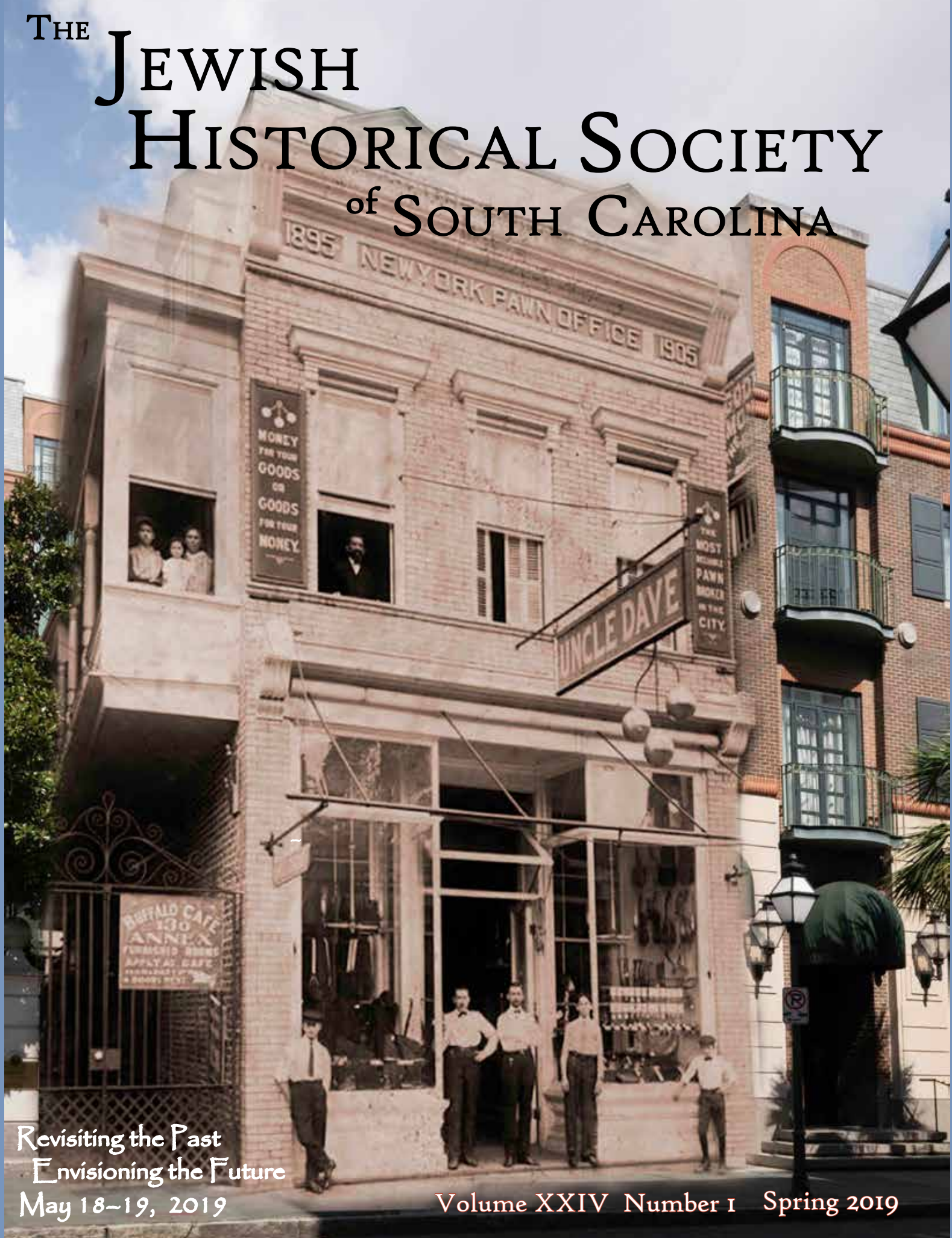


# THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA



Revisiting the Past  
Envisioning the Future  
May 18-19, 2019

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THE  
JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
OF  
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On the cover: I. D. Rubin (Uncle Dave) and his family pose in the windows of the New York Pawn Office at 128-130 Market Street, in Charleston, SC, ca. 1912. Born in Russia in 1869 and educated at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Kovno, Rubin immigrated to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1894. A staunch member of Brith Sholom synagogue, he served as president in 1909.

Archival image from Special Collections, College of Charleston, superimposed on contemporary photograph of the location, now occupied by the Belmond Charleston Place Hotel and Shops. Photo by Lisa Rosamond Thompson.

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## Letter from the President

As JHSSC enters its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, it's a good time to reflect on what has been the secret to our success and longevity. I believe the key has been stability of membership and staff, and a lot of hard work by all those involved.

Marty Perlmutter and Dale Rosengarten were the catalysts who had enormous vision and put forth tremendous effort. Enid Idelsohn, Alyssa Neely, Rachel Barnett, and Mark Swick are part of the team comprising the current backbone of the organization. We cannot thank them enough. It is an honor for me to be a part of a state-wide group, based at the College of Charleston, that, among its significant historical accomplishments, has brought together so many people from across South Carolina.

At the Society's meeting in May we will get a preview of the Jewish Merchant Project. The first fruits of the effort is *A Store at Every Crossroads*, an exhibition opening on May 18 in Addlestone Library. Creating the exhibit and filling out online surveys has prompted many family members to assemble their histories, compiling archival materials and writing about the experiences of their forebears. Some of their essays appear here in print, with longer versions posted online.

The stories coming to light are from the era of our grandparents and parents, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when new immigrants built successful businesses—often dry goods stores—and contributed mightily to South Carolina's economy and growth.

We were lucky to recruit Lynn Robertson, former director of McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina, to curate and design the exhibition, which has already attracted interest from Historic Columbia and the State Museum in Columbia. In the lead story in this issue, Lynn outlines the long history of Jewish merchants, from peddlers and small-town storekeepers to retail tycoons and builders of shopping malls.

For the past 25 years, JHSSC has looked back in time to understand our present. Much of what we know about South Carolina Jewish history has been documented by our own research. At our May meeting, we will use our acquired knowledge to try to imagine what the next 25 years holds for

the history of American, and especially southern, Jews. Three renowned speakers will help us forge these ideas. Historian Stephen J. Whitfield, author of nine books on American Jewish culture, will be our keynote speaker on Saturday. On Sunday morning we will host a conversation between Rabbi Judith Schindler, former senior rabbi at Charlotte's Temple Beth El, and Steven R. Weisman, author of the recent bestseller *Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion*. Together we will consider trends in Jewish life and culture that will affect our future and our children's future over the decades to come.

The Society has awarded the Order of the Jewish Palmetto five times in its 25-year history—to Senator Isadore Lourie, Greenville Mayor Max and Mrs. Trude Heller, Solomon Breitbart, Ann Meddin Hellman, and Dr. Martin Perlmutter. It will be my great pleasure to award the Jewish Palmetto for the sixth time to Dr. Dale Rosengarten.

Dale has been central to JHSSC from the very beginning, playing a major part in its organization in 1994. She is founding director of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the Addlestone Library and has built an extensive manuscript and oral history archives that attracts researchers from far and wide. In partnership with McKissick Museum, she curated the exhibition *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* and co-edited the book by the same name. She is editor of the JHSSC magazine and a consultant for the Society's Jewish Merchant Project. We recognize Dale Rosengarten as the individual who put South Carolina's

Jewish history on the map. The award will be presented at the Society's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on May 18, 2019.

I am proud of what this organization has accomplished and look forward to continuing my participation as JHSSC develops into one of the country's foremost Jewish historical societies. I hope you all will join me on May 18 and 19 as we begin the next 25 years!

Jeffrey Rosenblum, FAIA, JHSSC President



Dale Rosengarten and Jeffrey Rosenblum at the opening of the exhibit *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life at McKissick Museum, Columbia, SC, 2002*. Photo by Jeri Perlmutter.



# A Good Living Can Be Made in Trade

by Lynn Robertson, curator, *A Store at Every Crossroads*

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

It was here, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that small

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

Life in business often began with a dry goods store. These establishments sold most of what farm families needed, from plows to pillowcases. General merchandise stores commonly evolved into more specialized businesses as the town grew. Jewish merchants frequently encouraged other immigrant entrepreneurs or family members to join them—part of a matchmaking strategy that recruited single men as salesmen and potential suitors. Many towns boasted numerous Jewish-owned stores by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1927, the small town of Bishopville was home to 93 Jewish residents, many of whom, such as the Levensons, had stores on Main Street.

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

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

*Top: Price’s of Spartanburg, SC, 1903. Bottom: Wolff’s of Allendale, SC, ca. 1915. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



War II, they were successful enough to install a new awning carrying the more dignified *Rubenstein's* above the store.

