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“From
Kaluszyn
to
Charleston”

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THE
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HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
OF
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On the cover: Wittel (née Bryztwa or Solomon) Altman with her children, youngest in front: Israel, Isadore, and Molly (m. Henry Gotbeter). Back row, l to r: Jeanette (m. George Goldberg), Rose (m. Herman Cooper), Mildred (m. Zelik Levy), Sarah (m. Edmond Haas), and Sam, in Kaluszyn, ca. 1920. Wittel's husband, Charles Altman, like Wittel and their children, was born in Kaluszyn. He immigrated to America first and later sent for his family, a reunion that was delayed by WW I. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries. See also page 26.

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WE WANT YOUR PHOTOS!

Do you have roots in Kaluszyn, Poland? Or a connection to the Kalushiner Society? Help us expand our Kaluszyn archives. Share your photos and documents with us. Maybe your family will be on the cover of this magazine one day!

Letter from the President



Historical Society of South Carolina to lead these next two years. Thank you to Alex for his leadership the past two years.

Last fall, our meeting was held in Columbia to celebrate the publication of *Kugels & Collards* (USC Press), authored by Rachel Barnett and Lyssa Harvey. At the Friday evening book launch, we enjoyed a beautiful, bountiful, and tasty reception with recipes from the cookbook.

Saturday's keynote speaker, author, and University of North Carolina Professor Emeritus Marcie Cohen Ferris, fascinated us with her presentation about the history of southern Jewish foodways. A panel discussion among contributors to *Kugels & Collards* and a presentation about Jewish baking by author Anne Byrn whetted our appetites. Fortunately, a deli lunch with all the fixings, homemade baked goods by local bakers, and a delicious reception featuring South Carolina favorites took care of that. For those of you who do not know me, I love food, and the weekend was both a gastronomic and historic success. Food and history—two of my favorite things!

Special thanks are due to Joel Samuels, dean of the University of South Carolina's College of Arts & Sciences, and Saskia Coenen Snyder, director of Jewish Studies, for graciously hosting the meeting on the USC campus.

Welcome! Thanks to immediate past president Dr. Alex Cohen, the JHSSC Board, and the team of Rachel Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director; Enid Idelsohn, Director of Operations; and Alyssa Neely, JHSSC Administrator and Publications Specialist, I have been given an extremely healthy Jewish

Historic Columbia, the JHSSC's *Kugels & Collards* collaborator, also partnered with us at the meeting. Tours of the Columbia Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery were led by Historic Columbia researcher Eric Friendly. Many on the tour had no idea this burial ground was established in 1822, nor that two of Columbia's earliest mayors were Jewish and interred in the cemetery. Dr. Doyle Stevick, director of the Anne Frank House at USC, presented an excellent lecture and discussion about Anne Frank and her family. The tour of the exhibits following his lecture was truly an unforgettable experience.

I hope to see everyone at our next conference, May 17–19, 2024, in Charleston. It will be a different experience from our fall program, focusing on Jewish immigrants from Kaluszyn, Poland, who organized the Kalushiner Society, a *landmanshaft*, in Charleston in the early 1900s. Although I grew up in South Carolina, and my grandparents were immigrants from Europe, this will be my first exposure to the Kaluszyn story. As a child, I enjoyed hearing my grandmother talk about the Jews of different European countries and how many ended up in Walterboro and throughout the South Carolina Lowcountry. Now I will get to hear from scholars and descendants about this southern Jewish immigrant story.

We will begin the weekend with a Shabbat service and dinner at Brith Sholom Beth Israel. I cannot think of a better way to start our conference.

See you in Charleston.

Steve Savitz



The baked goods table at the *Kugels & Collards* book launch, October 6, 2023, at the Seibels House & Gardens, Columbia, SC.



The *Kugels & Collards* team gathered the same weekend at Lyssa Harvey's home in Columbia for a celebratory dinner (l to r): Marcie Cohen Ferris, Robin Waites, Dale Rosengarten, Aurora Bell, Rachel Barnett, and Lyssa Harvey.

Kaluszyn: “A Small Wooden Township Full of Jews”

by Alyssa Neely

“The only thing one can say about Kaluszyn is that it is a small wooden township full of Jews,” reports Dr. Nathan Michael Gelber, when quoting an old history book on Poland.¹ Gelber (1891–1966) was a historian and author of a number of chapters in *yizkor* books,² including the “History of the Jews in Kaluszyn,” published in 1961 in *Sefer Kalushin*.

Yizkor, or memorial, books were typically written, compiled, and published by groups of former residents—some survivors of the Holocaust—intent on documenting Jewish life in their Eastern European city or town of origin prior to the decimation of its Jewish population during World War II. The New York Public Library’s collection of *yizkor* books, most of which are digitized, totals well over 700 volumes. Those that are scanned, including Kaluszyn’s, can be viewed online at digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/yizkor-book-collection#/?tab=navigation.

Written in Yiddish, *Sefer Kalushin* was published in Tel Aviv by Kalushiner societies in Israel, the U.S., Argentina, France, and “other countries.” Less than half the chapters in the 545-page volume have been translated to English. JewishGen, Inc., and the Yizkor Book Project have



made the translations of these valuable primary sources available at jewishgen.org/yizkor/. The site also offers guidance for those who would like to set up a translation project for any of the remaining chapters and a donor page for those who wish to provide monetary support for a translation project.

Located on the main road between today’s Warsaw, Poland, and Brest, Belarus, the village of Kaluszyn dates to as early as the 15th century, based on information gathered for the publication of *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland* by Yad Vashem in 1989.³ Sources are vague as to when Jews first made the town home. The entry for Kaluszyn in *Encyclopedia Judaica* claims they lived in Kaluszyn soon after its founding. In the chapter titled “Towards a New Era” in *Sefer Kalushin*, the author, Moshe Frucht, shares lore passed down about an old wooden *shul* that had existed for 400 years before it was destroyed by fire at the end of the 19th century. If this report of a centuries-old synagogue is true, it places a Jewish population in Kaluszyn in the 1500s.⁴

Indeed, by the mid-13th century, Jews fleeing persecution in western Europe were moving eastward into Polish lands, where the economy and trade were picking up.

1. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal009.html.

2. See pages.uoregon.edu/rkimble/Mirweb/FirstChapterYizkorBook.html.

3. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol4_00399.html.

4. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal037.html#f42-1r.

In 1264, Jewish residents in the town of Kalisz were the first to benefit from formal grants of privileges and protections. With an influx of Jews in the following decades, the rights were extended throughout Poland in 1334. By the mid-1500s, a substantial Jewish population was just one of many cultural groups that had settled throughout the Polish Commonwealth.⁵ Some were allowed to self-govern; the Jewish communities did so for about two centuries under an administrative system called the Council of Four Lands.⁶

Gelber cites evidence of a significant Jewish population in Kaluszyn in the form of payment of a head tax by Jewish residents of Kaluszyn to the *kehilla* or Jewish community council of nearby Wegrow, as early as 1714. In the 1700s, Wegrow’s Jewish officials provided “necessary religious services” to the smaller Jewish populations in the area.

Well positioned between Warsaw and Brest, Kaluszyn became a center of commerce, like many of the towns and small cities owned by Polish nobles. In these Eastern European shtetls, referred to as market towns, Jews tended to comprise a plurality of the population and lived clustered near the market.⁷ By 1764, it appears Kaluszyn had become a *kehilla*, a center of Judaism for its residents, plus 33 small villages and farms, to make up a total Jewish population of 566.⁸

5. See britannica.com/topic/history-of-Poland/The-states-of-the-Jagiellonians and sztetl.org.pl/en/glossary/kalisz-privilege-1264.

6. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal009.html#f1r.

7. See yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl.

8. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal009.html#f1r.

During the 19th century, the population of Kaluszyn, both Jewish and Catholic, grew by leaps and bounds, with a reported 8,428 residents by 1897. The percentage of Jews ranged from 76 to 87 percent, and they made their living in a wide variety of occupations, situating families on rungs up and down the economic ladder.⁹ Many were artisans, crafting shoes, hats, furs, clothing, and the product Jewish



This page and previous: snapshots from *Sefer Kalushin*.



Kaluszyners were famous for—the tallis, or prayer shawl.¹⁰ Reports in *Sefer Kalushin* of religious life in 19th century–Kaluszyn suggest there were a multitude of congregations and religious study groups in town, populated by both Hasidim and *misnagdim*, the traditional religious scholars who opposed Hasidism. By the late 1800s, associations of craftsmen met regularly for religious study, as did the 400 or so workers in the prayer shawl industry, who, Gelber notes, had their own synagogue.

Centuries of geopolitical changes on the European continent resulted in Poland’s fluid borders and shifting leadership, bringing into question the identity of Jewish Kaluszyners. By the time of the exodus of Eastern European Jews to America—and Kaluszyners to Charleston, South Carolina—beginning in 1881, Poland was under Russian control. Jews were a minority in Polish Russia and in its respective provinces. However, in their shtetls, in Kaluszyn, they were strong in number and distinctly set apart from the gentile population by their language, culture, and, of course,

9. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal113.html.

10. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal009.html#f1r.

religion. Therefore, connection and identity were grounded at the local level, which is evident in patterns of immigration and the formation of *landsmanshaftn*, or benevolent associations, in America.¹¹ These benevolent societies were founded by landsmen, people who hailed from the same town or city in Eastern Europe.

According to Charleston memory, Eliezer Bernstein, in the 1880s, was the first Kaluszyn to arrive in Charleston. There were many reasons to leave Eastern Europe in the decades before the Great War—pogroms, poverty, repression and persecution, conscription into the Russian army. Read the translated chapters from *Sefer Kalushin* and you'll learn there were other very local reasons to leave Kaluszyn—destruction of property by fire, typhus outbreaks, and growing unrest among workers resulting in strikes and demonstrations.¹²

In their 2022 book, *Immigration: An American History*, scholars Hasia Diner and Carl J. Bon Tempo note that by the late 1800s, throughout Eastern Europe the “peasant economy” was disappearing. The local marketplace where Jewish artisans sold their wares was losing ground to factory-made goods delivered long distances by train. Diner and Bon Tempo argue that being able to make a good living and the chance of a better future was, first and foremost, the motivation that drove the mass migration of Eastern European Jews, while other circumstances, which impacted some areas and not others, played a secondary role.¹³

Kaluszyn appears to have been home to both small and large workshops as well as small industrial factories, perhaps lending the town some measure of resilience against the breakdown of the marketplace economy. In fact, population figures in *Sefer Kalushin* show a sizable increase in Jewish

residents between 1857 and 1897. However, by 1921, the number had dropped significantly, suggesting the out-migration from Kaluszyn did not begin in earnest until very late in the 19th century or early in the 20th.¹⁴ Interrupted in 1914 by the First World War, the exodus from Eastern Europe resumed in 1918 and lasted until the United States enacted permanent restrictive immigration quotas in 1924.

Read the translations in *Sefer Kalushin*. They are first-hand accounts that offer multiple views of life in Kaluszyn at the time people were leaving. Read the translations to discover the nuances that make the story of a life in Kaluszyn unique. Yossef Zisholtz recalls life in town at the beginning of the 20th century, offering a glimpse into weddings, funerals, religious life, relief organizations, the effects of modern conveniences such as electricity, and so much more. He

describes how life went on even during dire circumstances:

“The cemetery became the place of festivities during the great typhus epidemic that swept the city.”

Read the translations. Yaakov Palma tells of “The Turmoil of the 1920s,” David Felner describes the “Struggle Against Antisemitism,” and Pesach Finklshtayn reports on “The Trade Unions.” Read about Zionism, government, unions, kindergarten, sports, Hanukkah, and Purim. The list goes on! And read Mendel Berman’s “The Destruction of Kaluszyn” by the Nazis.

Read *Sefer Kalushin*. Offer to fund a translation.

Kaluszyn natives Abe and Ida Goldberg Appel and the siddur (prayerbook) that Abe brought with him from Kaluszyn. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

14. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol4_00399.html.



The Kalushiner Society: The Establishment of a Southern *Landmanschaft* in Charleston, South Carolina

by Ashley Walters, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, College of Charleston

There is a long and rich history of Jews establishing voluntary associations around the globe. From providing religious and welfare services to supporting intellectual and political endeavors, these associations offered autonomous

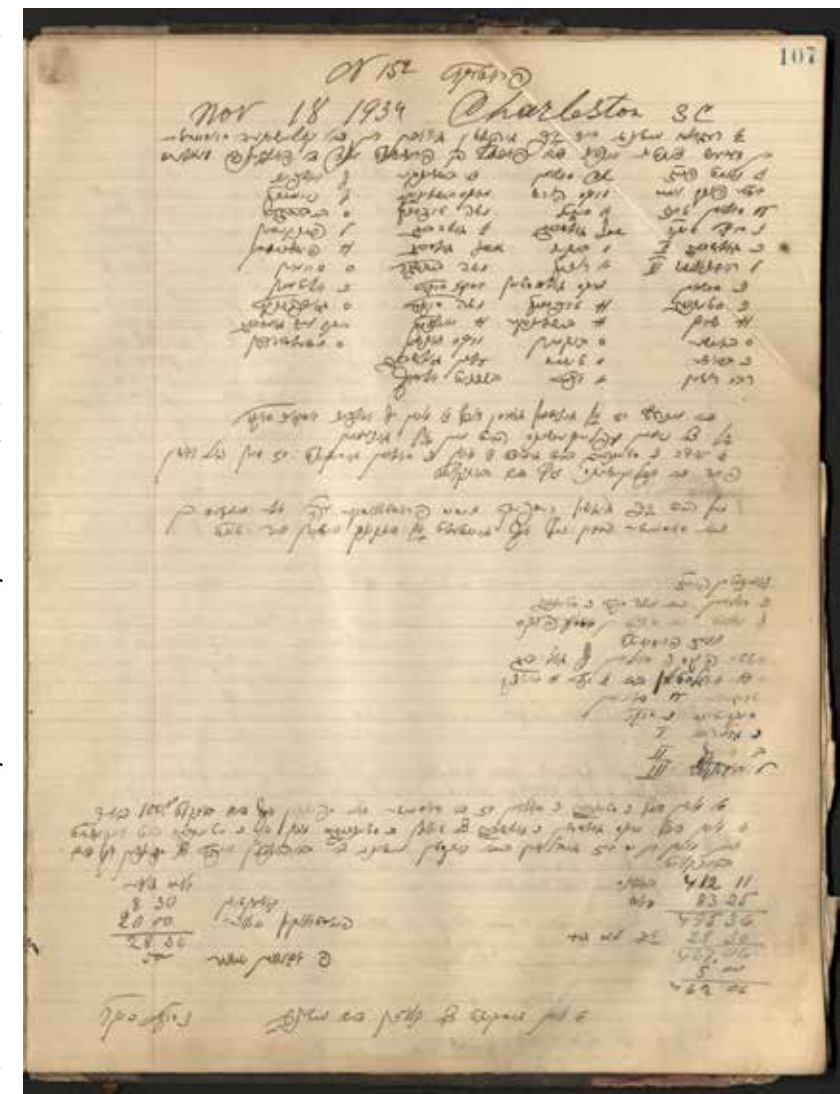
spaces for Jews to associate and engage in a wide array of interests. For the 2.1 million East European Jews who immigrated to the United States between the years 1881 and 1924, *landsmanshaftn* were integral to their acclimation to a new country. These fraternal organizations were usually comprised of *landsleit* (people hailing from the same town or region of the Old Country), lending a semblance of familiarity to an unfamiliar place. Historian Daniel Soyer explains that *landsmanshaftn* created a space for groups of immigrants with a shared history and culture to work through emerging ethnic identities, a product of Old World languages, religions, races, politics, and collective memories that assumed new meaning in a new land. As East European Jewish immigrants settled into their adopted country as newly minted Americans,

they began a prolonged process of selecting which parts of their Old World culture was worth retaining and expressing

in the United States.¹ The familiar and supportive spaces effected by kith and kin in *landsmanshaftn* were central to this process of acculturation.

Landsmanshaftn not only offered a sense of familiarity and

continuity for new arrivals in a new land, they also provided sorely needed social, economic, and psychological security. Cultural and social critic Irving Howe explains, “Rickety yet durable, the *landsmanshaftn* satisfied many needs. A member could assuage his nostalgia for the old country by listening to reports at the meeting from newly arrived immigrants or those who had gone back for a visit. He could share in the deeply rooted Jewish tradition of communal self-help, which in practice might mean sending money back home....” *Landsmanshaftn* compensated for the material precarity that characterized immigrant realities in the early 1900s by providing sick and death benefits, as well as the assurance of a proper Jewish burial. They, likewise, provided crucial networks for new arrivals who were eager to start a new business, in addition



Kalushiner Society minute book, 1927–36. This page, like most pages in the book, is written in Yiddish with the exception of the date and place, “November 18, 1934, Charleston, SC.” The entire volume has been translated into English. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

1. Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2–3.

11. See yadvashem.org/podcast/episode-9-shtetl.html.

12. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol4_00399.html.

