The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Celebrates 275 Years

JHSSC Meets in Charleston ~ September 13–15, 2024

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The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

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On the cover: A view from the bimah, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (Holy Congregation House of God), Charleston, SC, no date. This is the congregation's second building, constructed in 1840–41 by David Lopez; architect Cyrus Warner. This photograph can be found among KKBE's congregation records, available for research in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

In this issue

In celebration of the 275th anniversary of KKBE, the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) and the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston are happy to announce the recent digitization of several historic KKBE constitutions. These unique items from the 19th century that tell the story of a radically changing synagogue through its core documents will be freely accessible online for the first time late this summer. Search for them at lcdl.library.cofc.edu/.

Letter from the President

The 2024 spring meeting in Charleston, titled "From Kaluszyn to Charleston," started at Brith Sholom Beth Israel (BSBI) Synagogue with a, shall I say, heavenly *Shabbat* dinner. Rabbi Yosef Bart and the congregation showed us the famous Charleston hospitality. The next day we learned from scholars the history of this Polish *shtetl,* its tragic ending, and how so many ended up in Charleston, South Carolina. We even had a virtual presentation from Israel by a descendant of Kaluszyners who is working with Charleston descendants and the current mayor of Kaluszyn to create permanent visual evidence of the Jewish presence that existed before the Holocaust. We also learned how many Jews ended up in the southern United States, something much of the country finds hard to believe. A number of families discovered relatives in Charleston they did not know they had in the months leading up to this meeting.

The JHSSC bestowed on Rachel Gordin Barnett (l) and Lyssa Kligman Harvey the Order of the Jewish Palmetto in recognition of their work on behalf of the Society. Past-president Jeffrey Rosenblum (ctr) presented the award at the JHSSC reception on Saturday, May 18, 2024, during the Society's spring weekend conference. Photo by Laura Moses.

Rachel Barnett and Lyssa Harvey were awarded the Order of the Jewish Palmetto by the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina at a reception in the Addlestone Library during our 2024 spring meeting in Charleston. The only award the JHSSC presents, the Order of the Jewish Palmetto is bestowed on those who have made extraordinary contributions to the Society. Previous recipients are our Founding President Isadore Lourie, Solomon Breibart, Trude and Max Heller, Ann Meddin Hellman, Martin Perlmutter, Dale Rosengarten, Judge Richard M. Gergel, and Robert N. Rosen.

Jeffrey Rosenblum presented the award to Rachel and Lyssa who have been nationally recognized for their magnificent book, *Kugels & Collards: Stories of Food, Family, and Tradition in Jewish South Carolina.* They spent countless hours on the manuscript, which was published by USC Press in 2023, and they have traveled to states from Maryland to Louisiana for book signings, with more invitations still coming in. Successful beyond the imagination of USC Press, the book has already sold well over 3,000 copies and is in its second printing. The extent of the book's enthusiastic reception is such that our honorees have been asked to produce another book on southern Jewish life, which they have agreed to do. It has the working title of *Southern Simchas.* I am so honored to let everyone know of their dedication to the JHSSC, and the Society is pleased to recognize them for it. If you do not have a copy of *Kugels & Collards,* be sure to order one. All proceeds from the sales of the books are donated to JHSSC and the Columbia Jewish Heritage Initiative, a Historic Columbia project.

We now look forward to our fall meeting, again in Charleston. JHSSC normally meets in another part of the state each autumn, but Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim is celebrating its 275th anniversary! Mark your calendars for September 13–15. The planning committee has once again created an engrossing program covering everything from architecture to the birth of Reform Judaism in Charleston. They have engaged eminent Jewish historians Rabbi Gary Zola, Sam Gruber, and Laura Yares, who will lead us through the 275 years. The only speaker I have been privileged to hear before is Rabbi Zola. If you have not heard him speak, do not miss this opportunity.

Our membership is continuing to grow thanks to great programming and the hard work of membership chair Mickey Rosenblum and Alyssa Neely, our administrator and publications editor and designer. Every member I meet tells me how well our magazine is designed and that they look forward to receiving it.

I look forward to seeing you in Charleston in September.

Steve

Steve Savitz

Remembering the Days of Yore

by Gary Phillip Zola, Executive Director Emeritus of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio

According to the much-admired 20th century rabbinic scholar Elie Munk (1900–1981), the famous phrase from Deuteronomy, "Remember the Days of Yore,"[1] constitutes a sacred charge that echoes across the generations sternly enjoining us to *remember* the past. Yet Rabbi Munk taught that this statute calls upon us to do more than nostalgically reflect on bygone days. Jewish history, Munk asserted, and that includes *American* Jewish history, radiates with lessons for the living. Remembering the Days of Yore, then, is a reminder that Jews possess a *useable* past—a history that instructs and inspires. Milestone anniversaries, therefore, constitute a precious opportunity to revisit the past and make purposeful use of it.[2]

Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC, interior, first synagogue building, dedicated in 1794 and painted from memory by Solomon Nunes Carvalho (1815–1894) after it was destroyed by fire in 1838. Image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

This year, 2024–2025, marks the 275th anniversary of the founding of Charleston's Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. The congregation's longevity—it is one of the oldest Jewish congregations in North America—testifies to the powerful role that each generation has played in forging its own future. Although it seems likely that there were Jews praying together in Charles Town during the 1740s, the colony's first Jewish congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE), dates its founding to the early days of the Hebrew year 5510, corresponding to the last months of 1749, and the beginning of 1750. The fall gathering of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina will be held in beautiful Charleston and, in doing so, the organization will mark the 275th anniversary of KKBE history.

KKBE's long history is marked by a succession of anniversary commemorations. Over the decades, KKBE has galvanized its future by saluting its past. Although there currently exists no documentary evidence that the congregation celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding in 1775, the tumultuous political upheaval occurring during that year must have been a powerful distraction for the Jews of Charles Town. One of the city's most prominent advocates for American independence, Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805), was already meeting the Sons of Liberty under the famous "Liberty Tree." By mid-January of that same year, South Carolina's First Provincial Congress convened at Charles Town's State House and, three months later, colonists seized arms and gunpowder from the royal armories. Despite the massive political commotion, one of KKBE's founding members, Isaac Da Costa (1721–1783), solicited funds from New York's Shearith Israel in hopes of erecting a building for the synagogue. Da Costa did not live to see KKBE build its first home, but his farsighted ambition may have also been an optimistic statement about the future of the congregation he helped to organize twenty-five years earlier.[3]

KKBE marked its 40th anniversary by preparing to lay a cornerstone for what would become the first synagogue to be erected in South Carolina. The cornerstone was set in 1791, and the Hasell Street structure was dedicated in 1794. By the time KKBE turned 50 at the dawn of the 19th century, there were nearly 500 Jews living in Charleston, and they acclimated themselves to praying in their commodious, well-appointed synagogue. The French writer Auguste Levasseur (1795–1878)—who accompanied Lafayette on his last trip to the United States—visited the Hasell Street synagogue, which impressed him as being a "spacious and elegant" structure.[4]

Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Synagogue, Charleston, SC. Above: print of first building, lithograph by Solomon Nunes Carvalho (1815–1894). Below: Photograph of second building, completed in 1841. Images courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