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

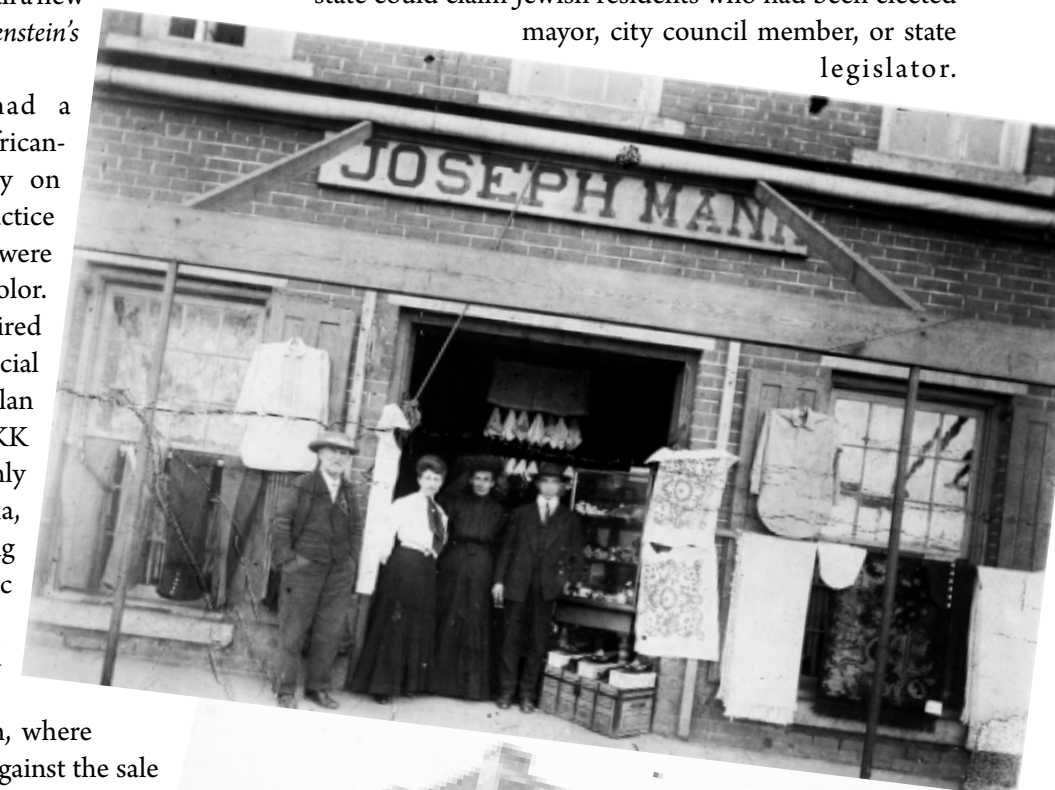
Small-town storeowners provided financial loans to regular customers, or became creditors in the crop lien system, where merchants furnished supplies to farmers against the sale of future crop yields. Holding the land as collateral, if years were bad, store men became landowners, and many diversified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

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

*Right: Mann’s of Newberry, SC, ca. 1908. Special Collections, College of Charleston. Novit’s of Walterboro, SC. Courtesy of the Novit-Siegel family.*

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

Perhaps the ultimate manifestation of Jewish involvement in community affairs was widespread engagement in politics. By 1900, many towns in the state could claim Jewish residents who had been elected mayor, city council member, or state legislator.





Some of South Carolina's most powerful politicians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from Jewish merchant families. Sol Blatt reminisced about working in his father's store in Barnwell. Irene Rudnick, whose family's business was in Columbia, became the first Jewish woman elected to the state legislature. Members of other families, such as the Louries from St. George and the Kornbluts in Latta, maintained their mercantile ties while becoming politically prominent.

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

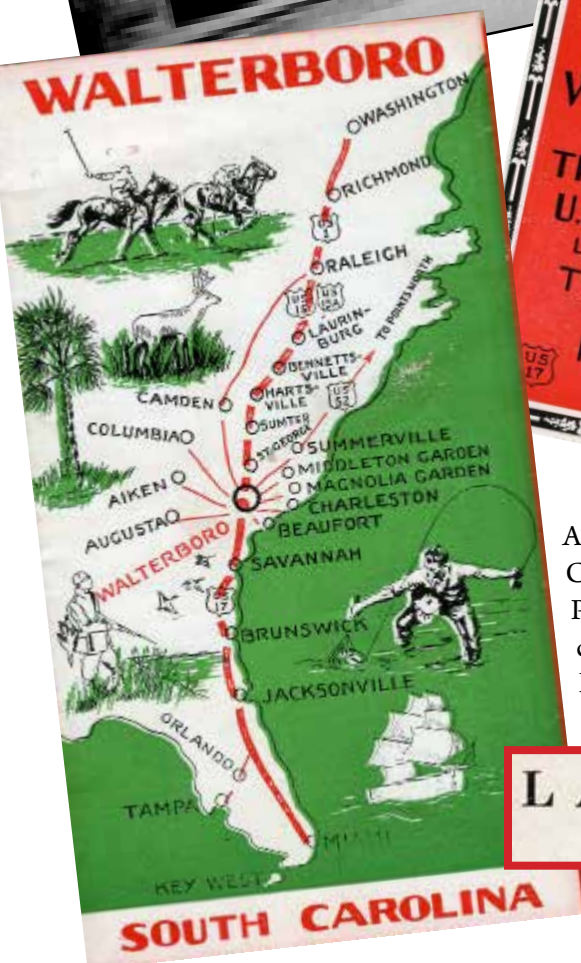
The spirit of entrepreneurship that characterized the ambitions of early Jewish peddlers and merchants did not disappear. Retailers looked for niche markets where they could avoid competition from big box stores. Some specialized in quality goods and personalized service. Spartanburg's Price's Menswear,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

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

In the post-World War II suburban boom, main street stores migrated to shopping centers. Development of South Windermere across the Ashley River from downtown Charleston—the brainchild of attorney William Ackerman—began in 1951 and included one of the first suburban malls in South Carolina. When it opened in 1959, the Kronsberg brothers' North Charleston Pinehaven Shopping Center, featuring their Edward's store, was the largest retail complex in the state. Merchants in other growing cities followed the same pattern. In the 1960s, established stores in Columbia such as Berry's On Main maintained their Main Street presence while opening branch stores in suburban locations.

**LAFAYETTE GRILL**  
"Finest Food South of New York"

*Special Collections,  
College of Charleston.*



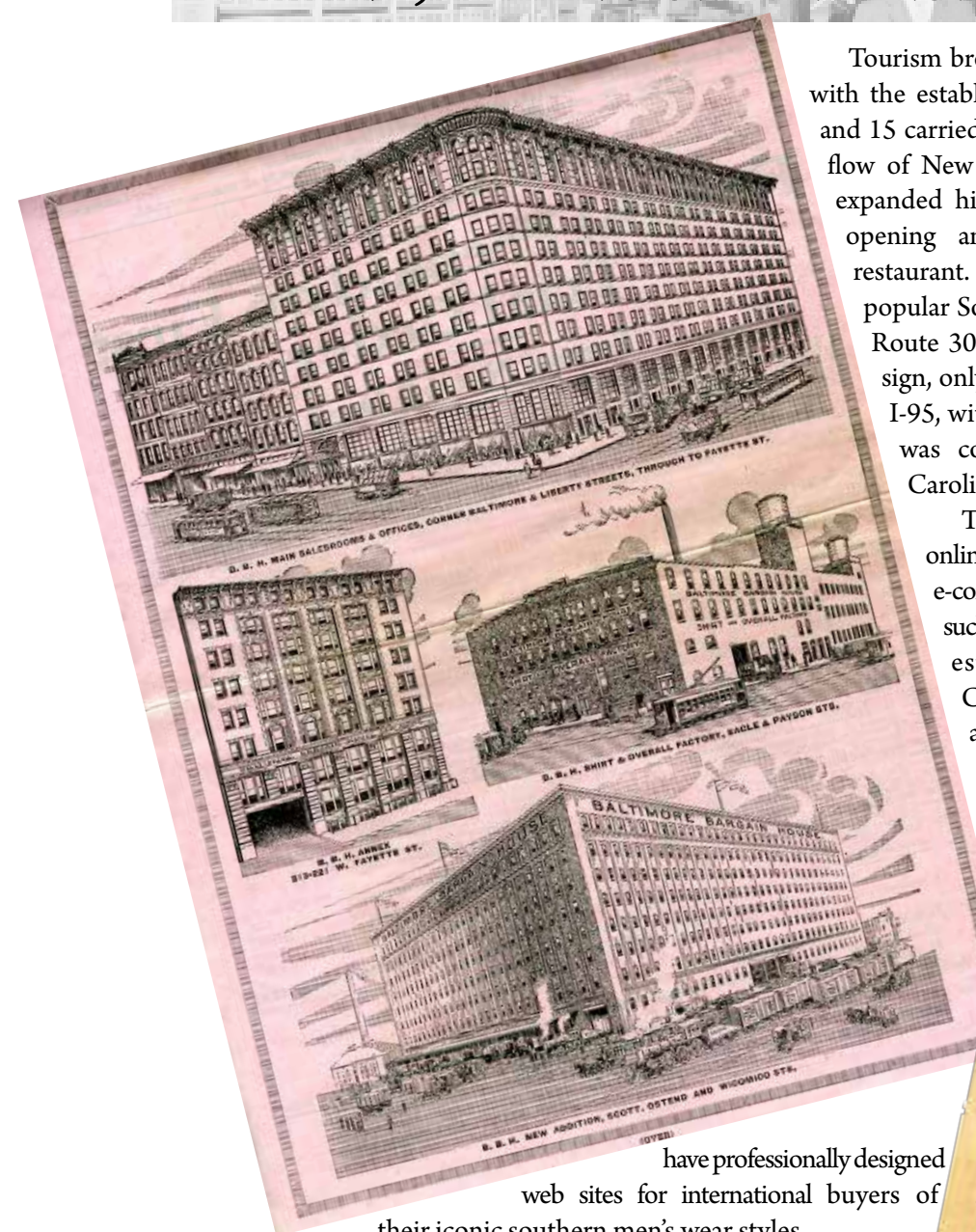
*Lady Lafayette Hotel, owned by the  
Novit family of Walterboro, SC.*



**Lady Lafayette**  
**AMERICA'S MOST**  
**UNIQUE HOTEL**  
and  
**TOURIST COTTAGES**  
**SENSIBLE RATES**  
South Carolina  
Walterboro.  
Tourists traveling to and from Florida should make  
an overnight stay at this charming oasis of hospi-  
tality—the enterprise that has made a small town  
famous.

Tourism brought in a new mobile customer base. In the 1920s, with the establishment of the federal highway system, Routes 17 and 15 carried travelers down the coast. Tapping into the growing flow of New York to Florida traffic, Albert Novit, in 1927, expanded his mercantile shops in Walterboro, opening an adjacent hotel and then a restaurant. Fifty years later, Alan Schafer's popular South of the Border, located on Route 301, with its iconic sombrero sign, only grew in popularity when I-95, with an adjacent Dillon exit, was completed through South Carolina in 1978.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century introduced online shopping and created the e-commerce customer. Stores such as M. Dumas, originally established in 1917 in Charleston by Mendel Dumas as a uniform shop for local service jobs, and Britton's in Columbia now



have professionally designed  
web sites for international buyers of  
their iconic southern men's wear styles.