13. *Immigration: An American History*, see pages 72 and 127.

to psychological support in the form of camaraderie and entertainment for members and their families.²

The makeup, mission, and culture of *landsmanshaftn* varied extensively between organizations, reflecting the diversity of Jewish immigrant needs and culture at the turn of the century. Immigrant Jews brought long-standing class, religious, and political divisions from the Old Country with them to their new homes, which is reflected in the landscape of fraternal organizations. Not all Jewish immigrants relied on Old World models, however. Many new arrivals established mutual aid associations and fraternal lodges that looked a lot like organizations popular among native-born Americans. In fact, Soyer explains, *landsmanshaftn* were more likely to mirror American organizations than East European ones. By adopting long-standing associational customs resembling those of, say, the Freemasons, Jewish immigrants sought to articulate

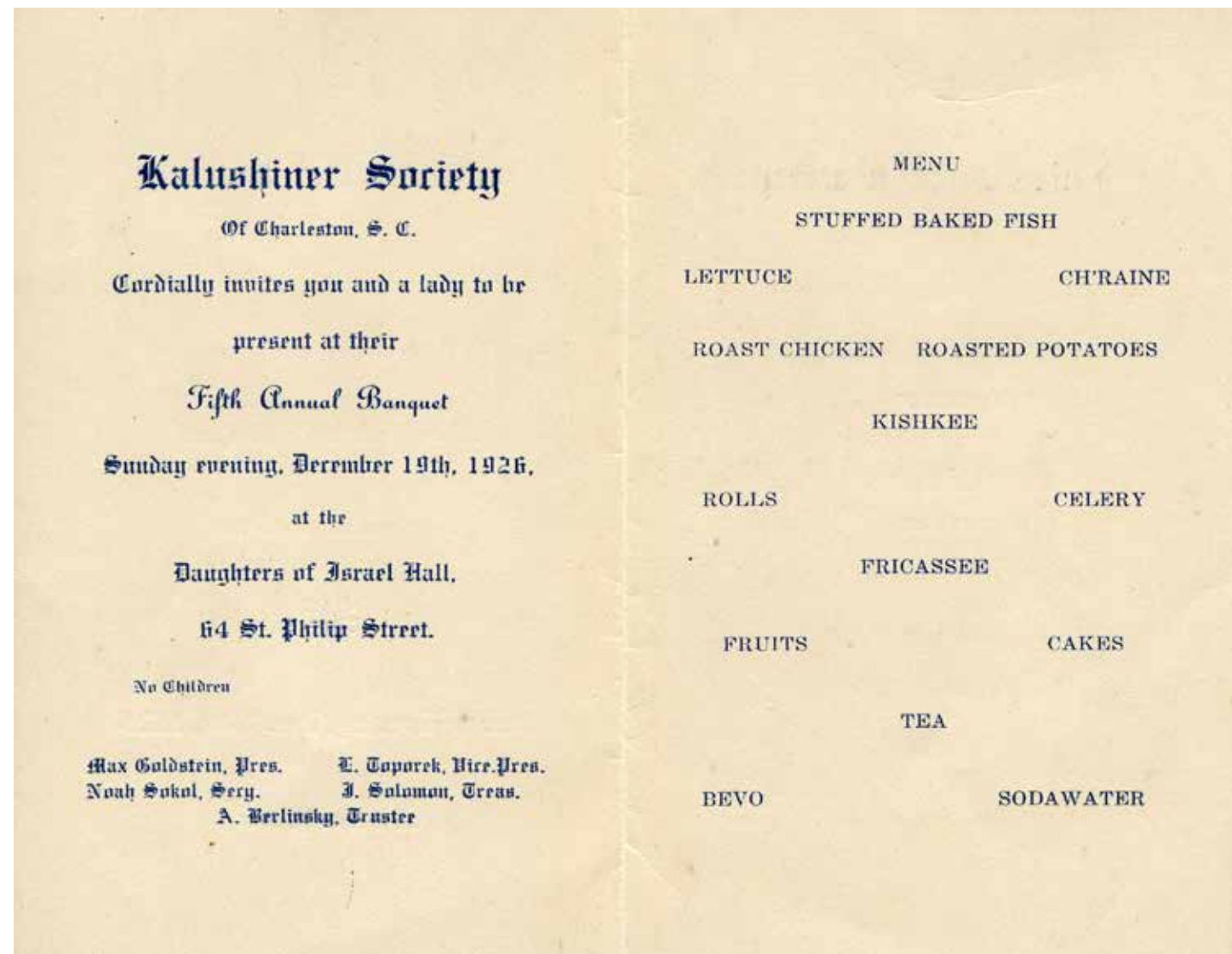
2. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Galahad Books, 1976), 187–9.

Jewishness on American terms.³ This was particularly true of the Kalushiner Society in Charleston.

The origins of the Kalushiner Society is a tale of two successive waves of migrations stemming from Central and Eastern Europe and differing views toward assimilation and the maintenance of Old World traditions. East European Jews have long been present in Charleston. Those who arrived in the Lowcountry during the early part of the so-called “third wave” of emigration from Eastern Europe settled in the city and quickly got their feet under them. By the 1910s, however, chain migration from the Polish shtetl of Kaluszyn—located approximately 40 miles east of Warsaw—had produced a new sub-community of East European Jews in Charleston. Despite common ties to tsarist Russia, this new group remained distinct for a generation or two, setting the stage for a showdown between the two emigre communities.

By the 1910s, long-standing members of the Orthodox congregation Brith Sholom were growing increasingly

3. Soyer, 4–30.



lax in their observance, a development that new arrivals from Kaluszyn found off-putting. As recent immigrants, Kaluszyners were well attuned to the rhythms of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, which included a high degree of religiosity. The lower income, foreign ways, and poor English of the Kaluszyners became

a frequent target of disparaging remarks by more affluent and acculturated coreligionists, who regarded the new arrivals as greenhorns. One notoriously combative leader of Brith Sholom is rumored to have quipped, “Who wants you people with beards?” in reference to the Kaluszyners.⁴ Adding to class and cultural tensions was the chassidish nature of the Kaluszyners’ Judaism (Kaluszyn boasted a robust Hasidic community and many immigrants brought Hasidic rituals with them to Charleston).⁵ Class, religious, and cultural conflict between an earlier generation of Central and East European Jewish immigrants to Charleston and a subsequent wave of new arrivals from Eastern Europe culminated in the 1910s with sixty members of Brith Sholom—many hailing from Kaluszyn—leaving and establishing a new Orthodox congregation known as Beth Israel. While most of the Kaluszyners were rather poor, they still managed to purchase a modest building at 145 St. Philip Street for their new synagogue.⁶ Tensions between the two communities persisted throughout the 1920s and 1930s (mostly over the shared employment of religious functionaries). The Great Depression, World War II, and the departure of a sizable number of Brith Sholom’s congregants in the 1940s, however, brought the two Orthodox congregations together under one roof as Brith Sholom Beth Israel in the 1950s.⁷

On Purim in 1921, four prominent East European

4. Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodoxy in Charleston: Brith Sholom Beth Israel and American Jewish History* (Charleston, SC: College of Charleston Library in association with Brith Sholom Beth Israel, 2004), 14–18.

5. Dale Rosengarten explains that the “Hasidism” theory behind tensions between Kaluszyners and other East European Jewish immigrants at Brith Sholom was put forth by Rabbi Radinsky. See [Sam Kirshtein, oral history interview](#) by Dale Rosengarten and Marcus D. Rosenbaum, 26 January 1998, Mss. 1035-174, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

6. Gurock, 14–18.

7. *Ibid.*, 32–48.

These pages: Kalushiner Society ephemera. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.



Jewish immigrants decided to establish a *landsmanshaft*, which became known as the “Independent Kalushiner Society of Charleston.”⁸ Its founders included Walter H. Solomon, Noah Sokol, M. Toporek, and J. Zucker. I. M. Goldberg served as the society’s first president.⁹ A minute book from the early years of the organization’s existence reveals that the Kalushiner Society was never exclusively comprised of individuals hailing from Kaluszyn (there simply were not enough to make this possible).¹⁰ By 1927, the society boasted 102 members, and just over a decade later, membership had grown to 121 members.¹¹ While the split between Beth Israel and Brith Sholom occurred in the early 1910s, the creation of the Kalushiner Society in 1921 suggests new foundations were being laid in Charleston for the East European Jewish community to come together. Religious differences and tensions certainly persisted between the two groups just as they did within the larger Jewish community of Charleston, but the founding of the Kalushiner Society implies a shared desire to come together on terms of ethnicity, fraternity, and welfare.

8. Unknown, “The Kalushiner Society,” *The Community Reflector* (Charleston, SC: Published by the Charleston Jewish Community Center, 1927), Special Collections pamphlets, F 279.C4 C65 1927, College of Charleston Libraries.

9. Alyssa Neely, “Kaluszyners in Charleston,” *JHSSC Magazine XII, No. 2* (Fall 2007), 4.

10. A special thank you to the Altman family for providing support to cover the cost of translating the Kalushiner Society Minute Book, 1927–1936. Additional support was made possible by the Stanley Farbstein Funds from the Coastal Community Foundation.

11. “The Kalushiner Society,” *Community Reflector*. See also, unknown, “The Kalushiner Society,” (1938), 45, Washington Birthday Ball: Special Collections pamphlets, F 279.C45 W37 1938, College of Charleston Libraries.