As is often the case, building costs exceeded the anticipated construction budget, and the installation of special accoutrements at KKBE was deferred until funds became available. Such was the case with the installation of the magnificent *Heichal* (Holy Ark) in KKBE's first building. The philanthropist and Jewish communal leader, David Lopez, Sr. (1750–1811), marked the 50th anniversary of the congregation's founding by raising the funds needed to install the magnificently columned *Heichal* that Solomon Nunes Carvalho (1815–1897) painted from memory after the synagogue building constructed in 1794 was razed in the Charleston fire of 1838.[5]

The year 1824 marked the 75th anniversary of KKBE's founding. This anniversary witnessed one of the most contentious and consequential events in the congregation's storied history. In the early decades of the 19th century, the congregation's membership became increasingly divided over how best to safeguard KKBE's future. Some wanted to preserve the customs and rituals that had been in place for many decades, while others—including some who had become estranged from the synagogue—strongly believed the time had come for innovative change and religious reform. This latter group founded the Reformed Society of Israelites (RSI), a truly consequential initiative constituting the first organized attempt to reform Judaism in North America.[6]

On the RSI's first anniversary, Isaac Harby (1788–1828)—the Society's leading light—delivered a long address wherein he summarized the trials and travails of the Jewish people who were cast into exile by the Roman legions that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 CE. He summarized the Jewish "pilgrimage through a hostile world" that "demoralized, then robbed, and then insulted a people whose scriptures they believe divine." Yet Harby concluded by reminding his listeners that the New World of America offered Jewish citizens a chance "to share the blessings of liberty; to partake of and to add to her political happiness, her power and her glory; to educate our children liberally; to make them useful and enlightened and honest citizens; to look upon our countrymen as brethren of the same happy family worshipping the same God of the universe . . ."[7]

1. Deuteronomy 32:7.

2. Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah: An Anthology of Interpretation and Commentary of the Five Books of Moses*, vol. 5, Devarim (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1995), 357–358.

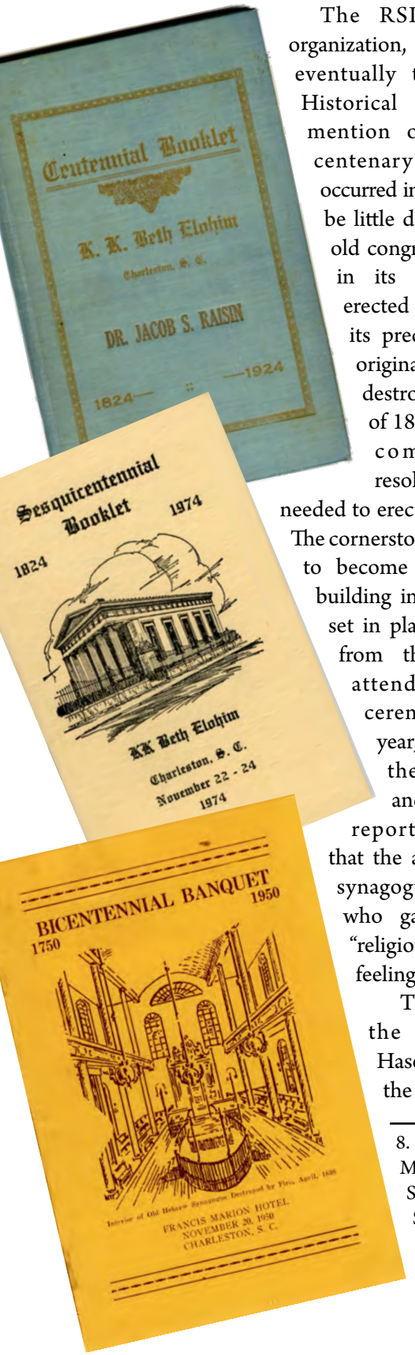
3. Charles Reznikoff and Uriah Zevi Engelman, *The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1950), 54–55.

4. Ibid., 54–55.

5. Ibid., 57.

6. On this sage, see Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

7. Lucius Clifton Moïse, *Biography of Isaac Harby* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Co., 1931), 110, 114, 121.



KKBE anniversary booklets courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

The RSI was a short-lived organization, but its ambitions eventually took root at KKBE. Historical documents make no mention of the congregation's centenary anniversary, which occurred in 1849–50, but there can be little doubt that the 100-year-old congregation was flourishing in its beautiful new home, erected on the foundations of its predecessor. After KKBE's original synagogue had been destroyed in the "Great Fire of 1838," Charleston's Jewish community promptly resolved to raise the funds it needed to erect a new house of prayer. The cornerstone on what was destined to become the oldest synagogue building in continuous usage was set in place in 1840. A reporter from the *Charleston Courier* attended the dedication ceremonies the following year, and he took note of the building's elegance and spiritual beauty. The reporter informed readers that the architecture of the new synagogue inspirited all those who gazed upon it with a "religious and hope-inspiring feeling."[8]

The inauguration of the new synagogue on Hasell Street gave rise to the modernization of the Jewish ritual and religious practice at KKBE, which fulfilled the ambitions of those who had joined the now long-dormant RSI. During the congregation's centenary year, the congregation launched a search for a new religious leader to succeed its popular minister, Rev. Gustavus Poznanski (1804–1879). Rabbinical applicants were informed that KKBE enjoyed an abbreviated worship service, with organ accompaniment and a co-ed choir that chanted in Hebrew and English. Just as the members of the RSI had recommended in 1824, the weekly sermon at KKBE was now delivered in English.[9]

It is fascinating, instructive, and ironic to note that instead of celebrating the 175th anniversary of the congregation's founding in 1925, KKBE elected to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Reformed Society of Israelites. By publicly marking RSI's centenary in 1925, KKBE revised its history. A century earlier, the congregation rejected the reforming pleas of the 47 disgruntled members who subsequently organized themselves into the RSI. Over time, however, KKBE slowly abandoned the traditional Spanish-Portuguese rite to which it once held such a firm allegiance. Reform Judaism's popularity had ascended over the last half of the 19th century, and KKBE had embraced Reform. It was among the first congregations to join Isaac Mayer Wise's fledgling Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 and, in 1915, the congregation called Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin (1878–1946) to its pulpit. Raisin was the first ordinand of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College to lead KKBE and, from that day to the present, all of KKBE's spiritual leaders have been alumni of HUC. As a loyal partisan of Reform Judaism, KKBE happily disregarded the fact that its *adjunta* (governing board) forestalled the call for religious reform in 1824. From that point forward, KKBE proudly identified itself to the world as the "Birthplace of American Reform Judaism"![10]

KKBE celebrated four additional anniversary events over the course of the 20th century: (a) the bicentennial anniversary of the congregation's founding (1750–1950); (b) the sesquicentennial anniversary of the RSI's founding (1824–1974); (c) the sesquicentennial anniversary of the dedication of congregation's Hasell Street building (1841–1991); and (d) the 250th anniversary of the congregation's founding (1749–1999). These celebrations featured letters of congratulation and celebratory events with prominent speakers, all of whom emphasized KKBE's remarkable longevity, the inaugural role it played in the history of American Reform Judaism, the longstanding support and warm embrace the congregation received from the citizens of Charleston, and the unflagging efforts of its members to sustain Jewish life while simultaneously contributing to the commonweal.[11]

In 1950, KKBE invited Jane L. Raisin (1887–1963), the widow of Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin, to offer one of the bicentennial addresses. Her concluding words are enduringly relevant:

> Thus our Bicentennial becomes not only a tribute to the Jewish past. It is a tribute, also, to the community that has made that past possible. [It is] a tribute to the Jew and [the] non-Jew. [It is a tribute] to the spirit that is America. It also points the way to the future. *What has been, can be,* and to the American dream so perfectly expressed in our ancient prayer book: 'One humanity on earth, even as there is one God in heaven. In this spirit we shall go forward.'[12] (emphasis added)

In marking the progression of its milestone anniversaries, this community has celebrated the past and, more importantly, it has drawn strength from it. As Jane Raisin put it: "What has been, can be! . . . In this spirit we shall go forward."