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

*Clockwise from top left: flyer from wholesaler Baltimore Bargain House, 1916, Special Collections, College of Charleston; Poll Parrot children's shoes display from the D. Poliakov store in Abbeville, SC, courtesy of Ed Poliakov; September 16, 1959, advertisement in the Charleston Evening Post for the opening the following day of Pinehaven Shopping Center, Charleston, Special Collections, College of Charleston.*





# D. Poliakoff: 100 Years on the Square

by Ed Poliakoff

D. Poliakoff, the dry goods store opened in 1900 by my grandfather David Poliakoff, was in business on historic Court Square in Abbeville, South Carolina, for more than 100 years, from February 19, 1900, to August 26, 2000. David emigrated from Kamen, a *shtetl* about 112 miles northeast of Minsk in today's Belarus, in 1893, when he was 20 years old. His passport application (found last year in the State Historical Archives of Belarus) states that the purpose of his trip was to "earn money." A few brittle wholesaler invoices addressed to "Poliakoff Brothers, Clifton, SC," some in Yiddish, remain from the years David Poliakoff was in business with his brother Mendel, 1894 to 1898, first in Clifton (near Spartanburg), then in Gaffney, South Carolina. In 1898–1899, he was in Aiken County.

Family lore has it that David was a peddler who initially picked McCormick, South Carolina, to open his own store and paid the first month's rent, but quickly decided to settle in Abbeville. Years later, in a November 1937 interview for the *Abbeville Press and Banner*, he said he came to Abbeville after leaving his brother Samuel in Graniteville, South Carolina. Abbeville's population had more than doubled between 1890 and 1900, perhaps a reason he decided to settle there.

The 1900 U.S. Census for Abbeville Township listed David Polliaskoff [*sic*], "clothing merchant," born in Russia in 1872, as a boarder who could read, write, and speak English. The store's original location on Abbeville's Court Square was "next door to [the State] dispensary," as noted in its March 1900 ad in the *Abbeville Medium*. A 1900 ledger shows cash sales the first month in business were \$433.98. The store, along with the dispensary and several other businesses, got electric lights in March of that year. By June 1901, David Poliakoff had become a U.S. citizen. Affidavits supporting his petition were submitted by his brother Mendel and J. S. Poliakoff of Langley, South Carolina, a cousin. A 1901 headline in the *Press and Banner* proclaimed "He is One of Us Now."

A July 1904 article in the *Abbeville Medium* reported on the wedding of David Poliakoff and Elka Rachel Axelrod. The ceremony in Augusta was performed by Rabbi Abraham Poliakoff, a cousin and the first spiritual leader of Augusta

congregation Adas Yeshurun. Rabbi Poliakoff was married to David's sister, Rebecca. A 1937 *Press and Banner* article looked back and recounted: "Mr. Poliakoff had not been in Abbeville but four years when he sent back to Russia for his sweetheart. His marriage to Miss Rachel Axelrod . . . showed him to be [a] man of outstanding wisdom and good judgment. Mrs. Poliakoff has truly been a helpmeet. She has not only kept a fine hospitable home, reared a large family, but has been his true partner in the operation of his store."

David Poliakoff died on June 9, 1940. According to the *Press and Banner*, "Mr. Poliakoff had been at his store throughout the day and was sitting in his chair at home when the end came. . . [He] prospered in Abbeville but in prospering he won the goodwill, the respect and esteem of a great circle of friends."

The paper noted he was the oldest living member of the local Masonic Lodge and a regular attendee.

Elka Rachel Poliakoff died at home on June 8, 1956, after a brief illness. She was described in the hometown paper as a "prominent Abbeville businesswoman and a resident of this city since 1904."

David and Rachel raised five sons and a daughter, maintaining an observant Jewish home a block from Court Square. Throughout its 100 years, the store was closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In a 1920 article entitled "The Knowledge of Hebrew Not Now Confined to Preachers," the Abbeville paper extolled their first-born. "Young Ellis Poliakoff returned this week from Anderson

where for the past month he has been under the tutelage of a professor of Hebrew and . . . has mastered the intricate characters of the Hebrew language." David Poliakoff "is the proudest man you ever saw when he is listening to his son read so fluently the language of his fathers."

Sons Ellis, Marion, Myer (my father), Arthur, and Samuel all graduated from the University of South Carolina, where over a period of more than 15 years at least one Poliakoff brother occupied the same dorm room (#48) at Burney College, according to an October 29, 1935, article in the *USC Gamecock*. All the brothers served their country during the World War II era, three overseas. Ellis was a respected physician who served the people of Abbeville County his entire professional career, excepting wartime service. Marion was a gentleman merchant who established a top-line men's apparel store in Walhalla, South Carolina. Arthur (Bud) was a beloved pharmacist in Atlanta and became the senior practicing pharmacist in the state of Georgia.

Samuel was a prominent physician in Atlanta and a discerning collector of Western American Indian art. He bequeathed to the Abbeville County Public Library, "in honor of the Poliakoff Family," his unique collection of pottery, textiles, and paintings, along with a monetary bequest, establishing in Abbeville one of the most significant public collections of this genre. Readers are invited to visit the collection in person or online at <http://poliakoffcollectionofwesternart.org/>

Daughter Eva Poliakoff, who later was a school teacher and lived with her husband and family in Marblehead, Massachusetts, graduated from Agnes Scott College, where her roommate was Rosa From of Union, South Carolina. Eva and Rosa became roommates at the suggestion of Eva's brother Myer, who had met Rosa at Jewish dances in Columbia. Rosa was the daughter of Israel and Bertha From, immigrants from Lithuania. Israel was a successful merchant—"I. From, Dry Goods and Notions" was a household word in Union—and Bertha a religiously observant homemaker. After graduating from Agnes Scott College, Rosa became a teacher in Atlanta, while Myer completed his degree at USC and returned to Abbeville to work with his parents in the store, eventually taking over its management. On February 20, 1940, Myer Poliakoff and Rosa From were married at the From residence in Union.

As his business grew, David Poliakoff had moved the store twice, settling in his third and final location in 1935 on the northeast corner of Court Square at Washington Street, located on the site where John C. Calhoun's law office once stood. It was constructed in 1873, only eight years after the horse-drawn entourage of Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, and others in the fleeing Confederate war cabinet came up Washington Street from the train station to the Square, en route to the Abbeville residence where the last meeting of the cabinet was held.

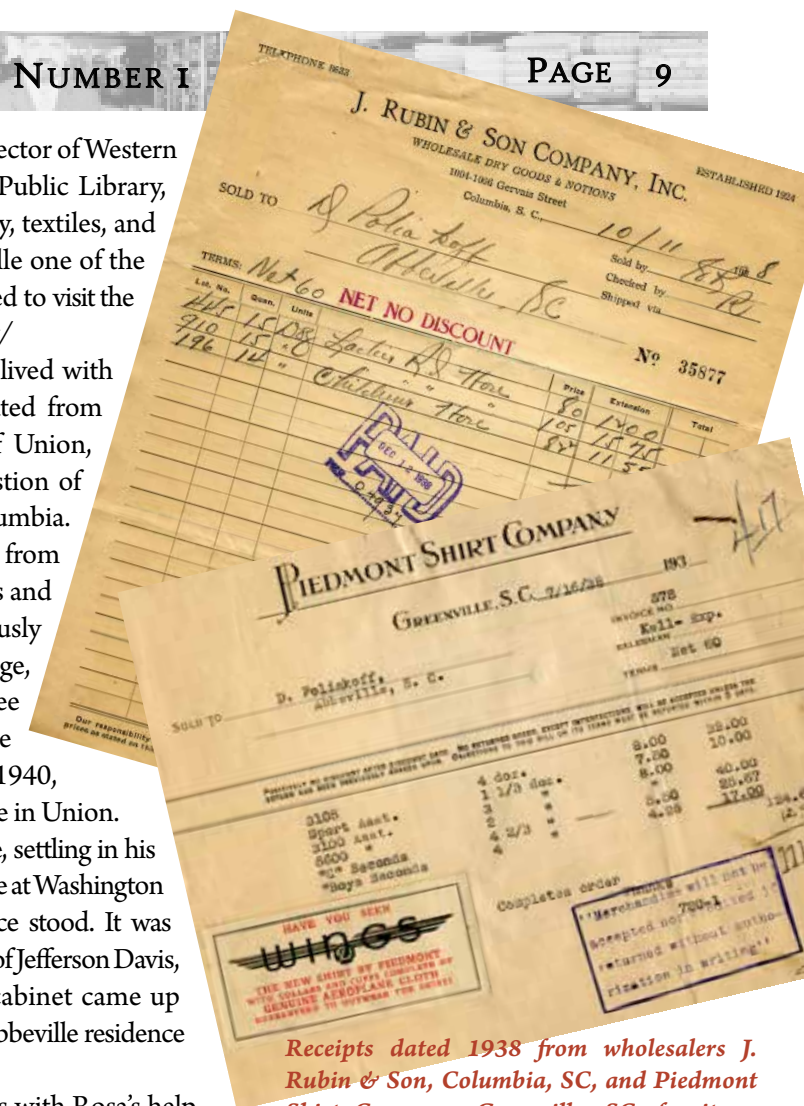
Myer ran D. Poliakoff's for almost half a century, in later years with Rosa's help. Like his father, he was a life member of the Abbeville Masonic Lodge. He was an officer of the local development board, a 17-year member of the school board, and a longtime board member, treasurer, and ardent supporter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

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

frequently selected women's apparel with specific customers in mind. Myer Poliakoff died on August 10, 1985. Rosa took up the reins and ran the business with paperwork assistance from her children.

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

**D. Poliakoff building after renovation, Washington Street view, Abbeville, SC. Photo by Ed Poliakoff.**



**Receipts dated 1938 from wholesalers J. Rubin & Son, Columbia, SC, and Piedmont Shirt Company, Greenville, SC, for items sold to D. Poliakoff in Abbeville, SC. Special Collections, College of Charleston.**





Still family-owned, the D. Poliakoff building was renovated a few years after the business closed, renewing its heart-pine flooring, high pressed-tin ceilings, and clerestory windows, and retaining on its corner sidewalks its pre-electric-era translucent panel vault lights and grate-covered basement light wells. The building's front parapet and side wall still display "D. Poliakoff" in the large letters once common on storefronts. Tenants operate an apparel boutique.