From its inception in the early 1920s, the Kalushiner Society functioned as a welfare society, providing sick and death benefits to its members as well as the occasional interest-free loan.¹² Later on, life insurance was also offered to its members. Additionally, the society paid for a number of improvements to be made to the modest and dated building that housed the Jewish Community Center at 54 George Street.¹³ On paper, the activities of the Kalushiner Society feel orchestrated and rigid (“A motion was tabled . . .” repeated *ad nauseam*), but between the lines it is possible to discern an impact that transcended purely material concerns. For example, on December 16, 1928, a motion was made to increase the monthly dues by 75 cents in hopes of making the annual Fourth of July weekend picnic and the annual banquet (which later included a dance) free for its attendees.¹⁴ The society’s winter banquet was described by one Jewish community member as “one of the leading winter social events.”¹⁵ The society also provided a way for *landsleit* to remain connected to their family and friends who had remained in Eastern Europe. Every year before Passover, the society sent financial support to the needy in Kaluszyn.¹⁶

While society records during World War II are missing from the archives, it is safe to assume that members of the Kalushiner Society did what they could to provide assistance to family and friends trapped in Hitler’s Europe during World War II. The names of society members pop up in state-wide and national organizations that sought to assist Jews attempting to escape Europe.¹⁷ Moreover, the story of the Zucker family

12. “Constitution and by-laws of the Kalushiner Society of Charleston, S. C.” (June 15, 1930), *American Jewish Archives*. This is also reflected in the 1927–1936 Minute Book.

13. Regarding insurance, see unknown, “The Kalushiner Society,” (1938), 45. For references to improvements made on the Jewish Community Center, see 1927–1936 Minute Book.

14. 1927–1936 Minute Book.

15. Unknown, “The Kalushiner Society,” (1938).

16. “The Kalushiner Society,” *Community Reflector*, (1927).

17. Collections in the Jewish Heritage Collection include papers for the

in Charleston offering assistance to newlywed refugees Paula Kornblum and Henry Popowski (both of whom were born in Kaluszyn and managed to survive the Holocaust) is a story of Kaluszyners coming together in the wake of disaster.¹⁸

In addition to the expressed mission to assist needy *landsleit*, the founders of the Kalushiner Society sought to, as one member wrote, “serve its . . . membership in the manner of a regular fraternal lodge.”¹⁹ The closed society meetings provided a space for Jewish men to enact long-standing American rituals of fraternity, which included secret handshakes made popular by exclusive organizations like the Freemasons. These rituals were no doubt introduced to the Kalushiners by society members who were also active in several civic organizations, most notably the Freemasons and Elks.

Many questions remain unanswered. Women, for example, are nearly absent in the archival records, save for the occasional reference to women applying for membership to the Kalushiner Society only to have their application delayed for months on end with no resolution or denied altogether.

Other women are present in society records as the beneficiaries of their husband’s sick or death benefits. Wives occasionally served as impartial witnesses to the interest-free loans granted to male members. Behind the scenes, member’s wives and daughters no doubt undertook extensive preparation for annual events, like the picnic and banquet, and they surely would have looked forward to the highly anticipated social events hosted by the society. No reference is ever made to the Black women who worked in the homes of members and might have prepared some of the refreshments enjoyed at society gatherings.

The Kalushiner Society began a long and protracted

Coordinating Refugee Committee of S.C. See Temple Sinai Records, Box 30, MSS 1083, Special Collections, College of Charleston.

18. [Paula Kornblum Popowski, oral history interview](#) by Michael Grossman, 3 & 12 May 1997, Mss. 1035-148, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

19. Unknown, “The Kalushiner Society,” (1938).



Kalushiner Society plaque placed in 1972 in the courtyard of Charleston’s Jewish Community Center.

process of disbanding in 1967 (it would take three years to determine how the remaining society assets would be allocated and the society officially disbanded in 1970). Yet, the legacy of the society remained alive and well. In January 1972, former members of the Kalushiner Society formally gathered a final time to place a plaque and dedicate a memorial garden at the Jewish Community Center in West Ashley to the “Memory of the Six Million.” While the Kalushiner Society took credit for the event, it was by and large planned by women (Charlot Karesh and Gertrude Solomon chaired the dedication committee).²⁰

The Kalushiner Society was originally established as a *landsmanshaft* dedicated to maintaining connections stemming from the Old Country, in addition to providing welfare for East European Jews determined to build their lives in a new land. By the time the third generation came of age, the need for such a society no longer existed. Today, the names of past members of the Kalushiner Society grace the cityscape

20. P. Maurice Fox, “Speech Delivered At The Kalushiner Society Plaque Dedication to the Six Million,” *Center Talk* 27, No. 6 & 7 (January 1972), 1, 8.

of Charleston, as Leah Davenport points out in her essay in this issue. Several Kaluszyn immigrant families have donated family photos and artifacts to the Jewish Heritage Collection in Special Collections at the College of Charleston that illustrate their assimilation and success, and multiple historical studies are currently being written about the Jews of Kaluszyn and their Charleston society based upon those archival materials. Today, social media platforms offer a new, digital medium for the descendants of *landsleit* to come together to share information about family and friends, past and present, as well as old photographs and materials about the history of Jewish life in Kaluszyn. In his magnum opus, literary and cultural critic Irving Howe wrote of the *landsmanshaftn*: “Long after the *landsmanshaftn* entered their decline, an interviewer asked the Penevesher society about its ultimate purposes. The answer came as unadorned as the *landsmanshaftn* themselves: ‘To die but not to die off . . . everybody in his place tries not to die off but to prolong his memory . . .’”²¹ The members of the Kalushiner Society achieved this goal admirably.

21. Howe, 190.

In the Company of Kaluszyners

by Leah Davenport, Research Assistant, Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, and College of Charleston junior, majoring in Jewish Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies

In October 2023, the JHSSC asked me to create a family tree of the many Charleston Jews who trace their roots to the Polish shtetl of Kaluszyn. I ended up spending hours and hours on ancestry.com, where I poured over census reports, naturalization papers, draft cards, and death certificates. One of the trees I created has over 1,300 people on its branches; 1,312 names that I have acquainted myself with; 1,312 births and deaths, new homes, and b’nai mitzvahs. It became apparent to me that ties to Kaluszyn connected many Jewish Charlestonians, if not by blood, then by marriage. I recognized names associated with the Jewish Studies Center, like Yaschik, Pearlstine, and Lipov. Now I could visualize familial ties. Someone would mention a last name, and I would wonder, “Who is their grandfather?”



Jacob Wolper’s Kalushiner Society medal noting 1930–31 as the years he served as president. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

Who is their great-aunt?” The scope of my research expanded after looking through Kalushiner Society records where Charleston family names I was familiar with popped out at me. The Society did not require its members to be from Kaluszyn and, it turns out, many were not.

This family tree followed me outside the office and into my personal life. At first, just in walks around town and up and down King Street, I recognized Morris Sokol and Marty Chase’s furniture stores. Then in January, I began volunteering at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and I noticed Kalushiner Society members on the donor lists. Melvin Solomon and Ben Bodne both donated to MUSC’s Heart and Vascular Health Center, as did Norman Berlinsky, and the foundations of

Henry and Sylvia Yaschik, Nathan and Marlene Addlestone, and Oscar and Mona Sokol.

I am not new to the city of Charleston. My grandmother Susie Davenport moved here in the 1950s. My dad grew up in West Ashley in the '70s and '80s, and I grew up in Summerville.



*Kalushiner Society banquet, Beth Israel social hall, 1948.
Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

My great-grandfather J. Hugh Jackson and my grandfather Dick Davenport ran a business alongside the merchant descendants of people I now know were Kalushiner Society members. Dick was also good friends with David Popowski, son of Holocaust survivors from Kaluszyn. While working on this project, I asked my grandmother if she recognized any names from a list I had created, and she began telling me story after story of Kalushiners she knew. She pointed to Copper Penny, located at 313 King Street, and immediately recognized it as being the former location of Jack Krawcheck's store. Jack's brother Max was a member of the Society, as were others in his extended family. She pointed to the former location of Bob Ellis' Shoes at 332 King Street, which was owned first by the Ellison family, then Samuel "Sammy" Bielsky, and finally by Jake Kalinsky and his family. She would tell me who had a store and where and how far it was from her father's store, Jackson Davenport Opticians, now Vision Center. My grandfather's store was in a couple of different locations, like 377 King Street and 65 Gadsden Street, before calling 381 King Street home when the building was purchased in 1975.

On a typical walk down King Street towards the Battery, I notice Jordan Lash's store. I love looking at the fun socks,

wishing my dad would wear more than just boring gray and black. At first, I thought it was just another store, but then I realized there was a high probability that this Jordan Lash was related to Alex Lash, a Kalushiner Society member. Alex and his wife, Lila Winter Lash, ran a butcher shop on King Street.

Alex, born in Bayonne, New Jersey, is not in the family tree I compiled, which is why it took so long for me to make the connection. He likely was not born in Kaluszyn, though I could not find where exactly.

Right next door to Jordan Lash's store is Isadore Lesser's jewelry store—if we were living in 1955. Isadore was born in Poland, though his naturalization papers state Brest-Litovsk, which is in present-day Belarus. Isadore's brother Louis was also in business on King Street, just a few doors down. Louis went into business with his brother-in-law Lou Tanenbaum, opening the Lesser-Tanenbaum Clothing Store. The location of Louis's store is obvious thanks to the tiled business sign at the front door. The two brothers were involved in the Society since at least 1927. From the looks of Isadore's obituary, the majority, if not all, of his pallbearers were fellow Kalushiner Society members.