8. *The Charleston Courier,* March 20, 1841. See also, Solomon Breibart, "The Synagogues of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* vol. 80, no. 3 (July 1979): 222–227.

9. Reznikoff and Engleman, 164.

10. On the rise of Reform Judaism in the American South during the 19th century, see Gary Phillip Zola, "The Ascendancy of Reform Judaism in the American South During the Nineteenth Century" in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History,* ed. Marcie C. Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006): 156–191.

11. Special Collections, of the College of Charleston Libraries, Charleston, South Carolina, contains a rich collection of these documents. The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. Max Modiano Daniel, public historian and Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator at Special Collections in the Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston for his generous research assistance.

12. Bicentennial Address written and delivered by Jane Lazarus Raisin (1887–1965), 1950, in the Jacob S. Raisin papers, Mss. 1075, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries, Charleston, South Carolina.

Clockwise from top right: Jane Raisin's bicentennial address with her emendations and signature; Jane Raisin; Rabbi Jacob S. Raisin. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

North American Reform Judaism: Born and Bred in Charleston, South Carolina, for a Changing World

by Rabbi Stephanie Alexander, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston, South Carolina

The following was presented by Rabbi Alexander at KKBE's Cantorial Concert held on May 25, 2024, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of North American Reform Judaism. A recording of the concert in its entirety, music and spoken word, can be accessed by scanning the QR code with your phone camera.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Reform Judaism in North America, a journey that began in South Carolina. The year is 1824, and there are about 600 Jews living in Charleston, making it the largest Jewish community in America. At Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, already in existence for 75 years, English sermons are delivered on special occasions—indicating the changing demographics of those sitting in the pews—but the service, as mandated by the congregation's constitution, follows traditional Sephardic practice.

In 1824, 47 individuals sign a petition and deliver it to the *adjunta* (KKBE's governing body) requesting certain reforms. They want shorter services; to repeat some of the Hebrew prayers in English; sermons consistently delivered in English, and about the meaning of Jewish principles and texts; and no more auctioning off honors in exchange for donations. But the *adjunta* denies their petition, so about a dozen men break off from KKBE and establish the Reformed Society of Israelites, signaling the birth of Reform Judaism in North America.

The Reformed Society of Israelites holds worship services in a masonic hall, accompanied by choral and instrumental music. Men don't wear kippot. Isaac Harby, Abraham Moise II, and David Nunes Carvalho compile liturgy for the group. In 1830, they create their own prayerbook, the first Jewish prayerbook to embrace liturgical reform anywhere in the world. In addition to prayers for *Shabbat* and certain holidays, there's liturgy for an individual confirmation ritual, a wedding ceremony in which the bride (gasp!) would speak, and other lifecycle events.

Yet, for all of its initial momentum, the Reformed Society of Israelites seems to fold, at least in an official capacity, after 1833. Funds collected for the construction of a building have to be returned. Some of its key leaders have by this time moved elsewhere; some members have drifted away from Judaism entirely; others have found their way back to KKBE. And KKBE welcomes them back in—in time, welcoming and embracing their reforms, as well.

In 1838, as fire sweeps through the Charleston peninsula, KKBE's building is destroyed along with so many others. It's a devastating loss, but also an opening for the reformers. Rebuilding the sanctuary provides an opportunity their recently hired religious leader, Gustavus Poznanski, surprisingly agrees to, if not encourages—the inclusion of an organ, effectively making KKBE the first Reform synagogue in the country. Some leave the congregation in protest; others who had left, rejoin. But in 1841, KKBE dedicates the incredible building we are privileged to continue to call our spiritual home today, the grand columns outside perhaps a knowing nod to Isaac Harby's speech 16 years earlier. At the dedication Poznanski declares and subsequently the newspapers broadcast: "This synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy land our Palestine." The practice of Reform Judaism in North American synagogues is born.

KKBE sanctuary with a view of the organ, no date. William A. Rosenthall Judaica Collection, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

What had begun in one synagogue in Charleston in 1841 is woven into a Reform *movement* by the end of the 19th century. In 1873, the UAHC (Union for American Hebrew Congregations, now the Union for Reform Judaism) is founded, an umbrella organization of quite diverse congregations, whose main goal is to fund a seminary that can train and ordain English-speaking American rabbis to serve a growing number of Reform congregations. In 1875, HUC (Hebrew Union College) is established in Cincinnati, fulfilling that lofty goal.

In 1885, a document called the Pittsburgh Platform articulates, for the first time, a set of philosophical and theological concepts to define and unify a Reform movement of congregations, members, and religious leaders. These include the *Torah* as a moral and ethical document; compatibility with scientific research and modern discoveries; an emphasis on religious rituals that are spiritually uplifting, and a willingness to discard those rituals (such as, perhaps, kashrut and wearing head coverings) that "fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness." What will come to be known as classical Reform Judaism is in fact quite radical. For those who welcome these changes, Reform Judaism represents a fresh and necessary modernization of traditional practice. For others, it goes too far.

KKBE's Music & Artistic Director Bates O'Neal (center front), Rabbi Stephanie Alexander (to Bates' left), and choir, Koleinu, *are joined on KKBE's* bimah, *May 25, 2024, by students and faculty from the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, New York City, for a cantorial concert celebrating 200 years of Reform Judaism, one of several programs offered in 2024 to commemorate the synagogue's 275th anniversary. Photo by Jack Alterman, courtesy of KKBE.*

Throughout the 20th century (and very much to the present day), a variety of styles and traditions, cultures and practices, commingle and influence one another in the laboratories of Reform synagogues and institutions.

In 1885, the Pittsburgh Platform stated: ". . . we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society." By the time of the Columbus Platform, in 1937, "Social Justice" was its own heading. As the momentum of social justice builds through the 1950s, '60s, and '70s in North America, so too does its impact on American Jewish life.

But the push for positive change isn't only focused *outside* of our Reform community and institutions. As Rabbi Daniel Freelander has explained: "The protest culture in opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of the growing women's movement encouraged synagogue members to question the established order [within their communities, as well]. People were suddenly asking, "Why can't we sing along in services?" or "Who says that I have to wear a tie and jacket in synagogue?" Women began to question, "Why do women only sit on the *bimah* at the Sisterhood *Shabbat*?" or "Why can't women be temple presidents?"

Inclusion becomes an intentional focus through the 1980s, '90s, and beyond. In 1978, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, executive director of the UAHC, challenges the Reform Movement to invest in and prioritize the work of outreach, specifically looking to connect more deeply with non-Jewish spouses raising Jewish children in interfaith families, Jews by choice, and those who don't affiliate with any religion or house of worship. Eventually that spirit of outreach will come to encompass not only interfaith families, but those in the LGBTQ+ community, Jews of color, and more—with, of course, much more work to be done.