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



*Today, 105 West occupies the Poliakoff building on Abbeville's Court Square. Photo by Eli Poliakoff.*

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

The 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated in April 1995 in conjunction with a meeting of the newly organized Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. A congratulatory letter from President Bill Clinton was presented to Rosa Poliakoff.

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

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

## Edward's 5¢ · 10¢ · \$1.00 Stores and the Kronsberg Brothers

by Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum

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

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



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



cooking fish, which was plentiful on the island. Lena and Abraham had three more sons after Edward: Meyer was born in 1905, Milton in 1909, and Macey in 1911.

Raymond Sinclair described Abraham and Lena in his book, *The Tilghman's Island Story 1659–1954*: "...they were of the Jewish denomination and classed as Tilghman's most loved citizens." The Kronsbergs were active in the town's life. Their neighbors respected their closing the store when the family would go to Baltimore for the Jewish High Holidays.

At the age of 39, Abraham got an infection and died, leaving Lena with four boys to raise—15, 13, 9, and 7 years old. She moved to Baltimore to be near her family. Edward attended the Polytechnic Institute and worked at night. He was still in his teens when Lena sent him to Charleston, South Carolina, to work for Uncle Joseph Bluestein, the husband of Lena's sister Bessie, at Joseph's King

Street store. Edward lived with the Bluestein family and attended the College of Charleston. In 1926, with Joseph's help, Edward opened the first Edward's five and ten cents store on King Street, next door to Bluestein's.

Expansion within South Carolina began in 1930 with the opening of the Bamberg store. Milton and Macey, both of whom had graduated from Johns Hopkins University, moved to Charleston, in the '30s to work for Edward's, and Lena followed. Stores were added in Walterboro (1936) and Conway (1938). World War II put a stop to further expansion, but in 1947, the Reynolds Avenue store at the entrance to the Charleston Naval Base was completed.

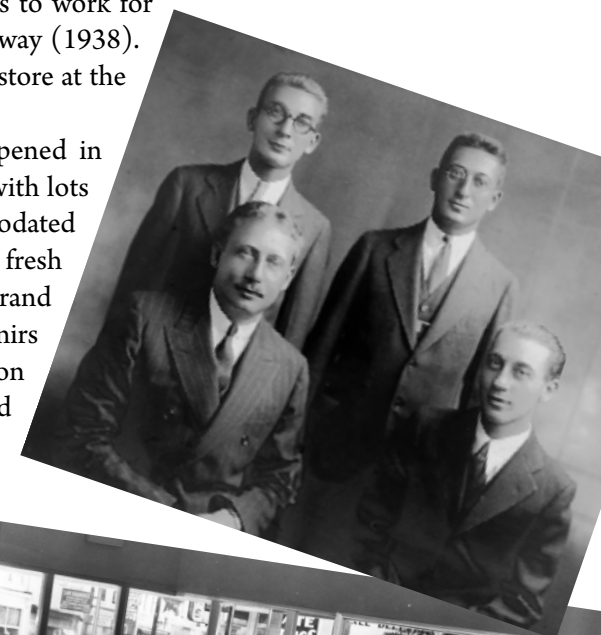
In 1949, one of the most significant stores in the Edward's chain was opened in Charleston at King and Morris Street. The large modern building was launched with lots of fanfare and newspaper coverage. The 15,000 square feet of store space accommodated 34 departments, including a frozen custard bar, fresh baked goods, shoe repair, fresh flowers and plants, and goldfish and pets. More than 15,000 people attended the grand opening. Two thousand five hundred orchids were flown in from Hawaii for souvenirs and were gone in two hours. There had been nothing like this store or its unveiling on the Charleston peninsula before. Lena, now secretary of the organization, opened the doors for the crowd. In attendance were all the Kronsberg brothers: Edward, founder and president; Macey, first vice-president; Meyer, second vice-president; and Milton, treasurer.

All four brothers married and had children: Edward and Hattie Barshay of Charleston had two sons, Avram and Jonathan (Buddy); Meyer and Fay Karp of New York had two sons, Alan Michael and Lawrence; Milton and Frederica (Freddie) Weinberg of Staunton, Virginia, had two daughters and a son, Regina (Gina), Miriam (Mickey), and Abram; and Macey and Adele Jules of Baltimore had three daughters, Rose, Peggy, and Sandra.

The 1950s brought many changes. Macey retired from Edward's and went to Florida to open his own store and work on his MBA. Meyer moved to New York and became Edward's resident New York buyer. Milton, who had started in the business as an assistant store manager and later became a store manager, assumed the position as General Manager of the Distribution Warehouse, the first of which was a small building at 237 East Bay Street in Charleston, across from what is now the Harris Teeter. In 1951, the Kronsbergs opened a store in Byrnes Down, West Ashley, Charleston, and in 1952, launched the first of two stores in Myrtle Beach. In the late '50s, they moved the warehouse from the small building on East Bay Street to a bigger one on Huger Street further up the Charleston peninsula.

Expansion in South Carolina continued apace in the '50s. In 1955, a store was opened in downtown Beaufort. Three years later, the Kronsbergs closed the Byrnes Downs store and opened a much larger store down the street in the new St. Andrews Shopping Center. In 1958, they acquired a store in Georgetown, the first of two, and two years later, they opened a store in Sumter.

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



*Top: Kronsberg brothers, ca. 1937, l to r, Macey, Milton (standing); Edward, Meyer (sitting), courtesy of Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum. Middle: Edward's opening, 1949, corner of King and Morris streets, Charleston, SC, Special Collections, College of Charleston. Bottom: Pinehaven groundbreaking, 1950, l to r, Edward Kronsberg, Milton Kronsberg, and Max Lehrer, Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



parking lot. Maxwell Lehrer of Charleston, who had been an important leader of the Edward's organization for many years, was chosen to manage the shopping center. Although Edward pioneered the new development and was responsible for it, the privately owned corporation did not have sufficient money to invest; rather, the partners raised capital for Pinehaven through a public stock offering.

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

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

Under Avram and Buddy's management, the new South Carolina stores were built even bigger. In 1972, they opened the biggest store to date—60,000 square feet—in Dillon, followed the next year by stores in Florence and Summerville. Edward's stores were described as "junior department stores." During the 1970s, major changes in retail were taking place with the advent of stores such as K-Mart and Wal-Mart—national chains offering similar goods at competitive prices. As public corporations, these big box stores had a lot of money for

expansion. In 1960, Sam Walton had gone public, a concept Edward refused to embrace. Avram recalled his father's attitude in a 2001 interview: "He didn't want to share his business with anybody, and he didn't want anybody telling him what to do, and we never had the capital. We had to expand out of profits, not out of raised money, and so we didn't grow as rapidly."

In spite of national competition, the new executives continued to open additional stores in the Palmetto State. Between 1973 and 1974, they built new stores in Union, Hilton

Head, Camden, Easley, and Mt. Pleasant. Finally, they decided to venture out-of-state—Georgia—opening first in Savannah in 1975 and Brunswick in 1977. Around the same time, there had been a storm in Laurens, South Carolina, and the Edward's store there was inundated, with no flood insurance on the building. All the stock was lost and the store needed a major renovation. The corporation was not able to insure the building because of the flood, and after the renovation, it flooded again. To top it off, 1974 brought a major recession to the country, and interest rates on

borrowing capital for goods and maintenance went to 20 percent. This put extreme pressure on the liquidity of the privately owned stores. It could be said that this was the beginning of the end for Edward's. In spite of everything, expansion continued with the opening of two more stores, in Charles Towne Square, Charleston, and a second store in Beaufort.

In 1977, Big K-Kuhn Brothers of Nashville, Tennessee, purchased Edward's. At the time of the purchase, the chain was doing \$43 million annually, despite the depressed economy and floods.

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



*Edward's store opening, Georgetown, SC, 1958. L to r: Buddy Kronsberg, Rabbi Gerald Wolpe (Emanu-El, Charleston), Abe Fogel, Sylvan Rosen, Hattie Barshay Kronsberg, Erma Levkoff Rosen, and Freddie Weinberg Kronsberg. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

## Lowcountry: Past and Present

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

Lisa Rosamond Thompson's senior thesis, *Lowcountry: Past and Present*, reflects her love of photography and history. Inspired by the works of visual artist Shimon Attie and photographer Sergey Larenkov and her fascination with Jewish culture and community, she searched books, databases, the internet, and JHSSC magazines for vintage photographs

of Jewish storefronts and shopkeepers in Charleston. Once she located an old image, she photographed the same site as it appears today, aiming to capture the same angle as in the old photograph. In the Simons Center photography lab, Lisa used Adobe Photoshop's Layers to superimpose a portion of the historic image on the new photo. Lining up the angles was challenging and required technical skill, while the decision about how to blend past and present offered her the opportunity to select which aspects of each era to feature. Through this method of layering the past on the present, Lisa expresses her appreciation for those who have come before and hopes to spark an interest in history in people who may be otherwise indifferent to it.



Harold Jacobs  
Harold's Cabin  
247 Congress Street



Abe Appel  
Appel Furniture  
520 King Street



Alex Karesh  
Uptown Sample Shoe Store  
545 King Street



## Dale Rosengarten

### Recipient of the Order of the Jewish Palmetto

Join us Saturday evening when we present Dale Rosengarten with the Order of the Jewish Palmetto, an acknowledgement of her tireless work on behalf of the Society. For more than two decades, Dale has been JHSSC's historian par excellence, traveling the state, gathering oral histories, photographs, and artifacts that document Jewish life in South Carolina. Dale's generosity and expertise has been instrumental to our success in researching, recording, and interpreting our family stories through exhibits, panel discussions, and this magazine, assuring that South Carolina Jewry is part of the public discourse on American Jewish history. We are grateful!



Founding curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston Library, Dale Rosengarten developed the landmark exhibition *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*, which opened at the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum in 2002 and traveled nationally for two years. More recently, for the Princeton University Art Museum, she co-curated *By Dawn's Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War*, which had an unexpected second life at the New-York Historical Society under the name *The First Jewish Americans*. For the catalog Dale contributed an essay on Charleston-born artists Theodore Sidney

Moise and Solomon Nunes Carvalho. She currently serves as associate director of the College's Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture.