On my evening walks home from Jewish Studies, I accompany my friend Gabby to her apartment. Her doorway, sandwiched between M. Dumas & Sons and Leyla, has a tiled business sign in front of the threshold that reads Mendelsohn. I knew there was an Isaac M. Mendelsohn who was a member of the Kalushiner Society, though not likely a native Kaluszyner.

With some digging, and I mean digging, I was able to find that he was a tailor at 298 King Street. Mr. Mendelsohn likely was in business with his brother Benjamin, where the two had a contract to make and design Citadel cadet uniforms.

My last stop before hitting the residential part of King is Berlin's. This hard-to-miss building has been in business for over 100 years. Founded by Henry Berlinsky, his sons Sam and Ben took over and changed the name from Berlinsky to Berlin following a disagreement over working on Shabbat. Henry and his wife, Lilly, were from Poland, likely Warsaw, while their sons were American, born and raised. It is through the story of this family's name change that we see an example of one difference between generations. The sons did not share their father's steadfast belief that work did not happen on Shabbat, even if it was at the expense of profit. Sam was a member of the Society as early as 1928, and his son Alwyn followed in his footsteps.

I don't usually venture to upper King, but when I do, I can always count on seeing Marty Chase's former furniture store. The art deco facade still features the vertical Chase sign. The building is now occupied by another furniture store, this time, with metal piggy banks in the shape of actual piglets front and center in the windows. Marty Chase, who was a member of the Kalushiner Society and served as its president in the late 1940s, was born in 1899 in Lomza, a town 80 miles north of Kaluszyn. Chase founded his furniture business in 1930, and it was one of the oldest in Charleston. Marty is visible in the photograph of the 1948 Kalushiner Society banquet on the previous page. He is standing below the clock and behind the table centerpiece. His wife, Freda, is on his right.

As I continue on my walk up King, the next big store with a name I recognize is Morris Sokol's furniture store. Morris

was born in Gavolin (likely Garwolin), Poland, according to his obituary. His son Joseph, in his 1997 oral history interview, says his dad got his start peddling on Edisto Island, selling out of his horse and buggy. Morris's obituary tells the tale of how he grew from a small-time peddler to running one of the largest stores on King Street. His father, Noah, was one of four founding members of the Kalushiner Society. Like their father, Morris and his brother, Oscar, were members and officers on the board of the Society.

Because of my work on the Kaluszyner family trees and the Kalushiner Society, I am now aware of the legacies their members left behind when I walk the streets of Charleston. Initially, they made their homes in the apartments above their storefronts lining King Street, and in the St. Philip

Street neighborhood. In the 1940s, many began moving to the suburbs, first to the nearby streets just south and north of The Citadel, and then across the Ashley River to South Windermere subdivision, developed by Bill Ackerman, a Kalushiner Society member. Kalushiners and their descendants grew up hearing about the American dream, and they grew into it, leaving their mark on a city that has not forgotten them.

Sources

- [Henry Berlin, oral history interview](#) by Michael Grossman, 13 February 1997, Mss. 1035-117, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries, <https://lcll.library.cofc.edu/lcll/catalog/lcll:23355>.
- [Joseph H. Sokol, oral history interview](#) by Michael Grossman, 18 January 1997, Mss. 1035-109, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries, <https://lcll.library.cofc.edu/lcll/catalog/263085>.
- Kalushiner Society Minute Book, 1927-1936, Mss. 1149, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.



Kaluszyner descendants gathered in front of the Kalushiner Society plaque at the Jewish Community Center, West Ashley, Charleston, SC, 2008. Seated, l to r: Harry Appel, Sol Kirshtein. Standing: David Popowski, Faye "Fannie" Appel Rones, Charlie Goldberg, Evelyn Lipman Sarasohn, Sam Kirshtein, Eva Levy Oxler, Melvin Solomon, Bernard Solomon, Sam Rosen, Meyer Lipman (standing). This image and the photo of the plaque on page 10 are courtesy of the Jewish Heritage Collection digital files, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

Photos from the St. Philip Street "Rewisited" Reunion collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.



"From Kaluszyn to Charleston" May 17-19, 2024 ~ Charleston, SC

In the spirit of Henry Yaschik's family history,
From Kaluszyn to Charleston: The Yaschik Family in Poland, Argentina, and South Carolina

Friday, May 17

6:30 P.M. Service followed by Shabbat dinner, Brith Sholom Beth Israel Synagogue, 182 Rutledge Avenue.

Saturday, May 18

11:30 A.M. Registration and lunch buffet

All events, unless otherwise specified,
will be held at the Francis Marion Hotel, 387 King Street.

12:15 P.M. Opening remarks ~ Steve Savitz, President, Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

12:30 **Landsmanshaft and Jewish Immigrant Fraternalism in the U.S. South** ~ Josh Parshall, Director of History, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life

1:30 Break

1:45 **The Kalushiner Society: A Southern Landsmanshaft** ~ Ashley Walters, Director, Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, College of Charleston

2:30 Break

2:45 **St. Philip Street Memories** ~ Panel Discussion, moderated by Dale Rosengarten
Panelists: Charles Altman, Steven Goldberg, Meyer Lipman, Sandra Altman Poliakoff, Rachel Kronick Rothbart, Raina Solomon Rubin, Charles Steinert

4:00 Break

4:15- 5:00 **Remembering the Martyrs and Survivors** ~ David Popowski and Chad S. A. Gibbs, Director, Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, College of Charleston

5:30-7:00 Reception featuring Kalushiner Society exhibit, 3rd floor, Addlestone Library, 205 Calhoun Street, College of Charleston

Dinner on your own

Sunday, May 19

9:00A.M. JHSSC board meeting and breakfast buffet. All are welcome.

10:30 **Kalsuzyn Today** ~ Ed Goldberg, with Joe Gellman via Zoom, and Chad Gibbs

11:30-1:00 P.M. Walking tours

Meeting registration, Charleston, May 17-19, 2024

Fees (per person):
Shabbat dinner \$60
Saturday & Sunday \$125
Saturday only \$75
Sunday only \$25

Online at jhssc.org/events/upcoming
with Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express

Or by check, payable to:
JHSSC, c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program
96 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29424

Questions:

Alyssa Neely, neelya@cofc.edu
Phone: 843.953.3918

Francis Marion Hotel
387 King Street, Charleston
843-722-0600

A block of rooms is reserved at a special rate until
April 17. Use online code: JHSSC24.

Links to hotel web pages with special rates are
available here: jhssc.org/events/upcoming

Hampton Inn Charleston/Mt. Pleasant-Patriots Point
255 Sessions Way, Mt. Pleasant
843-881-3300

A block of rooms is reserved at a special rate until
April 18.



Dr. Josh Parshall is a historian and non-profit professional based in Columbia, Missouri. He holds a Ph.D. from the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where his dissertation research focused on southern branches of the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle). His work has appeared in the journals *Southern Jewish History* and *In Geveb*, as well as other outlets, and he is a former editor of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life's online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. Dr. Parshall currently serves as president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

“Let’s Take a Look at America”: The Paula and Henry Popowski Story

by David Popowski

My parents, Henry and Paula Kornblum Popowski were the last Kaluszyners to immigrate to Charleston, South Carolina. They were Holocaust survivors who arrived in Charleston in 1949. Their connection to Kalusyzn, Poland, is central to their story of emigration and their lives in Charleston.

Prior to World War II, my father’s family consisted of his parents, Moses and Scheindel Popowski, and their eight children. My father, then known as Chaim, was their third child. The family trade was carpentry, which provided a modest living then for Jews in Europe. The Popowskis were known for their beautiful singing voices and my grandfather led Sabbath and holiday services. Only my father and two of his younger brothers survived the Holocaust.

My mother’s family was well-off. Her maternal grandfather, David Roza, my namesake, owned a flour mill in Kaluszyn that provided a comfortable living for the families of four or more of his ten children. My grandfather Moses Kornblum worked in the mill and was also a Torah scholar. He and my grandmother Sura Roza Kornblum had three children—Gershon, my mother, Paula, and my aunt Hannah. Gershon



Above: Paula and Henry Popowski, Landshut, Germany, ca. 1948. Below: Joseph and Rachel Miller Zucker’s 50th wedding anniversary celebration, Brith Sholom Beth Israel social hall, Charleston, SC, late 1950s. Left to right: Henry Popowski, Paula Kornblum Popowski, Sarah Kirshstein (wife of Kaluszyner Nathan Kirshstein), Rachel Zucker, Joseph Zucker, and Zipora and Leon Zucker. Joseph was Leon’s uncle. The well known Charleston inventor, businessman, and philanthropist Jerry Zucker was one of three children of Zipora and Leon.



perished along with my grandparents and most of my mother’s family in the Holocaust.

During the war, my father served in the Polish army, lived in the Warsaw ghetto, and was interned in three concentration camps: Krasnik, Plaszow, and Ebensee, a sub-camp of Mauthausen. After liberation, he attached himself, with several other Mauthausen survivors, to a U.S. Army medical unit in Landshut, Germany, where he was a leader in a displaced persons community that evolved into a refuge for surviving Kaluszyners.