North American Reform Judaism has come a long way in the 200 years since it began right here in Charleston. Reform Judaism is now a world-wide movement encompassing synagogues; national and international institutions; and rabbis, cantors, educators, and executive directors trained and supported by Reform seminaries and professional organizations. And KKBE, at the epicenter of the initial proposed reforms 200 years ago, fully represents our Reform Movement today.

We are egalitarian and inclusive, with leadership opportunities (all the way up onto the *bimah*) open to all, regardless of gender, class, sexual orientation, or race. We've been led by those who were born Jewish and those who have chosen Judaism. Among many others, we celebrate a Veterans *Shabbat,* Sisterhood *Shabbat,* MLK *Shabbat,* and Pride *Shabbat.*

From Isaac Harby's first compilation of prayers and the *Union Prayer Book,* to *Gates of Prayer* and *Gates of Repentance, Mishkan T'filah* and *Mishkan HaNefesh,* and the Visual T'filah created over the years by Robin Shuler and now Bates O'Neal, we have stayed current with the liturgy that creates a sense of familiarity across the majority of Reform congregations in the country.

Within these sacred walls, we've seen the ebb and flow of traditional Jewish ritual. There are certainly more *kippot* and *tallitot,* and decidedly more Hebrew, than would have been familiar or even comfortable a generation or two ago. We've reinstated *hakafot,* carrying the *Torah* scroll around the congregation during a *Torah* service, but have not brought back *hagbah,* lifting the *Torah* scroll and declaring it to be the word of God transcribed by the hand of Moses. We've continued to embrace the newer ritual of Confirmation, but reintroduced and have even more strongly embraced the milestone of *B'nei Mitzvah.*

We not only engage in social action and social justice, but are deeply proud of doing so. We speak up and show up for issues, not only those that impact the *Jewish* community, but we understand it is a Jewish imperative to use our voices and our presence to be a force for justice for *all.*

And, of course, we have evolved tremendously in our music. Organ, piano, guitar, clarinet, violin. Even the occasional drum kit or castanet. *Chazzanut,* choir, song leaders, and soloists. Selections and arrangements that go all the way back to the roots of Reform Judaism and up through the most popular melodies that will be sung throughout URJ camps this coming summer.

Every time we gather for worship, we truly stand on the shoulders of—and our prayers are elevated by—each of the generations that have gone before. And the future of Reform Judaism, as viewed from that lofty place, looks very bright indeed.

I am indebted to Dr. Michael Meyer's Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism *for much of the history of the Reformed Society of Israelites. The websites of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Union for Reform Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Religious Action Center, and North American Federation of Temple Youth were also tremendously helpful.*

Guest Speakers

Gary Phillip Zola is the Executive Director Emeritus of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience & Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. He has served the College-Institute, where he received both his rabbinic ordination (1982) and his Ph.D. in American Jewish History (1991), for more than four decades. Professor Zola is widely known as a historian of American Jewry who specializes in 19th-century American Judaism and the history of American Reform Judaism. On May 17, 2023, President Joe Biden appointed Dr. Zola to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, which serves as the governing board of trustees of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Samuel D. Gruber has been a leader in the documentation, protection, and preservation of historic Jewish sites worldwide since 1988. He was founding director of the Jewish Heritage Program of World Monuments Fund (1988–1996) and Research Director of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (1998–2008). He presently directs Gruber Heritage Global, a cultural resource consulting firm, and is president of the not-for-profit International Survey of Jewish Monuments. He has taught Art History and Jewish Studies at Syracuse University since 1994 and has also taught at Binghamton, Colgate, Cornell, and Temple Universities, and Le Moyne College. Sam received his BA in Medieval Studies from Princeton University, his Ph.D. in Art and Architectural History from Columbia University and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Rome, where he won the prestigious Rome Prize in Art History.

Laura Yares is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. Her research explores different contexts in which Jews and non-Jews learn about Judaism and Jewishness in the United States. She is the author of *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth Century America* (NYU Press, 2023) which was a finalist for a National Jewish book award. Her second book, a contemporary ethnographic study of how audiences learn about Judaism and Jewishness through engagements with cultural arts will be published with NYU Press in 2025.

Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Celebrates 275 Years

September 13–15, 2024 ~ Charleston, SC

Friday, September 13

7:00 p.m. Shabbat service followed by oneg

All events on Friday and Saturday will be held at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE), 90 Hasell Street.

Saturday, September 14

10:00–11:30 a.m. Shabbat service

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 Opening remarks ~ Steve Savitz, President, JHSSC; Naomi Gorstein, President, KKBE; Rabbi Stephanie Alexander, KKBE

1:15 Remembering the Days of Yore ~ Rabbi Gary Phillip Zola

2:15 Break

2:30 Shaping American Judaism: the Origins, Architecture, and Influence of KKBE's Synagogue Buildings ~ Sam Gruber

3:15 Break

3:30 Women in American Jewish Education ~ Laura Yares in conversation with Anita Rosenberg

4:15 Break

4:30– 5:15 TBD

5:30–6:30 Reception

Dinner on your own

Sunday, May 19

Sunday's events from 9:00 to 11:00 will be held on the 3rd floor of the Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 205 Calhoun Street.

9:00a.m. JHSSC Board Meeting and breakfast buffet. All are welcome.

10:00 The Jewish Heritage Collection ~ Max Daniel

11:00–1:00 p.m. Coming Street Cemetery walking tour

Join us Sunday for a very special morning! Max Daniel, Public Historian and Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator, will share special objects and stories from the Jewish Heritage Collection in Special Collections, Addlestone Library, the repository for countless photographs and artifacts donated by Jewish South Carolinians. Don't miss this opportunity!

Fees (per person):
Saturday & Sunday $125
Saturday only $75
Sunday only $50

Pay online at the
College of Charleston Marketplace
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

REGISTRATION

Questions:

Alyssa Neely, *neelya@cofc.edu*
OR
Rachel Barnett, 843.917.1418
jhssc2020@gmail.com

Francis Marion Hotel
387 King Street, Charleston
843-722-0600
A block of rooms is reserved at a special JHSSC rate until 5:00 p.m., August 12.

Link to hotel website with special rate is also available here:
jhssc.org/events/upcoming

The Women Who Pioneered American Jewish Education

by Laura Yares, Assistant Professor, Jewish Studies, Michigan State University

The first American Jewish Sunday school opened its doors in Philadelphia in 1838. Ringing the opening bell was Rebecca Gratz, a pioneering, American-born Sephardic Jewish woman who had dedicated her life to her philanthropic work among Philadelphia's needy.[1] Gratz was concerned that Jewish children had become easy prey for enthusiastic missionaries who would lure new recruits to their bible classes, so she founded the Hebrew Sunday School to offer pupils a safe place to spend their Sunday mornings and a basic primer in Judaism that she hoped would equip them with sufficient Jewish knowledge to rebut the claims of predatory missionaries.