Dale continues to pursue her other field of scholarship—the African-American tradition of coiled basketry. Her doctoral dissertation (Harvard University, 1997) placed the Lowcountry basket in a global setting and led to a partnership with the Museum for African Art in New York. With co-curator Enid Schildkrout, she produced the exhibit and book *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* (2008), which ended its national tour in 2010 with a six-month run at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of African Art in Washington D.C.



**Stephen J. Whitfield**, Max Richter Professor of American Civilization, Emeritus, Brandeis University, holds a bachelor's degree from Tulane University, a master's from Yale University, and a doctorate in the history of American civilization from Brandeis. Trained as an historian, he first encountered the field of American studies when he had to teach it, beginning in the fall of 1972 at Brandeis.

His curricular and research interests are primarily in the intersection of politics and ideas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whitfield has twice been awarded Fulbright visiting professorships: first at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1983-84) and then at the Catholic University of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium (fall semester 1993). For a semester in 2004, he became the first Allianz Visiting Professor at the Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich to offer courses in American Jewish studies.



**Rabbi Judith Schindler** is the Sklut Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice at Queens University of Charlotte. She was named Rabbi Emerita of Temple Beth El in Charlotte, North Carolina, after serving as Senior Rabbi from 2003–2016 and as Associate Rabbi from 1998–2003. She has contributed chapters and articles to more than ten

books. She co-authored *Recharging Judaism: How Civic Engagement is Good for Synagogues, Jews, and America* (2018), which was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice. Among the many awards she has received, Rabbi Schindler was named Charlotte Woman of the Year in 2011.



**Steven R. Weisman**, vice president for publications and communications at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, previously served as a correspondent, editor, and editorial board member at *The New York Times*. He was awarded the Edward Weintal Prize in 2004 from Georgetown University for his reporting on the run-up to the Iraq War and has served as a *New York Times* bureau

chief in Japan and India, as well as senior diplomatic and senior White House correspondent. His book *The Great Tax Wars: Lincoln to Wilson — How the Income Tax Transformed America* (2002) received the Hillman Prize in 2003. He was editor of *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Portrait in Letters of an American Visionary* (2010). *The Great Tradeoff: Confronting Moral Conflicts in the Era of Globalization* was published in 2016, and *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion* in August 2018.

# Revisiting the Past and Envisioning the Future JHSSC Celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

May 18–19, 2019 ~ Charleston, South Carolina

All events take place in the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, 96 Wentworth St., unless otherwise noted.

## Saturday, May 18

- 11:30 A.M.** Registration and lunch
- 12:00 P.M.** Welcome – Jeffrey Rosenblum
- 12:15** **Layers of History** – Lisa Rosamond Thompson, College of Charleston
- 12:30 – 1:45** **Merchants: The Marrow of the Southern Jewish Experience**  
Stephen J. Whitfield, Max Richter Professor of American Civilization, Emeritus, Brandeis University
- 2:00 – 3:45** **Merchants on the Move**  
Moderator: Katharine Allen, Research & Archives Manager, Historic Columbia, and Lead Researcher, Jewish Merchant Project, JHSSC  
Panelists: Harold Brody, Deborah Lipman Cochelin, Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum, Zachary M. Solomon, Alison Walsh
- 4:00 – 4:30** **A Store at Every Crossroads: Curator's Talk**  
Lynn Robertson, former Executive Director, McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina
- 6:30** **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reception** – Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 205 Calhoun St., third floor  
A celebratory evening featuring a cocktail buffet, the opening of *A Store at Every Crossroads: Documenting the Stories of South Carolina's Jewish Merchants*, and a special awards presentation of the Order of the Jewish Palmetto to Dale Rosengarten

 **NELSON MULLINS**

Reception sponsored by Nelson Mullins

## Sunday, May 19

- 9:00 A.M.** Open JHSSC board meeting—everyone is invited! Bagels will be served
- 10:30–12:30** **American Judaism and Civil Engagement: Our Future Depends Upon It**  
Rabbi Judith Schindler, Sklut Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice, Queens University, Charlotte, NC, and Rabbi Emerita, Temple Beth El, Charlotte, NC
- How Judaism Became an American Religion and What the Future Has in Store**  
Steven R. Weisman, Vice President for Publications and Communications, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington, DC

Be sure to visit *A Store at Every Crossroads* at Addlestone Library, as well as two exhibits on display at the Jewish Studies Center: *Picturing Southern Jews*, Room 305, and *Lowcountry: Past and Present* in the Levin Library, Room 210.

### Hotel reservations

**Francis Marion Hotel**  
387 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403  
877.756.2121

**Special rate:** \$319 per night + tax

To get the special rate, make your reservation by 5:00 P.M. on April 17 and mention Group JHSSC2019.

### Meeting registration

Online at: [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming) By check, payable to JHSSC c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29424  
with Visa, MasterCard, OR Discover, or American Express

**Meeting fee:** \$60 per person

**Questions:** Enid Idelsohn, [idelsohne@cofc.edu](mailto:idelsohne@cofc.edu)

Phone: 843.953.3918 ~ fax: 843.953.7624



# The Brody Brothers: Jewish Retail Giants in South Carolina

by Harold J. Brody, M.D.

Many business careers are stories of father-son relationships with the father originating the business and the sons carrying the torch after the father's death. This is the history of the Brody Brothers Dry Goods Company, founded in 1917 by my grandfather Hyman Joseph Brody (1876–1946) as a simple shoe store in Sumter, South Carolina.

Hyman and his brothers and sisters, children of Mordechai Schuster and Ruth Palevitz Schuster, settled in New York briefly after emigrating from Russia, but within a few years Hyman moved to the South on advice from friends.

Hyman Joseph Brody (née Schuster; family lore has it that "Brody" was on a sign at the New York docks and was adopted because it was easier to pronounce than Schuster), a native of Kletzk, Russia, immigrated to the United States in 1906. His wife, Bessie Lampert Krashnischelsky Brody (1882–1967), immigrated in 1913 with their children Sam, Raymond, William, Leo, Abram, and Jake. After Hyman and Bessie reunited, they moved to Anderson, South Carolina. Over time, the family grew, adding four boys—Reuben, Julius Samuel ("Sammy"), Morris, and Alex—and one girl, Ruth.

Hyman set up shop as a cobbler and shoemaker when the Brodys arrived in Anderson in 1913. Five years later they moved to the Midlands town of Sumter, South Carolina, and settled in what the family called the "Big House" at 10 South Washington Street. The Brody home was walking distance from Liberty Street, where Hyman established a shoe store, and near Temple Sinai, which had been built in 1913—the congregation's second sanctuary, still standing today.

Convinced that Sumter was destined to grow and that its future was bright, Hyman did his utmost to expand the business. The shoe store became Brody's Department Store, located at 8 West Liberty Street; in 1929, its floor space was tripled to include 10 and 12 West Liberty Street. All the Brody

brothers worked in the store and contributed to its success. The two oldest siblings, Sam (1901–1986) and Raymond (1902–1992), helped their father and stayed in retailing for their lifetimes. With financial support from his brothers, William (1904–1974) moved to Philadelphia and became a physician.

Throughout his life, he remained in close touch with the family, providing medical advice when needed. In 1928, Leo (1906–2003) moved to Kinston, North Carolina, and established a second Brody's Department Store. The Kinston store collaborated with the Sumter store in buying, selling, and public relations as the Brody brothers built their enterprises.

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



In 1938, Hyman Brody retired from the business because of his and his wife's poor health. The same year, the Sumter business was reorganized and incorporated as Brody Brothers Dry Goods Company, with Leo, Abram, Jake, and Reuben as officers. Brody policy, according to the "Employee Handbook of the Capitol Dept. Store," was to "sell merchandise as reasonably as possible," "to give honest value," and "to satisfy its customers." The rapid expansion and phenomenal growth of the company proved the soundness of this policy.

Also in 1938, Brody's, Inc., opened its doors in Greenville, North Carolina, about 30 miles northeast of Kinston. Leo got the store up and running and, at age 21, Ruth took over until Morris (1918–2011) returned from World War II. His son Hyman ("HJ") worked with him in the late 1970s, after his graduation from the University of Pennsylvania.

Julius Samuel (Sammy) (1916–1994) joined Leo in Kinston after serving in the world war. Sammy was not cut out for retailing but became very successful in radio/TV and the soft drink industry; his philanthropy is recognized to this day. Leo, Sammy, and Morris were instrumental in establishing the medical school at East Carolina University in Greenville, renamed the Brody School of Medicine in their honor.

Abram (1909–1983), my father, married Sara Pearlstine from Olar, South Carolina, in 1946, shortly after the death of his father, and he settled down to manage the shoe and men's departments of The Capitol in Sumter. Of the other Brody brothers in the retail business, Reuben (1914–1964) managed the women's department, Jake (1911–1999) handled physical renovations, maintenance, and housewares, and Leo managed the Kinston store, which carried similar merchandise as The Capitol.

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

Ruth Brody Greenberg (1920–2012), the only daughter of Hyman and Bessie Brody, married Dr. Stephen A. Greenberg and moved to Florence, South Carolina, 40 miles from Sumter.

*Above: l to r, Rabbi J. Aaron Levy, Harold Brody, and Abram Brody at the dedication of the Hyman Brody Educational Building, Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC, 1956. Morris Brody's confirmation certificate, Temple Sinai, Sumter, SC, 1932. Facing page: The Capitol Department Store, Sumter, SC, ca. 1959. Hyman Brody and his sons, l to r, back: Jake, Leo, Sammy, Abram, Reuben; middle: William, Raymond, Hyman, Sam; front: Alex, Morris, 1930s. Hyman and Bessie Brody. Collection of Harold Brody, courtesy of Sumter County Museum.*

She was a constant presence in the Sumter stores and, during World War II, she ran the



department store in Greenville while her brothers served in the military. When she wasn't tending to her two sons, Philip and Stuart—both physicians who have been active in and served as board members of JHSSC—she was a stalwart for her brothers.