My mother’s war-time experiences were distinctly different from my father’s.

She escaped from a labor camp near Kaluszyn with the help of a business associate of my grandfather’s, and reunited with her sister, Hannah. Using false identity cards, they lived in a convent in Czestowchowa, Poland, and worked in a glass factory until liberation. They returned to Kaluszyn, but found no trace of their relatives, and the flour mill had been seized. They joined up with another family and together they traveled to a displaced persons camp near Berlin, and then to Landshut where she met my father. While waiting to emigrate, they married and my mother gave birth to my brother, Mark, then known as Moses.

Like most of the Kaluszyners in Landshut who arrived in 1945 or soon thereafter, my parents were awaiting the establishment of the State of Israel. At some point, my mother and aunt received a letter from their distant cousin Joseph Zucker in Charleston. Their Aunt Miriam, who had left Europe for Mandatory Palestine before the war, wrote him and told him of their survival. He and his wife Rachel Miller Zucker, a Kaluszyner, offered to sponsor their immigration to the United States, specifically, Charleston, South Carolina.

My mother often said the only thing she associated with Charleston was the dance. For my parents, it was either Israel or the United States. My mother, by nature, would have wanted some personal connection to where she was going. She had presumed it would be Israel to be with her aunt Miriam. I asked my mother, “What was the deciding factor?” She said it was my father’s comment—which sounds very much like the father I knew—“Let’s take a look at America.” Conversely, for my uncles Jonah and Fishel Popowski, who found my father in Landshut, there was no option but Israel. As they later told me, referring to their experiences in Europe, they were “finished being the ‘guest’ in another country.”

My parents and Mark boarded the USS *General J. H. McRae* in Bremerhaven, Germany, on November 13, 1949, and arrived in New York City on November 25, 1949, the day after Thanksgiving. Their nearly two-week long trans-Atlantic trip is documented in the ship’s manifest, where their destination is listed as 418 King Street, Charleston, then the home of Moses Miller, Rachel’s brother, and his Liberty Furniture Store. [Ed.: A. M. Solomon & Sons Furniture was next door. Abraham M. Solomon is said to have been one of the first Kaluszyners to settle in Charleston.] On the ship, they were fed a wonderful Thanksgiving meal, learning for

the first time about that very American holiday. During the trip, my mother was pregnant with me and she often told me that I, rather than the means of transport, was the source of her discomfort.

Upon their arrival in New York Harbor, they were first greeted, of course, by the Statue of Liberty. When the ship docked, they were met by Joseph and Rachel Zucker and their daughter Minnie Zucker Kaufman. They headed to the train station immediately for their trip to Charleston, where they were welcomed by Moses Miller. He led them to an apartment building at 87 Warren Street, owned by fellow Kaluszyner Abe

Appel, and, with that, their new life began. I was born the following year, and my sisters Sarah and Martha followed in 1952 and 1956, respectively.

From their first days in Charleston, the lives of members of the Kaluszyner community were woven into the lives of my parents. Incidentally, the folks from Kaluszyn knew my mother was the granddaughter of David Roza, a connection that impressed them. Soon my parents became close friends of Sara Kirshstein and her sister Gittel Lipman—known to my siblings and me as Mima Sura and Mima Gittel, mima being Yiddish for aunt. After five years on Warren Street, we moved around the corner to Thomas Street. We were surrounded by Kaluszyners. Across the street was Moses Toporek and his wife Sarah. Around the corner on Radcliffe Street was his brother Louis Toporek,

patriarch of another branch of the Toporek family. A few doors down Radcliffe Street were Sara Kirshstein’s brother-in-law Alter Kirshstein and his wife Ruchal. Further down the street was Bella Rosen. This was just a portion of the Charleston Kaluszyner network, a community that warmly embraced my parents.

In fact, all of Charleston’s Jewish community pitched in by way of the Jewish Community Center, spearheaded by



Paula and Henry Popowski with their children, l to r, David, Martha, Sarah, and Mark, in their home at 22 Thomas Street, Charleston, SC, ca. 1957.

Nat Shulman. The Yiddish language and Judaism's traditions offered common ground between my parents and established families. Members of the immigrant generation, fluent in Yiddish and full of memories of the Old Country, offered the comfort of the familiar, while the Americanized second generation introduced my parents to a new culture. Rita Banov taught them English.

In terms of making a living, my father first peddled dry goods and furniture, encouraged to do so by the older Kaluszyners who themselves did it before they opened their stores on King Street. Among the dry goods wholesalers who helped my father and extended him credit was Sam Solomon, not a Kaluszyn, but a revered member of the community. In 1961, with the base of customers from my father's peddling business, my parents opened Henry's Furniture Company at 459 King Street and operated it until Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston in 1989.

For our family, our lives consisted of home, store, school, and Brith Sholom Beth Israel Congregation, where

the bulk of Charleston's Kaluszyners were congregants. The Charleston Kalushiner Society was the only organization that my father was an active member of and, indeed, he served as its last president.

My parents' hopes and dreams were their four children, all college graduates. We became a certified public accountant, a lawyer, a human resources specialist, and a media marketing specialist. Their six grandchildren are all also college graduates, now working in Atlanta, Boston, New York, Burlington, Vermont, and New

Orleans. My sister Martha likes to say that we have come a long way from Kaluszyn.

The sense of loss of my grandparents and other family members and being uprooted from their hometown always weighed on my parents, but they found a new life in Charleston and, yes, America. They were eternally grateful for that and for the support they received from their Kaluszyners. Nevertheless, my mother often said to us, "Kaluszyn will always be home."



Paula and Henry Popowski, outside their store, Henry's Furniture, 459 King Street, Charleston, SC, 1980. All photos are courtesy of David Popowski.

DAVID POPOWSKI'S PICK for the book with the best overview of Jewish Kaluszyn is *Kaluszyn*, edited by Joseph B. Gellman and published in 2019 by the Dr. Avraham Gamzu Kaluszyn Society of Israel (R.A.).

The compilation is printed in Hebrew and English in the same volume, and includes historic and contemporary photographs. Featured is "Martyrology, Resistance, and Annihilation of the Jewish Community in Kaluszyn" by Dr. Joseph Kermish, initially published in *Sefer Kalushin* in 1961. It is preceded by a profile of Kermish by Gellman and an edited version of the English translation of an article on the history of Kaluszyn by Abraham Klevan. Copies of the book are limited, but one has been donated to the Jewish Heritage Collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston.

The original translation of Klevan is available online at jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol4_00399.html.

Kermish's translation can be found at jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal314.html.

DID YOU KNOW?

Paula Popowski's war experience was memorialized in the character The Lady With the Coins, in the novel *Beach Music* by Pat Conroy.

Henry (Chaim) Popowski wrote about his war experiences in "From Kaluszyn to Landshut," one of the chapters in *Sefer Kalushin* that has been translated into English. See jewishgen.org/yizkor/kaluszyn/kal411.html#Page418.

Kaluszyn Today

by Ed Goldberg

Faith plays a significant role in my life even though I do not consider myself particularly religious. Sometime around 2010, I heard a friend, Joe Gellman, who has lived in Jerusalem for more than 40 years, was engaged in a lengthy process to transfer ownership of the "new" Jewish cemetery in Kaluszyn, Poland, to a suitable organization in that country. I also learned that both the "old" and the new Jewish cemeteries had been destroyed by the Germans in World War II, and no *matseivot* (tombstones) were left standing. The new cemetery was an open plot of land. The property upon which the old cemetery sits had been absorbed for the city's town hall.

When I was growing up, the name of my father's birth town, Kaluszyn, was drummed into me. As a child I knew a large contingency of Charleston's Jews were emigrants or direct descendants of emigrants from Kaluszyn. In Charleston's Jewish community, we were referred to as Kalushiners, and it is possible that as many as half of them were related to me.

When I heard of Joe's work, a complicated story (for another day) going back to 2007, my strong feeling for the history of my father and his family prompted me to reach out to Joe (known to some of you as Joey). I offered to help raise money for the cemetery project. Joe resisted because he



Above: Joe Gellman (l) and Ed Goldberg visited Kaluszyn, Poland, in September 2019. The monument behind them was erected on the grounds of the new Jewish cemetery in Kaluszyn in 2017 in memory of Jewish residents killed by the Nazis in World War II. Below: a Kaluszyn school group attended the unveiling of 3 additional monuments at the new Jewish cemetery on May 11, 2022.



did not want to continue fundraising until the official registration of the cemetery property had been transferred into the hands of a Jewish organization in Poland. Once he had done that, and after a few years of my annoying him, he finally acquiesced. He shared his plan to build a memorial on the property to honor the memory of Kaluszyn's Jews, including those murdered by the Nazis and those whose graves were desecrated and destroyed by the Nazis.