Above: Image of Rebecca Gratz found in a 1913 booklet printed in honor of the 75th anniversary of the Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia. Below: Sally Lopez, KKBE Sunday school founder. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

Gratz left aside the curriculum of traditional Jewish education in favor of introductory Jewish catechisms, English-language prayers, and simple home rituals for celebrating the Jewish calendar. Teaching the *Chumash* (Pentateuch) in Hebrew or the intense legal disputations of the *Talmud* was unrealistic for a once-per-week school. What is more, because of their gender, Gratz and the other women who volunteered as teachers had not received training in these subjects. At the Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School, Jewish children heard Gratz read selections from the weekly *Torah* portion in English, learned basic rituals for celebrating Jewish holidays, and talked about God, morality, and ethics. Meeting on Sunday mornings when Christians would be attending the schools of their own denominations, the Hebrew Sunday School taught Jewish children that their tradition was more than equal to the Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Baptists down the street. With only a token cost for attendance, Gratz sought to make Jewish education affordable and accessible to the children of new immigrants who had little financial capacity to pay for expensive Jewish schooling.

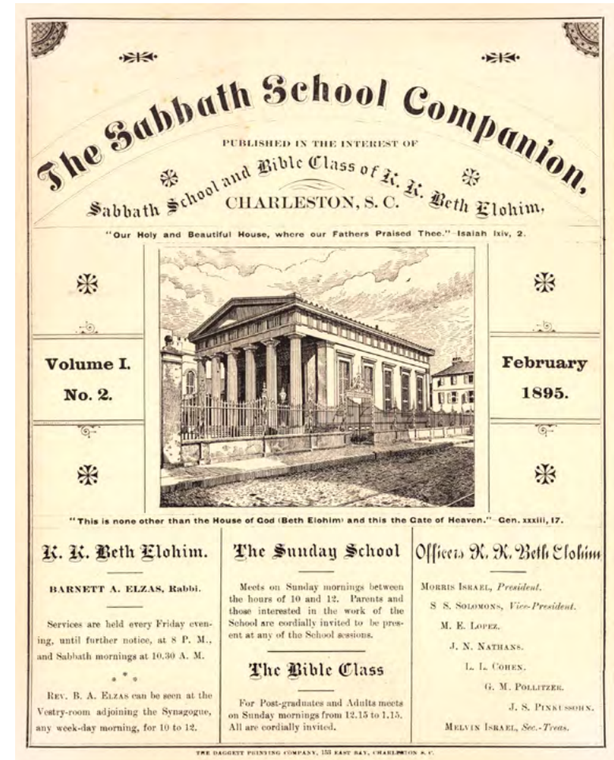
News of Gratz's initiative spread quickly. Just a few months after Gratz opened her Philadelphia school, Sally Lopez of Reform congregation Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, created a Sunday school for the children of her community. Lopez replicated Gratz's lessons, which Gratz would write out for her and send to Charleston by mail each week. Another school was created later that year by the women of New York congregation Shearith Israel, a traditional Spanish-Portuguese synagogue. It offered classes for poor Jewish children each Sunday, regardless of synagogue membership. One year later, a fourth Sunday school was founded in Richmond, Virginia, under the auspices of the Ladies Auxiliary of Beth Shalome, another Orthodox congregation.

Indeed, Jewish Sunday schools were created by communities across the denominational spectrum of American Judaism. They were founded by communities that we would describe today as Orthodox, or traditional, and not only by synagogues that identified with the Reform Movement. In Charleston, K.K. Beth Elohim was the principal seat of the emergent American Reform Movement. However, another Charleston congregation, Shearith Israel, which had split from Beth Elohim and which maintained the Spanish-Portuguese rite, recruited 60 women in 1844 to organize a rival Sunday school for "impressing upon the tender minds of their pupils the orthodox tenets of our religion."[2]

1. For more information on Rebecca Gratz, see Dianne Ashton, Rebecca Gratz: *Women and Judaism in Antebellum America,* American Jewish Civilization Series (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

2. Led by Henrietta Hart. "New School in Charleston," *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate,* June 1, 1844. Uriah Zevi Engelman, "Jewish Education in Charleston, South Carolina, During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 42, no. 1 (1952): 59.

Sunday schools were embraced by Jewish communities across the denominational spectrum because they were pragmatic and affordable for an American Jewish community that was largely comprised of new immigrants struggling to get a hold on life in America. Using Gratz's initiative as a model, over the course of the 19th century, Jewish Sunday schools were founded across the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. At the beginning, they were overwhelmingly organized by female superintendents, and they were served by female teachers. Sunday schools thus offered important opportunities for communal leadership to women who were largely prohibited from other public-facing roles in the synagogue at the time.



The Sabbath School Companion,

PUBLISHED IN THE INTEREST OF

Sabbath School and Bible Class of K. K. Beth Elohim,

CHARLESTON, S. C.

"Our Holy and Beautiful House, where our Fathers Praised Thee." Isaiah lxiv, 2.

Volume I. No. 2. February 1895.

"This is none other than the House of God (Beth Elohim) and this the Gate of Heaven." Gen. xxviii, 17.

K. K. Beth Elohim.

BARNETT A. ELZAS, Rabbi.

Services are held every Friday evening, until further notice, at 8 P. M., and Sabbath mornings at 10.30 A. M.

* * *

Rev. B. A. Elzas can be seen at the Vestry-room adjoining the Synagogue, any week-day morning, for 10 to 12.

The Sunday School

Meets on Sunday mornings between the hours of 10 and 12. Parents and those interested in the work of the School are cordially invited to be present at any of the School sessions.

The Bible Class

For Post-graduates and Adults meets on Sunday mornings from 12.15 to 1.15. All are cordially invited.

Officers K. K. Beth Elohim

Morris Israel, *President.*

S. S. Solomons, *Vice-President.*

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THE DAGGETT PRINTING COMPANY, 155 EAST BAY, CHARLESTON S. C.

The Sabbath School Companion, published in the interest of Sabbath school and Bible class of K.K. Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC, *February 1895. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

So what did male rabbis and community leaders make of all of this? Some celebrated this female-led Jewish Sunday school initiative. They deemed it a productive use of time and energy for affluent Jewish society women. In broader American Protestant culture, religious education was considered women's work, an activity to which women were believed to be naturally inclined. And so Jewish Sunday schools provided opportunities for Jewish women to play public roles in their religious communities that matched those played by Protestant women.

For other contemporary observers, however, placing women in an occupation traditionally restricted to males, and reimagining the curriculum of Jewish learning to focus on topics that had long been understood to be associated with a domestic women's domain—bible and simple prayers—was nothing short of a betrayal of Judaism itself. Critics of the movement denounced the once-a-week Jewish Sunday school as little more than saccharine feminine spirituality, a pale imitation of popular Christian theological motifs in a vaguely Jewish key. In Baltimore, a Sephardic woman named Sarah Nunes Carvalho rallied a group of 17 volunteer teachers to found the Baltimore Hebrew Sunday School Society in 1857. Yet Carvalho's work was ridiculed by a local Reform rabbi, David Einhorn. Arguing that Carvalho and her team possessed little in the way of Jewish or Hebrew knowledge, he told parents that children who attended the school would be crippled by "weibliche Theologie" (women's theology).[3] Another local Baltimorean, Orthodox Rabbi Benjamin Szold, also denounced Carvalho's work. Szold was the father of Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, yet he had little interest in supporting Jewish education led by women. "There is no better way to make a mockery of religion," he said in response to Carvalho's school, "than to depend upon volunteers to carry out the religious instruction of the children."[4]

The opposition to the Jewish Sunday school spanned the emerging denominational spectrum of American Judaism. Benjamin Szold was Orthodox, but David Einhorn was Reform, and Sunday schools were criticized by other Reform rabbis as well. Perhaps most important among them was Isaac Mayer Wise, who would become the de facto head of the American Jewish Reform Movement. In 1847, shortly after arriving in the United States, he wrote a letter to the *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums* newspaper in Leipzig describing the "fine progress" of American Jewry in all matters—except for Jewish education. In America, Wise besmirched, "they have introduced a phantom affair called a Sunday school. There religious instruction for children is imparted each Sabbath or Sunday by good-hearted young women. What fruits these

3. "Hebrew Sunday School of Baltimore," *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate,* January 1857, 496.