The Brodys raised their families and contributed materially to the growing Jewish community of Sumter by constructing a religious school adjacent to Temple Sinai, dedicated in 1956 as the Hyman Brody Educational Building.

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

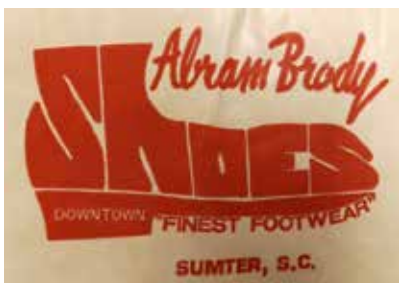
After Reuben's untimely death in 1963, the Brody family sold The Capitol Department Store to Alden's of Chicago.





Reuben's son David, born and raised in Sumter, joined the North Carolina retailing operation after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania.

Abram continued to operate a shoe department within the newly-owned Capitol. When The Capitol relocated to Jessamine Mall in 1980, the shoe department remained and became Abram Brody's Shoes at 16 South Main Street. In 1983, on Abram's death, the old Capitol store was renovated, and the shoe store became part of the new Brody's On Main Department Store, managed by Alex and his son Mark. The store carried a higher priced line of women's wear than the Brody's Department store. Brodys on Main closed after Mark departed Sumter about 1988. Abram Brody Shoes remained for another ten years—still



owned by the Brodys—and was sold around 1999, ending the reign of the Brody retail giants of Sumter.

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

## The Furchgott Stores, since 1866

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

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

After a brief few years of acculturation in New York, they moved to Charleston in 1865 as the American Civil War ended, where they were joined by their brother Leopold (1852–1928).

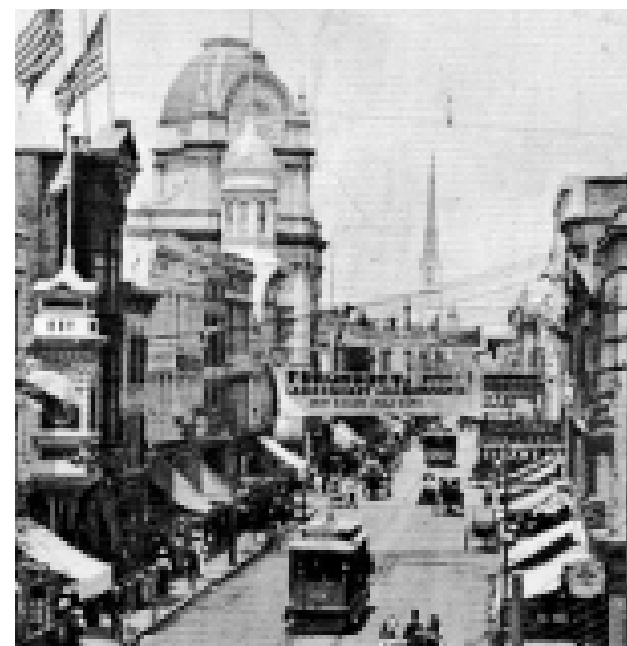
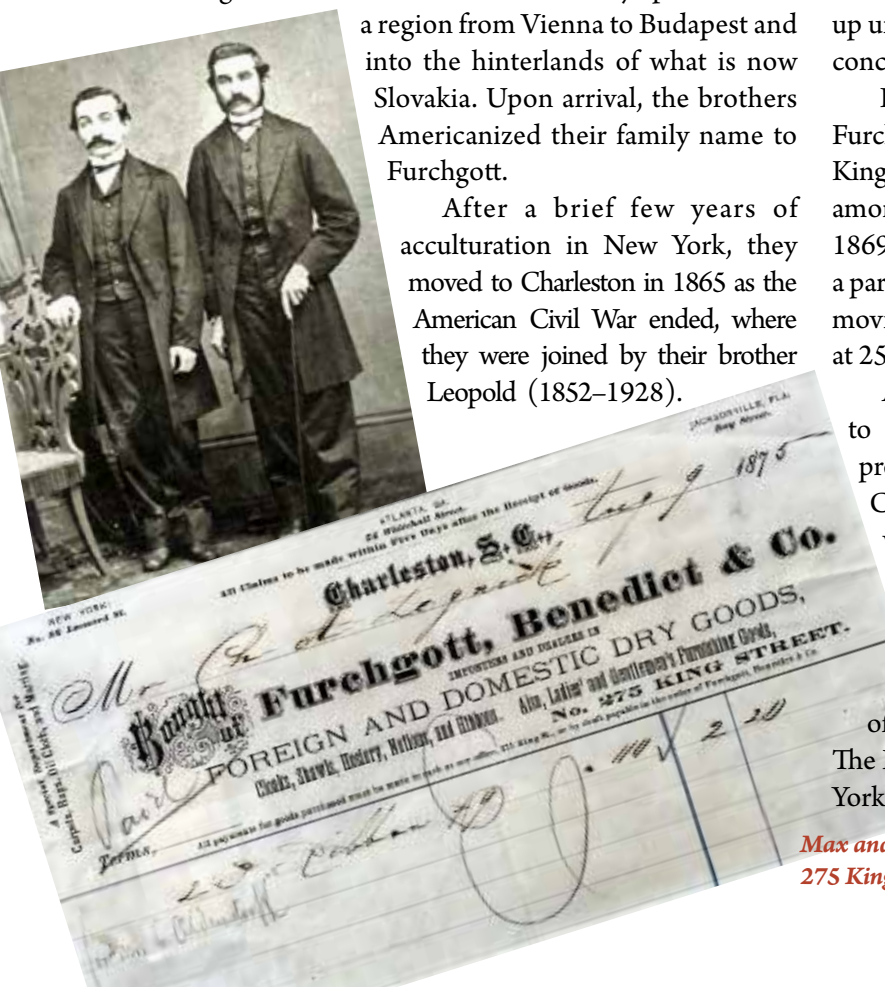
The turbulence in central Europe at that time had been volatile as well, so it is curious that their father, Abraham Isaac, and his wife, Marie (née Herzog) Fürchtgott, saw all three of their boys emigrate nearly at once, leaving them with their four daughters in Nitra. America was a land of opportunity, and Charleston, up until a few decades before the Civil War, boasted its largest concentration of Jews.

In 1866, the brothers opened their first dry goods store, Furchgott & Bro., near the southwest corner of Calhoun and King streets, probably living over the initial store and moving among three locations near that corner in a four-year period. In 1869, Charles Benedict (1848–1909) of Jacksonville became a partner, and the business became Furchgott, Benedict & Co., moving twice again to a prestigious location further downtown at 259 King Street.

Also in 1869, Leopold moved to Jacksonville, Florida, to establish another store with Benedict at the equally prominent location on Bay Street facing the St. Johns River. Charles Benedict was well established in Jacksonville. He was born in Austria and probably had family ties to the Fürchtgotts in Nitra, which is only 80 miles from Vienna, or possibly could have met them through the Masons, with which Max Furchgott was very involved.

In 1879, Morris Kohn created a New York buying office for the firm and provided additional financial backing. The Furchgott brothers' maternal uncle Philip Herzog of New York was also a silent partner and backer of the business. The

*Max and Herman Fürchtgott, 1860s. Receipt, Furchgott, Benedict & Co., 275 King Street, 1875. Courtesy of the Furchgott/Furchtgott family.*



largest earthquake ever to take place on the east coast, with almost all the buildings in the city either flattened or damaged. Max Furchgott led a number of major charitable efforts to help with the recovery, but he moved his family to New York for several years. There the children attended religious school at Temple Emanu-El.

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

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

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

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

firm became Kohn, Furchgott, & Benedict (Kohn became a partner in 1881). Kohn was also from Austria with the same likely connections to the Fürchtgotts as Benedict. Around 1875, a store was briefly opened in Atlanta, but was sold in 1878 to the Keely Company.

Webb's *Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida of 1885* said of the firm: “Their amount of sales mark this as one of the largest dry-goods houses in the South. . . . All members of the firm are practical men in the business, and are courteous, painstaking gentlemen; and, it need not be added, honorable, reliable business men, of which Jacksonville and Charleston have every reason to be proud.”

Max Furchgott returned almost yearly to Europe on buying trips and to visit family. In fact, his first two sons, Herbert and Lionel, died in 1882 in the fifth cholera pandemic while visiting Nitra. They are buried in the Jewish cemetery there. Tragedy didn't end for the Furchgott family and its businesses.

They also lived through the devastating Charleston earthquake of 1886. It was the





Following the 1921 death of Max Furchgott, the sons took over M. Furchgott & Sons. The Charleston store lasted through the first few years of the Great Depression with Melvin Furchgott at its helm. His brothers opened smaller stores elsewhere, Arthur first in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and then briefly in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and Oscar later in Florence, South Carolina.



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

In Jacksonville, Furchgotts of Florida thrived under Leopold's leadership. He moved to New York, retaining the position as head of the company and passing the management

to his brother-in-law, Frederick Meyerheim. The main store in Jacksonville was six stories tall, with 60,000 square feet of floor space (they once expanded to include the building next door). By the 1940s, it was known as the largest department store in the Southeast. The Jacksonville business also had three mall locations in the 1960s and '70s and a location in Daytona Beach, all of which were closed by the mid-1980s. The main store building is still standing as a testament to the heyday of Jacksonville's downtown and to the Furchgott family businesses.

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

*by Deborah Lipman Cochelin*

Long before Jews arrived in today's northern Berkeley County, the area south of the Santee River served as a refuge from religious persecution for a portion of the French Protestants actively recruited by the English

Proprietors of Carolina after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The Huguenots, as they came to be called, some of whom had been wealthy landowners in France, were drawn to Carolina by the promise of religious freedom and large estates, advertised in glowing terms by the Lords Proprietor, who envisioned profits from trade generated by an agricultural colony. By the mid-1700s, dozens of rice plantations, cultivated by enslaved Africans, had been established along the Santee.

In this region, about 50 miles north of Charleston, a town grew up around historic St. Stephen's

Episcopal Church, erected in 1767, now a national landmark. In 1871, the town was incorporated under the parish name of St. Stephens, which was officially changed to St. Stephen in 1952.