Joe had already raised considerable funding for the project and, in 2016, we decided on a fundraising approach so our goals could be met. I set out to raise money from descendants of Jewish Kaluszyn. I used that first word above, "faith," because I blindly committed to this task so we could complete the first phases of commemorating those Kaluszyn Jews who were robbed of their dignity by the brutal Nazis. Over a period of about six months, I found in databases about

200 families around the world with ties to Kaluszyn. About 70 of them contributed to the cause and our first goal was achieved.

Construction of the monument took place in the spring and early summer of 2017. Joe was aided by the Warsaw-based Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ), with which, by that point

in time, he had a ten-year relationship. I made my first visit to Poland in September 2017 for the ceremony that Joe and FODZ arranged for the official unveiling of the first monument on the new Jewish cemetery property. It is a large, beautiful structure designed by Joe's close friend, artist Ken Goldman of Kibbutz Shluchot. The memorial can be interpreted as a gateway through which the souls lost in the Shoah could enter heaven. That September 2017 dedication drew hundreds of people that included the principal and a history class from the local school, the chief rabbi of Poland, the Israeli ambassador to Poland, the local Catholic priest, and the chairperson and three other representatives of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, who assisted Joe with the project.

My second visit to Poland was in September 2019. At that time, Joe had been invited by the mayor of Kaluszyn to a ceremony commemorating the 80th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. Inasmuch as there are no Jews in Kaluszyn, the mayor apparently thought it important to have a Jewish representative of the destroyed Jewish community of Kaluszyn present. Joe secured an invitation for me, and we were introduced from the podium as representatives of the former Jewish residents. One of the highlights of that visit was a drive around the town and its surroundings. I had a chance to contrast modern-day Kaluszyn



Above: a headstone recovered from the Jewish cemetery is mounted on an exterior wall of the Catholic church (below) in Kaluszyn, Poland.



to the shtetl of my father's time and the photos of pre-war Kaluszyn. I visualized the kind of house my father grew up in. It was described to me as having dirt floors. Not surprisingly, I found nothing like that, even among the older homes.

My third trip to Kaluszyn, in 2022, was for a second ceremony that Joe and FODZ arranged, with the cooperation of the U.S.-based Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland. The speakers were the mayor of Kaluszyn, the chief rabbi of Poland, the local priest, the Israeli ambassador to Poland, and Joe. The purpose of the ceremony was to unveil three new monuments, designed as the inverse of the open part of the larger first monument and could conceptually stand for keys to a lock to the 2017 symbolic gate to heaven monument. The three "keys," front and back, hold thousands of names of Kaluszyn Jews who were murdered in the Shoah.

Today there are no Jews in Kaluszyn. The town has about 3,000 residents, roughly the same number of non-Jewish inhabitants as in 1939. There is little sign of abandoned buildings that might have once been occupied by 6,500 to 7,000 missing Jews. The exception is a few houses where I saw a possible remnant of a mezuzah on a doorpost. The streets are not exactly where they once were, and most homes appear well cared for. Not much looks like pre-1939, but Kaluszyn does not resemble the 21st century either, having, to my eyes, an old European look.

Kaluszyn is about 4.5 square miles in area, roughly the size of the Charleston Historic District. But much of that area is rural and the village itself is much smaller. Most of the town's homes and businesses are clustered on either side of the Warsaw Highway, the main thoroughfare.

The tallest building is the Catholic church in the center of town. This is the very church where Jews were locked up by the Nazis only days after the German invasion of Poland in 1939. On the front stoop of the church is one of the few surviving *matzeivot* (headstones) from the cemetery, placed there by an earlier priest, possibly to remind the town of the lost Jewish heritage. I met two of the priests and they both seemed empathetic to the town's loss.

Destroyed in 1941 by the Nazis was the large and imposing Great Synagogue of Kaluszyn. From photos, I envision it to be much bigger than synagogues I saw in other small Polish towns. Instead of a synagogue, the location now has a modern gas station to support the heavy traffic passing through town.

There is no real shopping area in Kaluszyn, which other towns have. It is now a quiet suburb of the neighboring larger cities of Minsk Mazowiecki and Siedlce, where I assume much of the commerce is centered. The main street of Kaluszyn is a busy highway that leads west to Warsaw. Developing industry in the area is leading to heavier truck traffic passing through town, headed to the new expressway nearby.

My impression is the town's citizens are somewhat aware of the loss of Jewish culture. In the local school there is an annual program commemorating Polish Jews, with students performing and sometimes singing Hebrew songs, accompanied by Jewish music. On my September 2019 visit to Kaluszyn, I met the mayor and the principal of the school, both of whom are quite close to Joe. I even toasted over schnapps with retired military. (My father may not forgive me for that.) My conversations with all of them were positive. They were welcoming and gave the impression they would love to have anyone, including Jews, come to visit or stay.

It is my hope that this project will again take me to Kaluszyn. Joe has traveled to Poland about 30 times while bringing the Kaluszyn commemoration project

to fruition, and he continues to build exceptionally close relationships with key people in Kaluszyn. Because of these relationships, we have plans to continue recognizing our heritage.

Because of the efforts mentioned above and similar efforts in other towns across Poland, Jews worldwide who have roots in Kaluszyn and elsewhere can visit the home of their ancestors and see meaningful and respectful commemorations of the Jewish life that once existed. Joe and I are extremely proud to have taken part in this project to ensure our ancestors are respectfully commemorated in their hometown. Our hope is that our work will have a life that extends far beyond today and that it will encourage understanding and cooperation among our people and those of other cultures.

Right: the remnant of a mezuzah on a doorpost, spotted by the author on a visit to Kaluszyn, Poland. Below: visitors to Kaluszyn, Poland, in 2017 stand outside the house of a Holocaust survivor.



What Kaluszyn Tells: A Walk in Holocaust History

by Chad S. A. Gibbs, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, College of Charleston

Twice a battlefield and the site of a massacre, Kaluszyn was flattened and depopulated in the years 1939–1945. With such a history, the fact that much has changed in the small Polish town to which many Charleston Jews can trace their roots is no surprise. The shtetl is gone and today's town of Kaluszyn, ironically, stands at the edge of another major change as the opening of a new EU-funded road project will soon bypass this little bedroom community for good.

Late last year, I had the chance to add a short trip to Kaluszyn at the end of some larger work that took me to Warsaw and other places in Poland. As it happens, having feet on the ground proved to be more revealing than I had expected. I had hoped there would be more traces of the old town, though I was happy to see so much stewardship in today's Kaluszyners.

I planned my trip to Kaluszyn as a first visit in an ongoing research project with College of Charleston Professor Ashley Walters. As our wider work on the history and legacies of Kaluszyn Jews in Charleston and in the Old Country comes together, I wanted to see this place and understand the end of Jewish life there, as well as what remains. Before I left,



Above: entering Kaluszyn, Poland, on the road from Warsaw.
Below: Father Robert leads a tour on the grounds of the Catholic church in Kaluszyn.



conversations with Ed Goldberg and David Popowski—both descendants of Kaluszyners—helped me get a sense of what to look for in my travels. The most important place would be the “new” Jewish cemetery, once the site of a pair of mass shootings. (City hall sits atop the “old” Jewish cemetery.)

As I set up an itinerary, I contacted Lukasz Barwinski, a Polish tour guide, fixer, and friend of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program and arranged to have him with me for the day in Kaluszyn. Lukasz set up meetings with Mayor Arkadiusz Czyzewski and local priest “Father Robert” that would both prove incredibly useful. Lukasz also has a local's eye for history and the fragments of the past that are incredibly helpful to any visitor.

We met early in Warsaw for our roughly 1.5-hour drive to Kaluszyn and a day packed with plans to speak with everyone we could. Our first and most important stop was the new Jewish cemetery, the location of the two mass graves and the memorial. Walking these grounds and seeing how they fit into the scenery of the town was a powerful experience. As I stood in the area believed to hold the greatest number of Kaluszyn Jews murdered over those few days in September 1942 by Nazi

Germany, I could clearly see the church steeple, the roofs of nearby homes that existed at that time, and the passing of cars on a highway that is now—as it was then—the main avenue in and through the town. It was clear that there was no attempt to conceal these crimes as they happened.

Western Holocaust historians have long described the mass shooting phase of Nazi genocide as one in which the SS and others attempted to maintain a level of secrecy and, in part, changed to mass murder by gas chambers when they realized this was not possible. Looking at the places in which these things happened seems to put that view on its ear. At Kaluszyn, German forces held around 1,000 local Jews in the church before marching them to the new cemetery area and shooting them. All of this would have been immediately apparent—visibly and audibly—to non-Jewish Poles in the town. The centralization at the church, the march down one of the town's main feeder roads, and the horrible, day-long cacophony of gunfire would have made thousands of witnesses. Indeed, no part of this day could have been envisioned as secret.

While Kaluszyn can teach us so much, the first thing that grabs me by the collar is the flawed nature of our thoughts on secrecy and Nazi

decision-making. Having seen the ground at Kaluszyn and walked the trail that day, I come away from it changed. The physical evidence seems to indicate that Nazi Germany switched from mass shooting to gas chambers at camps like Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka because they sought to enrich themselves in the process of killing—not because they were concerned about witnesses.