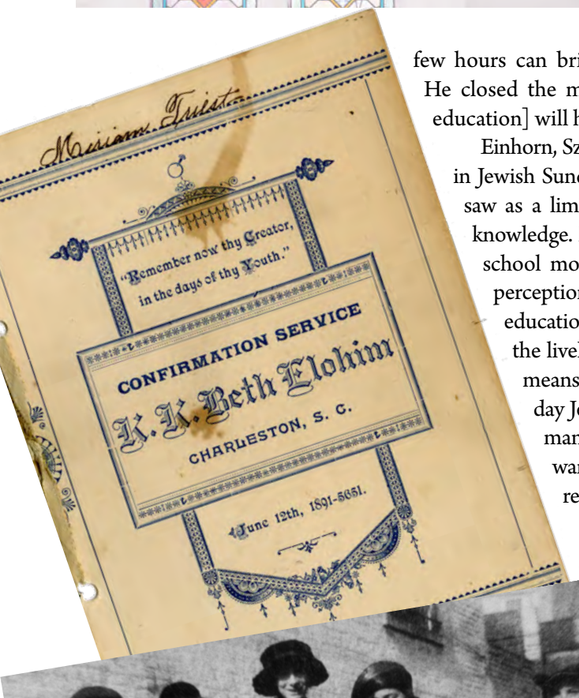
4. Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community; the History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), 186.

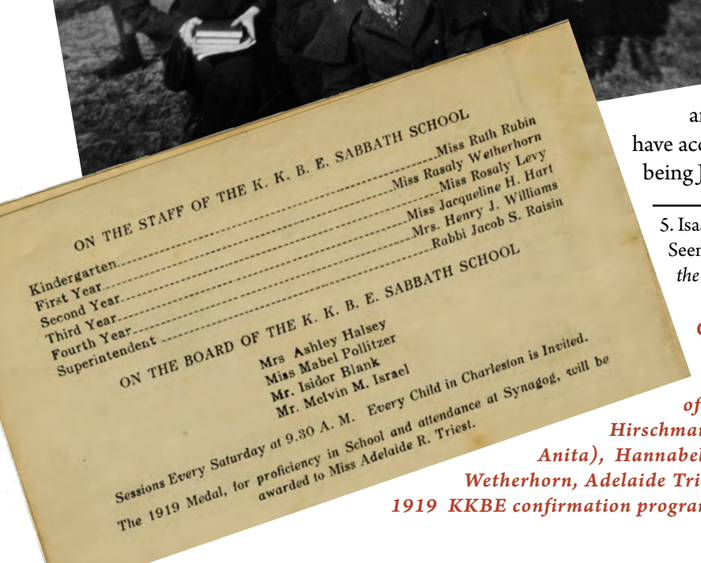
few hours can bring forth hardly necessitates further description." He closed the missive by promising "This snake [of insufficient education] will have its head crushed."[5]

Einhorn, Szold, and Wise's dismissal of the women who taught in Jewish Sunday schools was certainly a criticism of what they saw as a limited curriculum, and the teachers' lack of Jewish knowledge. But their condescension towards the Jewish Sunday school movement was also motivated in no small part by the perception that they posed a threat towards more intensive Jewish educational initiatives like the schools at their own congregations, as well as to the livelihoods of male educators. In America, as in Europe, teaching offered a means for Jewishly educated males to support themselves financially. Yet all-day Jewish schools or intensive *Talmud Torahs* simply did not seem to attract many American Jewish parents. The majority of 19th-century American Jews wanted their children to attend the newly developing free public schools to reap the benefits of an American education, including learning English.

Eventually, male leaders like Wise came around to Sunday schools. They simply could not fight the tide of popularity. By the 1880s, Sunday schools had become integrated into most American synagogue congregations. In the process, the leadership of these schools was taken over by men. All-male congregational education boards determined the curriculum, and male rabbis supervised the classes who would "graduate" Sunday school during elaborate confirmation services held each year on *Shavuot*. Women still provided much of the volunteer labor of teaching younger classes, but they no longer occupied positions of leadership. As teachers, women continued to play important roles in Jewish education, but their contributions have mostly been overlooked by historians of American Judaism. That is in part because the work they did is the kind that still very rarely makes headline news today—showing up, volunteering, and working with children. In my book, *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America,* I reconstruct the ways these women pioneered the field of American Jewish education, and how they sought to ensure every Jewish child would have access to a school where they could learn the basics of what being Jewish was all about.

5. Isaac Mayer Wise, "The New American Jew: American Jewish Life as Seen from Albany, New York, September 1847," in *Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1847).





Counterclockwise from top right: KKBE Sunday School medal, 1923; KKBE confirmation service program, June 12, 1891; photograph of nine of the twelve members of the KKBE confirmation class of 1919 [front: Edith Hirschman(l), Anita Williams (ctr), Cecile Mendelsohn (behind Anita), Hannabelle Hirsch (r); rear (l to r): Willard Hirsch, Mildred Wetherhorn, Adelaide Triest, Miriam Neuberger, Richard Israel]; the back of the 1919 KKBE confirmation program. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

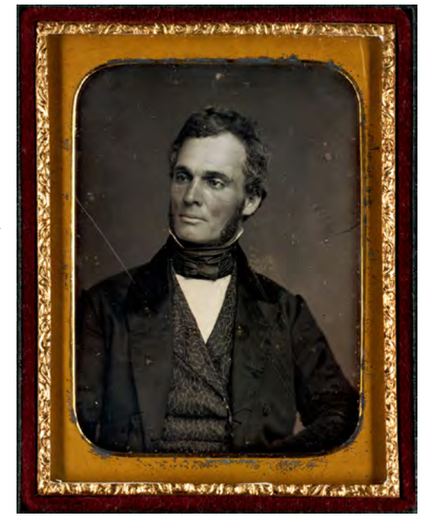
In the Pews Before Us: An Unorthodox Look at KKBE

by Harlan Greene, based on a talk given during COVID to KKBE's Lifelong Learning group.

Congregational histories, quite appropriately, often focus on founders and leaders, those on the *bimah,* in the board and classrooms. But of great interest, as well, are the countless members who were not on the pulpit or in power, but in the pews. It's something especially true of KKBE, where the pews themselves have been varied: some hand-crafted, some lost in a fire, others given to an Orthodox *shul,* and the current ones upsetting orthodoxy, seating men and women simultaneously. The pew occupants have changed over the years, too. What follows is just a brief suggestion of perhaps some of the more colorful members of KKBE: some who may not have led the congregation but led interesting lives nonetheless. Some may not have been dues paying members, but were of the larger *mischpachah,* or KKBE family.