Northern Berkeley County has remained rural since the days of the Huguenot planters. Today, St. Stephen and nearby towns are economically depressed and thinly populated. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, the region profited from South Carolina's extensive network of railroads. Sawmills sprang up near rail lines, and Charleston merchants saw opportunities to build shops in towns like Moncks Corner, about 30 miles from Charleston, and Bonneau, another 10 miles farther north. According to Maxwell Clayton Orvin's history of Moncks Corner, the names of Jewish merchants who set up shop in Berkeley County just before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century include Seligh (Zelig) Behrmann (whose nephew was Ben Barron, founder of Barron's Department Store in Moncks Corner), Sol Lurie, Louis Glick, Sol Goldberg, Mendel Dumas, Frank Read, Isaac Read, and Abe Read.

Not until about 1900 did the first known Jewish merchant

settle in St. Stephens. Gus Rittenberg (brother of Sam Rittenberg and my great-great-uncle) arrived in the town with a young wife, Henrietta (Hennie) Behrmann, who had emigrated in 1893 from Russia, and three very young children, Anita, Corinne, and Walter. In the 1910 census, Gus was identified as a merchant with a general store, and the number of his children had doubled, now including Morris (Maurice), Arthur, and Rose. Also listed as members of the Rittenberg household and workers in the store were two brothers, Herman and Isadore Sanditen, Russian immigrants related to Gus's sister's husband, Samuel Sanders (Sanditen).

Around 1910, the enterprising Gus Rittenberg built a sawmill on his land not far north of St. Stephens Station, on the west side of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad's track, with a spur that would enable him to ship finished lumber to growing markets. On August 6, 1912, a train of passenger cars running south went dead on the track about 40 feet from the mill, idle at the time. A local train from Florence soon came behind and began to push. Cinders from the laboring engine were churned up by the wind and blown into the lumber yard. Sawdust and waste lumber caught fire and spread to the mill, causing much destruction. Rittenberg prevailed in his lawsuit against the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and was awarded damages for the destroyed mill, inventory, and machinery.

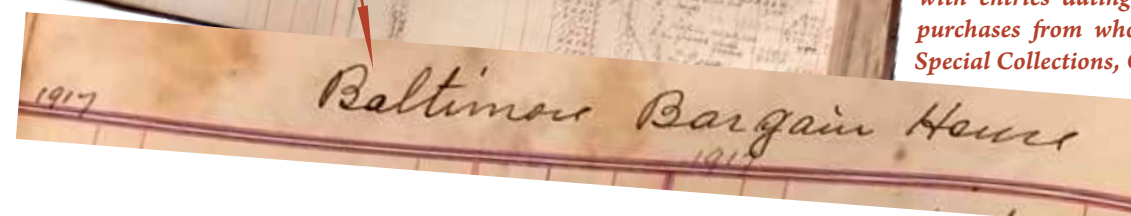
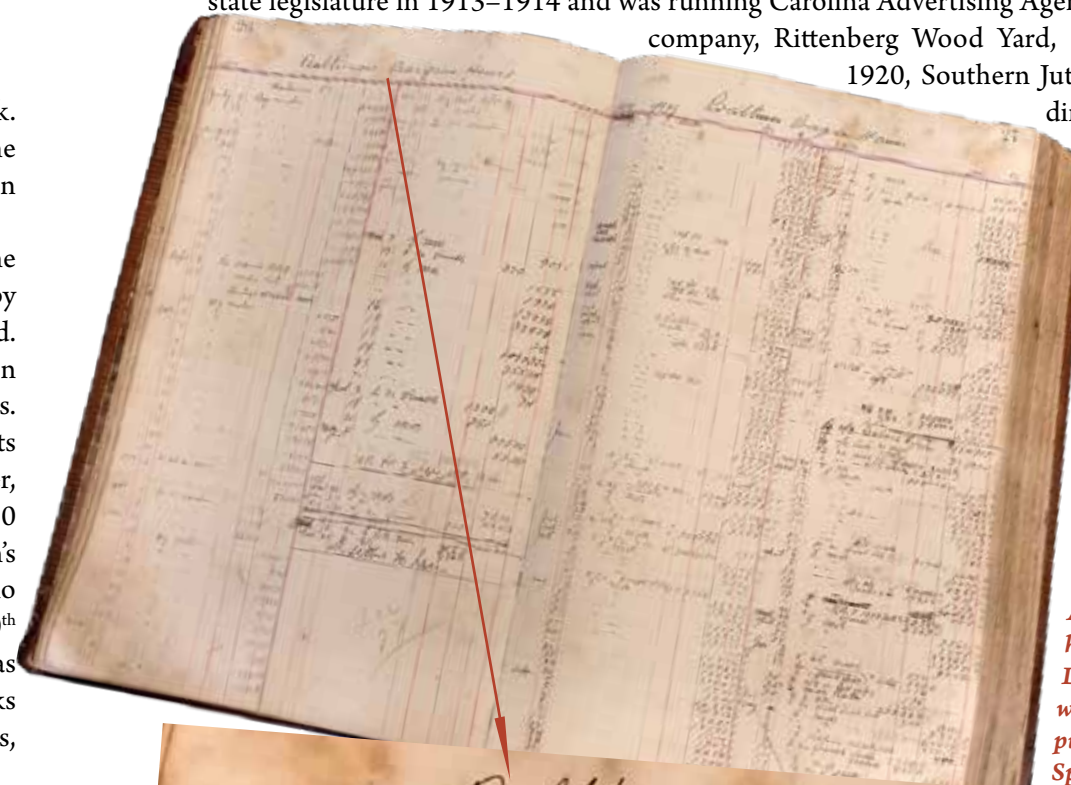
Disaster from the railroads struck again early on a Sunday afternoon in March 1918. Shortly after a freight train of 36 loaded cars passed through St. Stephens, a fire was discovered on the roof of a house, which jumped to adjoining buildings and burned until most of the row was destroyed, including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

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

1920, Southern Jute and Rittenberg Wood disappear from the city directory, and subsequent listings note that Gus is a general merchandiser and merchant, perhaps a reference to his St. Stephens store. He died in 1924 in a car accident near Moncks Corner.

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

*Above: Wilfred E. Lipman, the author's father, with his parents, Sara Sanders Lipman and Max David Lipman, ca. 1928. Left: Gus Rittenberg's store ledger, with entries dating to 1916, includes pages tracking purchases from wholesaler Baltimore Bargain House. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*





Max Lipman, my paternal grandfather, was working as a bookkeeper for Mendel Dumas in Bonneau when someone suggested that he meet a young lady teaching at the public school in St. Stephens.

The day he visited the school, however, the teacher was a substitute. He peered into the schoolhouse window thinking the substitute was the young lady he was to meet. Max asked her for a date, and the rest is history. Max Lipman and Sara Sanders were married from 1922 until Sara's death in April 1981. Their wedding was officiated by Rabbi Jacob Raisin of K. K. Beth Elohim in Gus Rittenberg's home on Huger Street in Charleston, as recollected by a very young guest, Henry Rittenberg (1918–2012), son of Sam Rittenberg. During the time the Rittenbergs lived in St. Stephens, it is believed they kept the Sabbath and observed other Jewish traditions.

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

Arthur also worked at Paul's general merchandise store. Paul's children Sallie Kate and Robert shared with me their memories of the store and growing up in St. Stephens, as did town historian Elizabeth Carroll. Arthur stationed himself most of the time on the bench near the meat case. If someone needed something from the locked furniture store on the north corner of the block, he escorted the customer to the building. Although Arthur never married, he showed affection for children, letting the Read siblings ride along with him in his pickup truck when he delivered groceries or furniture, and giving many local children rides on the handcart used to carry purchases to a customer's car. Since the Reads



did not have a television until the late 1950s or early '60s, their children watched shows on TV sets in Arthur Lipman's furniture store.

In the 1930s, Arthur purchased a cottage at Folly Beach, where the Reads and other St. Stephens residents would stay during the summer; my family stayed there in the late 1950s. Arthur's Sunday visits to my Lipman grandparents on St. Margaret Street in Charleston during the winters of the 1960s brought such delight as he swept through the front door with his great shock of tumbling white hair with a slight curl. He greeted us in his Gullah-Geechee accent, with his ever-present broad smile and cheerful countenance, while toting a bushel basket of sweet potatoes or other seasonal vegetables. I remember the earthy smell clinging to his large overcoat, wafting in with the cold air that followed him into the living room.

Spanning the decades, Arthur's exhaustive and selfless contributions to important town affairs garnered him the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Public Service Award in 1973. He was responsible for organizing the town's fire department in the early 1930s, served

as the fire chief and water works commissioner, acted as mayor pro tem for numerous terms, and functioned as the acting mayor to complete unexpired terms of office. Arthur was a charter member of the St. Stephens Lions Club and a member of the St. Stephens American Legion Post 62 and Mt. Hope Lodge 128. His health declined in the 1970s, and he died in August 1979 at the age of 86. Although his grandfather had been a rabbi in Wurzburg, Germany, Arthur was never an observant Jew. However, his character and deeds epitomized the Jewish concept *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) and were memorialized in his epitaph, "Gentle, Kind, Beloved."

Frank Read (1868–1940) arrived in America from Latvia through Ellis Island. The original family name was



*Above: Deborah Lipman on the lap of her great-grandmother, Rachel Rittenberg Sanders, mid-1950s. Special Collections, College of Charleston. Top: This M. D. Lipman sign is on display in the Berkeley County Museum, Santee Canal State Park, Moncks Corner, SC. Photo by Deborah Cochelin, 2018.*

spelled "Redt" but was legally changed to Read after the ladies from Pinopolis, who had been teaching him English, insisted that "Redt" was not the proper way to spell his name, based on his European pronunciation. Frank married Fredericka (Fanny) Lief (1868–1958) and later brought over his Latvian-born son, Daniel, and his wife's mother, Dina Lief. Four more children were born to the Reads in South Carolina: Riva, Ludvig (Ludie), Joseph (Joe), and Paul.

In 1886, Frank Read and his brother Abe built and opened a large store on the south side of West Main Street in Moncks Corner. It was about a block long, where shoes, clothing, and groceries were retailed; mules were sold from the yard. Since there were no undertakers in Moncks Corner, Frank also sold caskets, a business practice that Paul Read continued from his store in St. Stephens until at least the early 1960s.

