

THE  
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OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA



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**Southern Jewish Women:  
Uncovering Stories of Everyday Greatness**  
JHSSC Meets in Columbia, SC ~ May 2-3, 2026



THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Cover: "Nu?" is one of several caricatures teenager Norma Mazo sketched while observing the locals as they came and went from her parents' deli at 171 King Street, Charleston, SC, in the mid-1930s. For more about Norma, see page 23. Courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

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- Jewish Women's Archive, jwa.org
"Women Leaders" in Exploring Aiken's Jewish History, asourceoflight.org/women-leaders
Smithsonian American Women's History Museum, womenshistory.si.edu
National Women's History Museum, womenshistory.org/about-national-womens-history-museum

Letter from the President



Dear friends, I wish you a happy and healthy 2026. Thank you all for allowing me the honor of serving as your president. I have big shoes to fill and hope to do just that. On a sad note, I send Rachel Barnett and her family deepest condolences on the passing of her mother, as well as the Ellison family on the recent

passing of Barbara, one of our earliest members.

My journey to this presidency began in 1981 when Jeffrey, my husband, and I were lucky to be included with Governor and Mrs. Richard Riley, Jr. on a mission to Israel led by Sam Tenenbaum of Columbia. We met many of the "movers and shakers" of South Carolina, including Senator Isadore Lourie and his wife, Susan. The experience changed the trajectory of our lives. We became friends with Phil Lader and many years later, as president of Winthrop College, he invited Jeffrey to serve on his President's Advisory Board. Governor Riley appointed Jeffrey to the first ever Procurement Panel for South Carolina. I was content to be my husband's office manager.

In 1994, Jeffrey was invited by Isadore to help with the formation of a new society, one dedicated to collecting information about the earliest Jews of South Carolina and preserving it for posterity. At the first meeting in 1995, I began my own lovefest with the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. It was a magical gathering, with Eli Evans, the main speaker; Isadore, president of the Society; Marty Perlmutter, head of Jewish Studies at the College of Charleston (Marty as the first executive director would spur the society into hitting and holding its stride); and Alex Sanders, president of the College (we met him also on the Israel trip).

Fast forward some 32 years, and the Society has doubled its size. Thanks to Dale Rosengarten, who was curator in Special Collections in College of Charleston's Addlestone

Library for nearly three decades, our vast collection of materials regarding the history of Jewish South Carolinians, known as the Jewish Heritage Collection, is housed and accessible to researchers at the College.

My presidency began at the end of our last conference on Jewish youth organizations. Although I did not take part in the planning, I must thank Rachel Barnett, our director, and Alyssa Neely, our fabulous magazine editor, and all committees for a wonderful weekend. Rabbi Gary Zola started us off with an informed talk about the history of these organizations. Two panels led by Ashley Walters and Max Daniel were not only educational, but also humorous. The AZA boys kept us laughing with some of their memories. At



Max Daniel (1), Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator, placed a number of youth group artifacts on display in Special Collections for the Sunday program at the fall 2025 meeting. Photo: Laura Moses.

the evening Sweetheart dance we enjoyed fabulous food and wine, beautiful decorations and dancing. I was so pleased to see all the new young faces! The following day after a delicious breakfast, Max gave a wonderful presentation on the collection and showed us some AZA and BBG items.

Finally, our upcoming meeting, "Southern Jewish Women: Uncovering Stories of Everyday Greatness," in Columbia, South Carolina on May 2nd and 3rd promises to be informative and fun. We will learn about the struggles women had in achieving their dreams, what they accomplished, and how their work made it easier for later generations.

Finally, I welcome your ideas, suggestions and thoughts (a shorter letter maybe), so let me hear from you.

Best to all,

Mickey Rosenblum

Mickey Rosenblum

## Looking Inward, Looking Outward: Jewish Women in the American South

by Shari Rabin, Oberlin College

On July 11, 1733, eight married women and seven girls arrived in Savannah with their families, according to the detailed communal records kept by Benjamin Sheftall.<sup>1</sup> This is the first documented evidence of Jewish women in a southern colony, although by 1740, when some Savannah Jews moved to Charleston to avoid the threat of war with Spain, they may have found a small number of Jewish women accompanying its growing community of male Jewish merchants.<sup>2</sup>

From before the United States was a country or “the South” was understood to be a distinct region, Jewish women were part of their histories. While Georgia initially banned the chattel slavery that was so central to the Carolina colony, by 1750, it was being introduced there too.<sup>3</sup> The South became

1. Malcolm Stern, ed., “The Sheftall Diaries: Vital Records of Savannah Jewry (1733–1808),” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1965): 246.

2. James Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

3. Noeleen McIlvenna, *The Short Life of Free Georgia: Class and Slavery in the Colonial South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).