That certainly rings true for Robert Purvis, born in Charleston in 1810 to a white British father and Harriet Judah, a free woman of color. Harriet's African mother was kidnapped from Morocco and was possibly of the Muslim faith. Her father was Baron Judah, the son of Hillel Judah, a German immigrant who married Sephardic Abigail Seixas of KKBE. Their great-grandson Robert Purvis left for Philadelphia and was one of the founding members of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. It's wonderful to reflect that a man descended from our early families (he always claimed his Jewish ancestry) went on to be a force not in sustaining slavery but in abolishing it.

David Lopez, who left KKBE when it became Reform, used enslaved labor to build the current building, a fact now memorialized in a marker on the grounds. It's ironic, then, to note that at least one enslaved person worshiped at KKBE. Billy Simmons was his name, or sometimes Billy Mitchell, born circa 1780, maybe in Madagascar, and sold into slavery, descended, he said, from a long line of Jews. To our shame, Jewish enslavers were the ones who sold him to this city. He eventually was enslaved by A. S. Willington, editor and owner of the *Courier,* the forerunner of the *Post and Courier* and, for years, Mr. Simmons delivered the papers through the city streets.



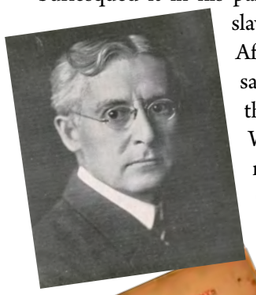
Above: Robert Purvis, ca. 1840–1849. Courtesy of Digital Commonwealth (accessed July 15, 2024). Below: sketch of Billy Simmons featured in the 100th anniversary **News and Courier** *publication, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

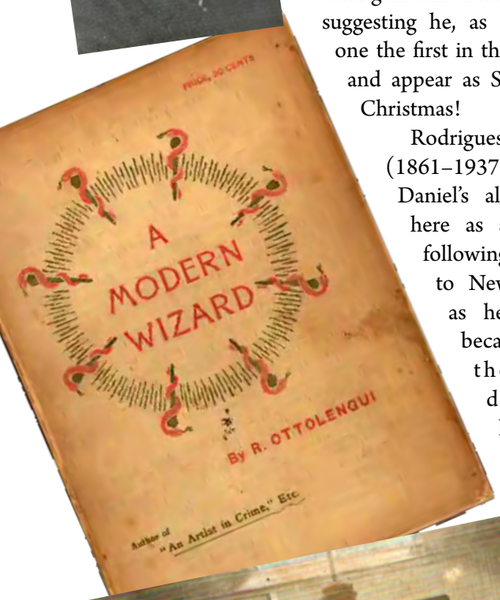
Even though in 1820, again to our shame, we changed our constitution to outlaw any person of color from ever becoming a member of KKBE, that did not stop Simmons from attending. According to an 1850s source, at services "He wore a shining black hat, full suit of black and frill in his shirt of great size, snowy white four inches wide, and extending from his chin to his waist."

"In Religion," the *Courier* noted, "Billy was an Israelite, attending for the entire day of Atonement, the solemn day of the Jewish year." Not granted freedom, he nevertheless was free to worship as his ancestors did, possibly making KKBE the first integrated congregation in the city, with a Black man *not* relegated to segregated seating, as women were then.

Sitting close by to Simmons could have been Daniel Ottolengui and his family. Daniel's family were slave-owners; he fought in the Civil War, going to New York City afterwards where he found his claim to fame as a writer. Some scholars believe that he was behind the 1868 pamphlet *General Grant and the Jews,* attacking the then–presidential

candidate for his infamous order of expelling Jews from part of the South in his *General Order Number 11*. We aren't sure of that, but we do know that, unfortunately, his most famous parody was a racist one based on Elizabeth Keckley, the free woman of color who made clothes for Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. Keckley's memoir was called *Behind the Scenes,* and Ottolengui burlesqued it in his pamphlet called *Behind the Seams.* So, slave owner, racist, and ridiculer of African Americans, Daniel Ottolengui, sat with enslaved Billy Simmons in the same sanctuary before the Civil War, apparently civilly, united by their religion, if not their political beliefs. Ottolengui, returning to Charleston, would gain fame here, as well, some suggesting he, as an actor, was one the first in the city to dress and appear as St. Nicholas at Christmas!





Rodrigues Ottolengui (1861–1937), a relation of Daniel's also worshiped here as a boy before following the path to New York. Rod, as he was called, became one of the leading dentists of his day. He professionalized the practice in New York, was among the earliest to use X-rays, and edited and wrote numerous standard dental texts of the day, but he published novels and detective stories, too. Today he is sometimes called one of the American rivals of Sherlock Holmes. Ellery Queen dubbed Ottolengui "one of the most neglected authors in the entire history of the detective story." His first mystery, *An Artist in Crime,* was republished in numerous countries. *A Modern Wizard* posited the idea that some forms of insanity were traceable to microorganisms. In another tale he described how a dead person could be identified by her teeth. Five years later, an officer of the law used Ottolengui's clever idea, helping to give rise to the field of forensic dentistry.

Fact and fiction surrounded other members of the Ottolengui family, as well. Some relatives who stayed in Charleston not only drummed up business for him by keeping secret a recipe for a confection, probably famous for rotting teeth, but also were tangentially involved in Charleston's literary and culinary scene.

In 1906, a best seller called *Lady Baltimore,* set in Charleston, came off the presses. It's a tale of crass rich northerners coming to Charleston and Charleston's resistance to them, specifically, how one young Charleston gentleman avoids marrying a wild Yankee girl, wedding a Lowcountry lass instead. The book was so popular that the cake—Lady Baltimore Cake, the specialty of a shop run by women featured in the story and the wedding cake in the novel—got a national and even international reputation. Lady Baltimore cakes from Charleston became the signature food of the city and a national food fad; the masters of the cake were members of KKBE. Florence Ottolengui (1859–1928) and her younger sister, Nina Ottolengui (1879–1960) were called the "very best makers of the Lady Baltimore." Florence Ottolengui ran the Lady Baltimore Tea Room, where she served the cake and filled orders for it from around the country.

Their relative Octavus Roy Cohen (1891–1959) was the son of Rebecca Ottolengui Cohen, the first president of the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, and her husband, Octavus Cohen. Cohen, Jr. practiced law here briefly before turning out nearly 60 novels and hundreds of short stories, published in the likes of *Amazing Stories* and the *Saturday Evening Post.* His plays

Top to bottom: Rodrigues Ottolengui portrait from Table Talks on Dentistry *by Rodrigues Ottolengui, 1935. Image courtesy of Harlan Greene. Cover of Ottolengui's* A Modern Wizard, *first edition, published in 1894, asking price on July 15, 2024, by L. W. Curry, Inc.: $450. Postcard image of the Ladies Exchange, site of the Lady Baltimore Tea Room, 208 King Street, Charleston, SC. Image courtesy of Harlan Greene.*

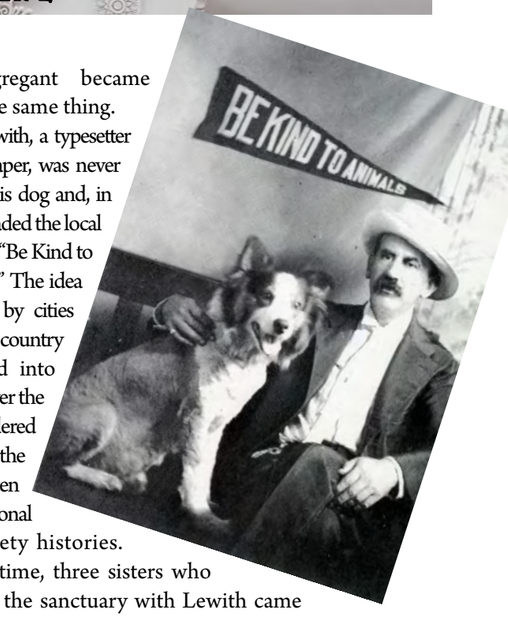
were on Broadway and he wrote for films, too. Unfortunately, he contributed to racial stereotypes by writing for the racist radio serial, *Amos 'n Andy,* work of his that the congregation is striving today to undo.