With the dispersed process of genocide by rifle shot, local Poles stood to gain the most from the destruction of their Jewish neighbors. Once the Nazis took Jews to a site of mass killing, the locals would plunder and pillage the homes and businesses of those they heard shot. The Third Reich did not gain materially from this process.

Transport to camps like Treblinka gave German authorities a chance to lie to Jews in ways that would make it possible to steal all their valuables. They were told that they would be relocating to the east and should bring just what they could carry, but certainly the best of what they had. This had the tendency to fill suitcases, pockets, and the seams of clothing with what little material wealth belonged to these victims. Killed in camps behind barbed wire, the Germans had every chance to devise systems that would strip



Above: Kaluszyn's Catholic church where Jewish residents of the town were rounded up and held before being shot to death in the cemetery.
Below: a panoramic view of the new Jewish cemetery. This area was the site of a pair of mass shootings that took the lives of as many as 1,300 Kaluszyners. All photos: Chad Gibbs, 2023.



all this carried wealth from their victims. Those camps made it impossible for self-serving locals to take even the clothing of the dead.

As difficult as it is to contemplate, the ground at Kaluszyn can help us understand all of this. The extermination camps were not reactions to a need for secrecy—that had never been a priority. Rather, the gas chambers and the camps around them are understandable

as a reaction to a loss of plunder and an SS system bound and determined to enrich itself through the destruction of Jewish life. The ground yells as much when one stands at the site and looks back to the village a mere stone's throw away.

While it is hard to move beyond those facts and see other aspects of Jewish history in Kaluszyn, Lukasz and I did try to take in more on our day at the town. We walked the area where the synagogue once stood, viewed the stream-side location of the former mikvah, and took in the streets of what was once a largely Jewish part of town. In these places we found that architectural remnants of the synagogue might remain and the mikvah area

may also be a prime site for an archaeological dig if there is ever interest in such an idea. While the mayor is right that little remains of the pre-1939 town, I am slightly more optimistic than his guess of three or four total buildings. We found a few homes and businesses that may well predate 1939 and a good deal of fragments around the town at or just below the surface.

The best note one can end on in such a story isn't the discovery of a remaining building or a

shard of this or that former structure. Rather, Lukasz and I were both happy to see votive objects left at two Jewish sites in town by local schoolchildren and to learn from the mayor that schools in today's Kaluszyn teach about the local Jewish past and students visit the memorial each year in recognition of what was lost. Poles have a fraught relationship with many aspects of their World War II past and their own crimes between 1939 and 1945, to say the least, though we came away hoping there was a slightly better local reality in that regard. The memorial so many Kaluszyner descendants helped create remains a part of that process.



H.E.A.R. Their Stories: Holocaust History and Memory: student-hosted podcasts, a production of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies and H.E.A.R.

Listen to "Preserving Memory: Looking at Kaluszyn," a discussion with Chad Gibbs, hosted by Leah Davenport: podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/ldavenport.

The Vera Blacher and Ben Yaschik family



Benjamin "Ben" Yaschik, Henry Yaschik's older brother, in his Charleston, SC, grocery store. Ben, holding his daughter, Dena, is joined by his wife, Vera Blacher Yaschik, and Vera's mother, Ida Blacher, 1930. Courtesy of the Jewish Heritage Collection digital files, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

Henry Yaschik, a descendant of Kaluszyner, wrote *From Kaluszyn to Charleston: The Yaschik Family in Poland, Argentina, and South Carolina*, available for research in Special Collections.

Introducing Max Daniel

by Vincent Fraley

Last year, the Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC) found itself at a crossroad. Founding director Dale Rosengarten's retirement from Special Collections and Archives in Addlestone Library, College of Charleston (CofC), in early 2023 left the region's premier Judaica repository leaderless for the first time in nearly thirty years.

Following a national search with stakeholder input from across campus and the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, CofC welcomed this past August JHC's new archivist and public historian, Max Daniel. A scholar of modern Jewish history with a particular interest in the discourse on Jews and race in the U.S., Daniel's dissertation and other published works focus on Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews, specifically those from Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) speaking backgrounds.

The Lowcountry's climate, architecture, and brogue were a far cry from Daniel's childhood outside Chicago and later stints in Manhattan (B.A., Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary) and Los Angeles (Ph.D., UCLA). But the importance of

archival collections—and their opportunities for research and outreach—had been familiar to the historian since his student days. "UCLA had a program for graduate students to work with special collections processing manuscript materials," he says. "I worked in the department for six months and enjoyed the experience, learning how my colleagues thought about history, access and archives, and the relationship to scholarship."

After a former advisor flagged the job announcement, the decision to apply was easy for Daniel. "Teaching, research, archival work, and public history, the things I'm most interested in; this position touches on everything."

Since its launch in 1995, JHC has documented Jewish history and culture by collecting and making accessible these "special" materials—manuscripts, artifacts, photographs, genealogies, memoirs, home movies, and oral histories. In his

newly-created role as public historian and Jewish Heritage Collection coordinator, Daniel will act as steward of the collection, ensuring its safekeeping for future researchers. But his remit is to also grow and expand JHC. Consider oral histories, of which JHC has recorded more than 600.

After addressing a queue of unreleased recordings, "I would love to interview Jewish students at CofC. Understandably, the vast majority of oral histories are of the elderly. But there is a value in getting contemporaneous accounts," he says. "Even though Jewish undergraduates might be here for only four years, their experiences are part of our history."

Daniel is fortunate in his efforts to have a secure foundation atop which to grow. "I want to build on the excellent work done by Dale Rosengarten, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, and our campus partners exploring the connections between southern Jewish history and the global Atlantic world in which Charleston was central."

As part of his tenure-track faculty appointment, Daniel will also teach one class each semester in

Jewish Studies and hopes, in the future, to lead study abroad groups to the Caribbean and Iberia. "It's exciting and daunting at the same time because Jewish history in South Carolina has such a large scope," Daniel says of his job that involves working with off-campus organizations and communities as much as with students and faculty.

JHC's mission supports those of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina and CofC's Jewish Studies and Pearlstine/Lipov Center. Daniel is eager to deepen these relationships and explore the opportunities such collaborations foster. "From my first day here I've benefited from the expertise and experience of my colleagues," he says. "That's what stood out for me during my time in special collections as a student, that collaborative element, and I've experienced that here from the very beginning."



Max Daniel, Ph.D., Public Historian and Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator, Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, December 2023. Photo: Vincent Fraley.

30 Years ... and Counting!

by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

“The Jews of South Carolina have a happy story to tell and are eager to tell it.” Marty Perlmutter, o.b.m., gave this statement as part of his remarks during the first Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina meeting in 1994. Leah Chase’s article in the first issue of the Society’s newsletter, “Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina Inaugural Meeting Draws 250 People to Charleston: A Special Report” gives great detail to that first meeting held at the College of Charleston.

Isadore Lourie, o.b.m., had a vision in 1994. He convinced his friend and then-College of Charleston president, Alex Sanders, that preserving South Carolina’s Jewish history was a worthwhile endeavor and one the College should embrace. Indeed, 30 years later, that vision has been realized.

As the Society celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2024, we realize there is more we can do to carry on Isadore’s legacy. From Jewish families who lived in rural South Carolina to those who lived in larger towns and cities, we have documented stories through oral history interviews, the Jewish Merchant Project, meetings, magazine articles, events, and publications. We will continue this work, but we will be mindful of those

who have made South Carolina their home in recent years, as they are very much a part of our collective Jewish history. We plan to partner with Max Daniel, Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator, to accomplish this important work, with an emphasis on recording oral histories that capture the experiences of Jewish residents of all ages and backgrounds.

A few years ago, Marty Perlmutter encouraged the board to consider how the Society would sustain itself. An endowment was launched with the goal of providing stable financial support for our organization. I encourage you to consider a gift to the JHSSC endowment fund. Thirty years is a good time to applaud all that we have accomplished, but we cannot rest on our laurels.

During the spring meeting, we will premiere our 30th anniversary video. I want to express my gratitude to Terri Wolff Kaufman, Tim Fennell, and Tony Morgan for their professionalism and talents. Terri, a JHSSC board member, is a consummate media professional and we are thankful she offered her expertise. And we are most grateful to the Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation for funding the video.

See you in Charleston in May!

The Wittel Solomon and Charles Altman family

Seated, l to r: Sandra and Gail Altman with their father, Isadore Altman; Wittel Altman; Israel Altman with his children Charles and Arlene Altman. Standing, l to r: Annette Sokol Altman (wife of Isadore Altman); Myra Altman (daughter of Isadore); Phyllis and Carolyn Altman (daughters of Sam Altman); Ermine Gaeser Altman (wife of Sam); Sam Altman; Francine Altman (daughter of Sam); Edith Tesler Altman (wife of Israel Altman); Samuel Altman (son of Israel). Date unknown. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries. Our thanks to Helene Goldberg Scharff who shared her massive family tree and photos of Wittel and family with the Jewish Heritage Collection. See also cover.



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Register now for the **May 17-19 meeting at jhssc.org/events/upcoming.**
See page 15 of this publication for program information.