682).

The Southern Jewish Historical Society meets on October 14-15-16 in Raleigh, NC. Drs. Jim Hagy, Belinda Gergel and Leonard Greenspoon will update their presentations from our April 1994 meeting. Contact Helen Silver (763-8714).

Abbeville, SC will celebrate the 95th anniversary of the Poliakoff Department Store on April 29-30, 1995. Highlights include a showing of "The Last Hour" at the Opera House on Saturday. The play recounts the last meeting of the Confederacy and tells, among other stories, that of Judah Benjamin.

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina Inaugural Meeting Draws 250 People to Charleston: A Special Report

by Leah F. Chase

"Every newcomer to the South, whether it be to Charleston or Atlanta or wherever, has to encounter Southern history, has to encounter Southern customs, has to encounter the South," said author Eli N. Evans, at the April 16-17 inaugural meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina in Charleston. "It's great to be back in the home state of Judah P. Benjamin and Isadore Lourie, two great political figures in South Carolina's history," Evans said during his keynote address. Evans is president of the Charles H. Revson Foundation.

Held on the campus of the 220 year old College of Charleston in conjunction with its Jewish Studies Program, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina's first meeting brought together over 250 people.

Fond memories of his youth and differences encountered in the South, blended with the warmth and esteem shown to his family, led State Sen. (ret) Isadore Lourie to envision the Jewish Historical Society of to preserve the history of immigrants like his parents. Many of these nineteenth century Europeans became peddlers driving horse and wagon along rural dirt roads. With the encouragement and assistance of his school chum of more than twenty years, College of Charleston President Alex Sanders, Lourie's efforts were realized over the two day conference.

"Jews have been in South Carolina since 1695. We have a proud heritage, both as South Carolinians and as Jews," said Lourie at the outdoor afternoon social at the College's historic Cistern. the fragrance of honeysuckle and jasmine under the shade of ancient oaks stimulated the delegates to renew friendships and share recollections of family migrations to the South.

Historical presentations were given by Leonard J. Greenspoon, Professor of Religious Studies at Clemson University and the author of "Judaism" in Religion in South Carolina; Columbia College historian Dr. Belinda Gergel; College of Charleston Professor Jim Hagy, author of This Happy Land; and one of Charleston's foremost Jewish historians, attorney Benjamin Goldberg.

Dr. Greenspoon noted that Jews were in Greenville and in the smaller cities and towns of upstate South Carolina, forming a continuous community that can be traced for at least one hundred years. He encouraged members of the society to preserve anything of historical value and to maintain oral and written records that will be of use to future generations.

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Evans, the son of a Jewish mayor of Durham, North Carolina, and the author of The Provincials, writes about Jewish life in the South. His newest book, The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner, (University Press of Mississippi), takes its title from the diary of his grandmother, Jennie B. Nachamson, recalling her life in the early 1900s.

"The lonely days were Sundays," she wrote, "Sundays when I watched the town people going to church, while we stayed upstairs in our apartment. Then I would feel like an outsider in this little community. I would have hunger in my heart for my own people. I would visualize a Utopia -- a village like this of all Jews -- going to temple on the Sabbath."

That book is dedicated to Evans' son, Joshua. Evans told of Josh's birth in a New York city hospital. He told how he clutched his wife's hand with one hand and with the other in his pocket, he held a vial of dirt from Chapel Hill and Durham because he "...didn't want this child born altogether a Yankee." Later, after his mother died, he planted a tree in her memory on the grounds of Hadassah Hospital Ein Karem using the same dirt from North Carolina. His mother was a friend of Henrietta Szold, and founded Hadassah in the South in 1919.

Also on the program was Saul Viener, Atlanta, representing the American Jewish Historical Society and the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

"The Jews of South Carolina have a happy story to tell and are eager to tell it. The Society is off to a great start. I am glad that the Jewish Studies Program at the College is a part of it," said Dr. Martin Perlmutter, Director of the program which was endowed through the generosity of Sylvia and Henry Yaschik of Charleston over ten years ago.

* Leah (Feinberg) Chase is a freelance journalist from Charleston. She, too, is a small town Southerner, born in West Point, GA, population 5000.