Another member of KKBE, Robert Marks, wrote almost as many books as Cohen. Marks was such a genius that he was asked to leave both the College of Charleston and Harvard, going on to Yale, eventually teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York, becoming something of a modern wizard with math and technology.

But if Cohen's books were about race, Robert Marks's were racy. After publishing hundreds of articles in magazines like *Esquire, Saturday Evening Post, Cosmopolitan,* and *Coronet,* and authoring and/or editing dozens of books on the slide rule, math, set theory, Buckminster Fuller, wine, chess, and electricity, he returned home. Having made a living with his scholarly books, he made a killing with a new series of novels published under the name of John Colleton. These very tongue-in-cheek novels track the social habits of many Charlestonians and their travels, focusing on them pursuing art, beauty, wine, and good times, but mostly each other in and out of bed. For years one of the most popular sports in this city was trying to identify upon whom Robert had based his characters. He was not above taking congregants' names and putting them in his books, flattering some and embarrassing others.

Robert was not a religious man, but Rabbi Jacob Raisin, then in KKBE's pulpit, took it all in stride, challenging the young man to write a sermon, and he did; it and the Ottolengui sisters' Lady Baltimore recipe are archived at the College of Charleston's Jewish Heritage Collection. Dr. Raisin's papers are, too.

Born in Russia, Raisin came to this country as an itinerant rabbi, before settling in Charleston in 1915, serving as KKBE's rabbi until 1944. He was a scholar of Jewish life and literature and, unlike most Reform rabbis at the time, he was also a Zionist, attending the Yiddish-speaking Zionist group in town. Amazingly, this greenhorn married Jane Lazarus, of one of Charleston's oldest Jewish families, and gave sermons every year, in the deep South, on Abraham Lincoln. He was a leader in race relations when Jim Crow ruled, a member of the County Board of School Commissioners, the Salvation Army, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Jewish Welfare Board. Rabbi Raisin also spoke often and eloquently on the necessity of being kind to animals, in an era that another KKBE congregant became famous for the same thing.



Henry Lewith, a typesetter for the local paper, was never seen without his dog and, in 1913, he persuaded the local paper to start a "Be Kind to Animals Week." The idea was taken up by cities all over the country and translated into languages all over the world. Considered a pioneer in the field, he is often included in national humane society histories. At the same time, three sisters who worshiped in the sanctuary with Lewith came to be extolled for their contributions to betterment of the human species.

Above: Henry Lewith from Quality of Mercy: History of the Humane Movement in the United States *by William Alan Swallow, 1963. Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries. Left: Lee Cohen Harby, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Below: the Old Exchange building, 122 East Bay Street, Charleston, SC, likely 1930s. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress (accessed July 15, 2024). Editor's note: the LOC lists Charles N. Bayless as photographer, but we believe that is inaccurate since he photographed Charleston in the 1970s–'80s.*

The Pollitzer sisters did amazing things. Carrie (1881–1974) was on the committee that opened up the College of Charleston to women. Mabel (1885–1979) worked in science education for girls, helped found the public library, and was state head of the National Women's Party. Their youngest sister, Anita (1894–1975), while in New York, introduced Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O'Keefe, and, as president of the National Women's Party, helped bring about ratification of the 19th amendment, giving women the vote, and changing the course of American history.

Important to our local history was Lee Cohen Harby (1849–1918), granddaughter of Isaac Harby. Born in Charleston, Lee Cohen did the usual old Jewish family thing: she married a cousin once removed—named Harby. A Daughter of the Confederacy and a Daughter of the American Revolution, she helped save one of Charleston's most important local landmarks, the Old Exchange Building. A plaque on its north side lauds her for her "patriotic and untiring efforts" in keeping it from destruction.

Dr. Robert F. Furchgott received the Nobel prize for medicine from King Carl Gustav XVI of Sweden in 1998. Image courtesy of Gene Furchgott, Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

Another congregant, Robert Furchgott, merited praise for his work, too—internationally. He was born here in 1906, grew up downtown, before moving to Orangeburg, attending UNC, thence going on to Northwestern, Cornell, Washington University School of Medicine, and University of Miami. In 1978, he discovered a substance in certain cells that relaxes blood vessels. It took years of intense research to determine that it was nitric oxide, thus helping to explain many processes important to human health and fighting diseases. In 1998, with two other others, Furchgott was awarded the Nobel Prize for his discoveries. He retired back to Charleston for a few years and was again a regular attender of services at KKBE.

These are just some of the men and women who were in the pews before us, who impacted our city, country, and world. Some have been examples of human frailty, and others of humor or hard work or heroism, benefiting humanity—a diverse group indeed, and just an eclectic selection of all those who are part of the continuing story of KKBE.

Making Connections

by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director

I recently received an email from a JHSSC member who attended the May meeting. She told me she reconnected with a cousin there and noted, "The JHSSC brings together folks in many ways." This message really spoke to me. Beyond the mission of the JHSSC, our conferences encourage community and engagement. Meeting people from across South Carolina and beyond, and either reconnecting or making new acquaintances and friends is part of the experience of the JHSSC. For those of you who were in BBYO or TYG, attending a JHSSC gathering is a similar experience.

My goal during this 30th year of the JHSSC is to engage not only the next generation, but also those who are moving to South Carolina. We need everyone's help in this endeavor! To remain a vibrant organization, we need to reach out to those who share an interest in our mission "to study, preserve, and promote awareness of the Jewish community of South Carolina."

Our 2024 fall conference in Charleston marking Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim's 275th anniversary will be held September 13–15, beginning Friday evening with a service and oneg at KKBE. We have an outstanding group of speakers planned for Saturday, opening with Dr. Gary Zola's keynote address, and wrapping up with a reception at the synagogue. Sunday's program is shaping up to be very special. It will take place in Special Collections at the Addlestone Library, where Dr. Max Daniel will speak about the archival holdings in the Jewish Heritage Collection. In fact, a few special items will be available for viewing! This conference weekend would be a great time to invite your friends and children to join you to experience the JHSSC.

As always, my thanks goes to our steadfast and supportive Board and to our stalwart Pillars and members for believing in the JHSSC. Have some thoughts? Get in touch with me at *rgbarnettsc@gmail.com.*

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Register now for the **September 13–15 meeting at *jhssc.org/events/upcoming***.
See page 11 of this publication for program information.