**Mikveh, Great Synagogue, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Engraving by Caspar Jacobsz Philips after a drawing by Pieter Wagenaar, Jr. From the William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection. Courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.**

a region profoundly shaped by slavery, which fostered the expectation that respectable white women would remain under the protection of a white male “master” of the household.<sup>4</sup> Even as they navigated their neighbors’ expectations of behavior, based on gender, race, and class, Jewish women further contended with the laws of their Jewish tradition, which defined their religious obligations in ways that were distinct from men. While women were not always encouraged to leave robust written records, traces of them can be found in four ways in particular: in ritual practice, Jewish communal life, business, and politics.

Almost five years after arriving in Savannah, Benjamin Sheftall recorded the opening of a mikveh, or ritual bath, in the city.<sup>5</sup> Presumably before then, as in Charleston until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish women committed to traditional observance would have ritually immersed, in accordance with menstrual purity laws, in the rivers and oceans that were so vital to the port cities they lived in. Jewish women would also be expected to prepare challah bread and light candles on Friday night in celebration of the Sabbath. In many families, where men were compelled to work on Saturday to make a

living without running afoul of Sunday closing laws, they were likely the primary markers and keepers of the Sabbath before the advent of two-day weekend. More affluent women would have completed preparations for the Sabbath and other Jewish festivities with the assistance of Black women who were often part of their households. The Sheftalls of Savannah enslaved

4. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

5. Stern, “The Sheftall Diaries,” 248.

women named Betty, Phillis, Amy, and Lucy; even after emancipation, Black women would serve as vital producers of Jewish domestic life, including its religious practices.<sup>6</sup> Over time, and especially as southern Jewish communities embraced Reform Judaism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Jewish women would abandon strict observance of Jewish law, although many maintained a more general sense that women should strive for moral purity and oversee religious practices in the home.

For much of southern history, middle-class women were expected to be submissive and private, but they were also understood to be morally superior to men, which opened pathways for public activity in literature, religion, and education. In Charleston, Penina Moise became an important hymnodist and poet and the first Jewish woman author in the U.S. Sally Lopez, another Charleston Jewish woman, following in the footsteps of Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia, founded the Sunday school at KKBE; women in Columbia and Richmond were also early adaptors of the Jewish Sunday school. Historian Laura Yares has shown that these women recast Judaism in ways that they could master and teach.<sup>7</sup> The Reform confirmation ceremony also created opportunities for women’s religious development and communal acknowledgement. Women were always stalwarts of synagogues—as they were in Christian churches—even when they were not able to lead them or become independent members.<sup>8</sup> When journalist Charles Wesselowsky visited Waco, Texas, in the late 1870s, he scolded the women for the lack of Jewish institutions in the city!<sup>9</sup> The historian

6. Shari Rabin, *The Jewish South: An American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025), 25.

7. Laura Yares, *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2023).

8. Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

9. Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections on Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wesselowsky, 1878–1879* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982), 111.



**Mabel Pollitzer’s confirmation certificate dated May 26, 1898, signed by Rabbi Barnett Elzas of K.K. Beth Elohim in Charleston, SC. The motto quotes from Proverbs, chapter 11, verse 16: “A good woman retaineth honor, even as strong men retain riches.” From the Anita Pollitzer Family Papers (1210.00) at the South Carolina Historical Society.**

Ann Braude once argued in an influential essay, “American Religious History Is Women’s History,” and this certainly resonates with southern Jewish history; southern Jewish women were the beating heart of their communities.<sup>10</sup>

Not all women restricted their activities to the home or synagogue, however. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women could work as sole traders, in control of their own property, although this required permission from their husbands.<sup>11</sup> Widows also gained additional power; for instance, Abigail Minis of Savannah became an important businesswoman and left all her possessions

10. Ann Braude, “Women’s History Is American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, edited by Thomas A. Tweed, 87–107 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

11. Hagy, *This Happy Land*.

to her daughters.<sup>12</sup> After the Revolutionary War, an anti-Jewish screed published in Savannah included an exception for her and her daughters because of their “long residence, upright demeanor, and inoffensive conduct,” indicating that Jewish women could be received by their Christian neighbors in ways distinct from Jewish men.<sup>13</sup> The 1862 will of another widow, Rosanna Osterman of Galveston, Texas, was incredibly generous, leaving funds to a wide array of institutions—Jewish and not, southern and not. For instance, Osterman gave funds to build synagogues in Galveston and Houston, very practically insisting that they “must be built of brick.” She also gave to a home in Galveston “for the support of Widows and Orphans of whatever denomination, for are not all men brothers before God?”; to the Talmud Torah school at Shearith Israel in NYC; and to the North American Relief Society for the Indigent Jews of Jerusalem in New York.<sup>14</sup> Jewish women, especially poorer immigrants, were often important contributors to family businesses. When a writer working for the Works Progress Administration interviewed Elizabeth Rubinowitz, an Eastern European Jewish immigrant in Beaufort, South Carolina, in the late 1930s, she found her to be a savvy saleswoman, fully in control of the store.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, although women in southern states could not vote until 1920, they developed and expressed opinions about the organization of the society they lived in. We have evidence of this at least dating back to the Civil War, which was a war between sisters as well as brothers. Many southern

12. Ancestry.com, *Georgia, Wills and Probate Records, 1742–1992* [database online] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2015), *Estate Records, Wills, Estates, Administrations and Bonds, Alphabetically Arranged, 1777–1852*, 610.