Their sister, Esther Read (1879–1949), who married Mendel Davis Dumas, of Dvinsk, Lithuania, arrived in Moncks Corner about 1890. (Dumas operated a store in Bonneau before moving to Charleston, where he went into business with Frank Read.) In November 1898, their younger brother, Isaac Read, joined them, and Frank built a large two-story frame house, now known as the Coastal Hotel, a short distance from the present railroad station.

Frank and Fanny's son Paul was born around 1905; he lived in Moncks Corner until the family moved to Charleston, where he attended the High School of Charleston and The Citadel. After venturing into some real estate deals in Florida, Paul was ready to settle down. Upon returning to South Carolina, he met Sephra Savitz at a social event where it was love at first sight. Sephra, whose family were merchants in St. Matthews and Columbia, had been the roommate of Paul's brother Joe's wife, Florence Panitz.

In the early 1920s, Franklin Turner of Turner Lumber Company, Louisiana, opened the Santee River Hardwood Mill in St. Stephens. It drew many workers to the town, whose population tripled by 1930. This boom may have influenced Paul to build his first store, with a residence on the second floor, in 1928, the year he and Sephra were married. The store burned down but was rebuilt in 1931, coinciding with the birth of their first child, Robert. This time, the residence was built behind the store, as was a warehouse for storing supplies and dry goods. The Read family expanded with the birth of two more children, Frank and Sallie Kate.

Paul and Sephra Read managed to maintain their Jewish traditions while raising their family in St. Stephens. Sallie Kate recollects going to Sunday school at KKBE, which gave her parents the opportunity to meet with Charleston's Jewish wholesalers who were open on Sundays.

Paul sold everything from farm supplies to groceries, clothing, and fabric. Robert remembers the big cookie jar, from which he filched cookies when his mother was not looking. He recalls his mother working full time in the store and his father breaking up dog fights with a broom. During the Depression, a truck transporting slot machines broke down on the highway

near St. Stephens. Paul helped finance repairs of the truck by purchasing the slot machines. He installed them in his store and, for some time, he paid his clerks using money that was deposited into the slot machines.

Even in the 1930s and '40s, St. Stephens, along with other towns in Berkeley County, was described as the "wild, wild West." Shootings occurred often, sometimes on Main Street in front of Paul Read's store. One time Sephra was so annoyed

by the shooting that Paul went into the street and asked the gunmen to stop firing because it was disturbing his wife. Incredibly, they obliged, stopping long enough for Sephra to leave for home, before resuming their shootout. Time stood still in St. Stephens until at least the 1950s, when a vacant lot next to the store accommodated customers needing a place to leave their mules, horses, and wagons.

Christmastime was always a memorable and exceptionally busy time for the Reads. Since they could not stop working for lunch, their cook brought platters of sandwiches to the store. Family members who were merchants in Columbia and St. Matthews came to St. Stephens on Christmas day for a big dinner and fireworks.

The main street in St. Stephen (as it is spelled today) may be a shell of what it was when these pioneering Jewish merchants had a presence, but the street named Lipman Drive and the annual Arthur Lipman Day are reminders of their legacy. The town still is notable for grand houses on its outskirts and the historic church. An Army Corp of Engineers facility called the St. Stephen Powerhouse grows sweetgrass for use by Lowcountry basket makers. Berkeley County's economy is on the rise again, this time with 21<sup>st</sup> century industries, such as Google in Moncks Corner, and J. W. Aluminum and defense contractor W International in Goose Creek.



*Former location of Paul Read's store, Main Street, St. Stephen, SC. Photo by Deborah Cochelin, 2018.*



# The Sam Solomon Company

by Kate Stillman, Martha Stillman Silverman,  
Ellen Jacobson Terry, and Marilyn Solomon Brilliant

*Sam Solomon emigrated from Russia in 1902 when he was 17 years old. Seven years later, he opened his own business in Charleston, South Carolina. Eventually, that business grew to 11 stores in four states and became known for pioneering a novel retail format and mounting the first legal challenge to South Carolina's Sunday closing laws.*

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

In 1909, at the age of 24, Sam opened the business that would become Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers at 526 King Street. Sam distributed general merchandise to retail outlets, focusing on dry goods and toys. Although it had several addresses on King Street over the years, by the 1940s Sam's store was located at 484 King Street. In 1912, Sam married Sophie Prystowsky, who had wide family connections in the city; Sophie's father owned E. Prystowsky and Sons—Mike Sam and Jake's at 525–527 King Street (later the Father–Son Store).

As with many Jewish businesses at the time, the entire family was involved in the operation of Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers. Sam and Sophie's five children—Naomi, Aaron, Muriel, Frances, and Melvin—all helped in the store and took turns staffing the register.

Sam Solomon was known for his compassion, generosity, and warmth. *The Charleston News and Courier* printed a special tribute on the editorial page after his death, declaring that he was “a kind and generous man who did not spare himself in helping others.”

As his own business thrived, Sam also helped those who

were just starting out, especially newcomers to the city. He extended credit and loans on generous terms and offered moral support and material assistance to many who would later become successful Jewish merchants. Traveling salesmen knew that they could find a minyan at the store on King Street and enjoy Sabbath dinner at the Solomon home on St. Philip Street. Sam and Sophie invited so many guests to their beach house on Sullivan's Island for Sunday night supper—including Jewish servicemen stationed in Charleston during World War II—that they had to serve supper in multiple shifts. Among many other mitzvahs, Sam regularly visited the sick in the Jewish community.

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

In 1947, Sam Solomon opened Regal's Department Store at 501 King Street. He opened a second location on Reynolds Avenue in North Charleston. In 1960, both locations were sold.

Sam Solomon died on February 8, 1954, and ownership of the store passed to his two sons, Melvin and Aaron, and to his son-in-law, Joseph Stillman.

## Novel Business Format

In November 1953, just months before Sam's death, the store moved to a modern, custom-built, air-conditioned building at 338–340 East Bay Street. The business became known as Sam Solomon Company and changed from a wholesale to a retail discount operation and catalog showroom, while continuing to serve retailers in the Carolinas and Georgia. In 1962, the East Bay facility more



*The Solomon family, l to r: Sam, Aaron, Frances, Naomi, Melvin, Muriel, and Sophie, ca. 1924. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

than doubled in size to 50,000-plus square feet.

Retail customers at Sam Solomon Company had to have a membership card to enter and shop, but there was no charge for the card. Operating on a membership basis allowed the store to offer discounted prices. The store sold broad lines of nationally advertised and other brand merchandise, including jewelry, electronics, small appliances, toys, sporting goods, housewares, giftware, health and beauty aids and, until 1968, clothing.

A popular feature of the store was its large color catalog, which grew to roughly 500 pages. Sam Solomon Company was a founding member of the Merchandisers' Association, Inc., an organization based in Chicago and composed of similar catalog showroom businesses. The association members cooperated in the preparation of a standard catalog used by all members and customized for each business.

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

## Challenge to the Sunday Blue Laws

In April 1962, a law restricting sales and other business operations on Sunday became effective in South Carolina—

commonly known as the Sunday Blue Laws. Since its founding, Sam Solomon Company had closed on Saturday in observance of the Jewish Sabbath and had been open on Sunday.

On Sunday, May 6, 1962, and again the next Sunday, the chief of police and a detective came to the store and presented an arrest warrant/summons for Aaron Solomon, who was identified as the manager of the store. The warrant charged

Aaron with a general violation of the Sunday Blue Laws and for selling two baby strollers. Because the parties recognized that the violation was intended to be a test case of the Blue Laws, Aaron was placed only under “technical arrest.”

A local court convicted Aaron on both counts and fined the store \$50 for each violation. Sam Solomon Company quickly appealed the conviction to the South Carolina Supreme Court, arguing, among other points, that the Blue Laws violated the religious freedom guarantees of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and similar provisions in the South Carolina state constitution. As Aaron told the press: “We feel certain it was not the intention of the lawmakers to force us to profane our own

Sabbath and observe someone else's.”

In 1965, the South Carolina Supreme Court upheld the conviction, holding that the Blue Laws did not further Christian beliefs or discriminate against other faiths, but merely established a uniform day of rest for all citizens.

Sam Solomon Company then appealed the state ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the court dismissed the case



*Above: Frances Solomon Jacobson (l) and Muriel Solomon Stillman (identity of men unknown) in front of Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers, King Street, Charleston, SC, date unknown. Collection of Kate Stillman. Below: Sam Solomon Wholesale Jobbers, thought to be 484 King Street, Charleston, SC, ca. 1940. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*







claiming, in effect, that the question was a matter of state law (although three judges disagreed). Sam Solomon Company paid the fines and continued to close on Saturdays for as long as Aaron Solomon remained with the business.

### Expansion throughout the Southeast

In 1971, the business opened a second store on Rivers Avenue in North Charleston. This store was roughly double the size of the store on East Bay Street. The following year, Sam Solomon Company went public, with Melvin Solomon as its president.

By 1981, Sam Solomon Company operated 11 stores in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. After several months reorganizing under the protection of Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code, Sam Solomon Company merged with Service Merchandise in 1982. At the time, Service Merchandise was the second largest operator of catalog showrooms in the country.

*Clockwise from bottom right: profit chart, courtesy of Kate Stillman. Sam Solomon Company, 338–340 East Bay Street, ca. 1962. In the foreground, 1 to r, Joseph Stillman, Melvin Solomon, and Aaron Solomon. Sam Solomon promotional shoe polish. Page from the 1960–61 Sam Solomon Company catalog. Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

## What Makes a Merchant?

by Mark Swick, Executive Director, JHSSC

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

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

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

JHSSC has been membership-supported throughout the organization's proud history. As we look towards the next 25 years, our financial success rests on creating a robust endowment and sustaining our Pillar memberships—JHSSC members who commit \$5,000 over five years—so that in 2044 we can celebrate 50 years of success. I hope you will join us this May in Charleston to commemorate the Society, our achievements, and the many, many people who have helped us arrive at this happy time.

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for more information.