13. A Citizen, “Cursory Remarks on Men and Measures in Georgia” (1784), in the digital collection *Evans Early American Imprint Collection*, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, accessed June 26, 2024, <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N14539.0001.001>.

14. Ancestry.com, *Texas, Probate Records, 1838–1906* [database online] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2015), 229.

15. Chlotilde R. Martin, “The Levines in the Melting Pot,” in the Federal Writers’ Project papers #3709, folder 877, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Jewish women supported the Confederacy. Some, especially newly arrived Jewish immigrants from the German lands, may have been motivated by a desire for acceptance. Others, born in the South, felt themselves to be fully of the South, and no different from the Christian women of their race and class who supported secession. Most dramatically, Eugenia Levy Phillips, the wife of a former Alabama congressman, was arrested twice—in D.C. and later in occupied New Orleans—for spying and insubordination. Her sister Phoebe Pember was superintendent of a hospital in Richmond. Other Jewish women went to work sewing, knitting, collecting donations, and organizing benefits for the Confederate cause. They also wrote letters to northern relatives, which could act as a kind of psychological warfare.<sup>16</sup> After Appomattox, Jewish women were among those who became involved in the valorization of the Confederacy and slavery that came to be known as the Lost Cause.



*Eugenia Levy Phillips (1819/20–1902). Image from Jewish Women’s Archive, [jwa.org](http://jwa.org). See JWA for an article on Eugenia and the P. Phillips Family Papers in the Library of Congress for her 1861–62 journal.*

I have found intriguing evidence, however, of two women who were more skeptical of secession. Writing to President Andrew Johnson to request amnesty, which was required because of her wealth, Rosanna Osterman, claimed that she had never embraced secession and always “felt not only satisfied, but happy in the enjoyments of living under the United States Government.”<sup>17</sup> Another petitioner was Dina Minis of Savannah, the eighty-year-old widow of Abigail’s grandson. Her son explained that “My Mother revered the sentiments of my Father, who... was a lifelong Democrat, a warm friend of, and well known to Gen[eral Andrew] Jackson.”<sup>18</sup> In her own letter, however, she

16. Shari Rabin, *The Jewish South*, 82.

17. Rosanna Osterman to Andrew Johnson, September 26, 1865, Texas, Amnesty Papers, compiled 1865–67, record group 94, roll 0054, NARA, Fold3, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.fold3.com/image/24309813/osterman-rosanna-page-1-us-confederate-amnesty-papers-1865-1867>.

18. Abraham Minis to Andrew Johnson, February 7, 1867, Georgia, Amnesty Papers, compiled 1865–67, record group 94, roll 0021, NARA, Fold3, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.fold3.com/image/20062381/minis-abraham-page-2-us-confederate-amnesty-papers-1865-1867>.

described herself through her own experiences, as “perhaps one of the few now living, who sat on the knees of Gen[eral George] Washington.”<sup>19</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish women became important progressive social activists, advocating, among other causes, for their own suffrage.<sup>20</sup> And in the next major drama of southern history, the movement for Black civil rights, they too participated. As early as 1950, for example, the National Council of Jewish Women chapter in New Orleans was discussing the topic of integration.<sup>21</sup> Following the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, historian Clive Webb has shown, Jewish women often had greater leeway for political activity—especially in the realm of school integration—than did their husbands, who had to worry about their businesses.<sup>22</sup>

I have also found evidence of a Black Jewish woman, a convert married to a white Jewish man, whose presence in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1968 raised questions about integration in the synagogue itself. It’s unclear whether she in fact became a member of the congregation, but her presence led Rabbi Perry Nussbaum of Beth Israel Congregation and a cadre of his most prominent Reform rabbinic colleagues to reflect on the troubling gap between the basic requirements of Jewish law and the challenges of living in a community suffused with racism. The consideration of her family was surely shaped by the fact that she was a woman. It likely made it easier in a Jewish setting, where her white husband could make their case, and at a time when it was not unheard of for Jewish men to marry women of different backgrounds, including those who converted. And yet the fact that she was a Black woman

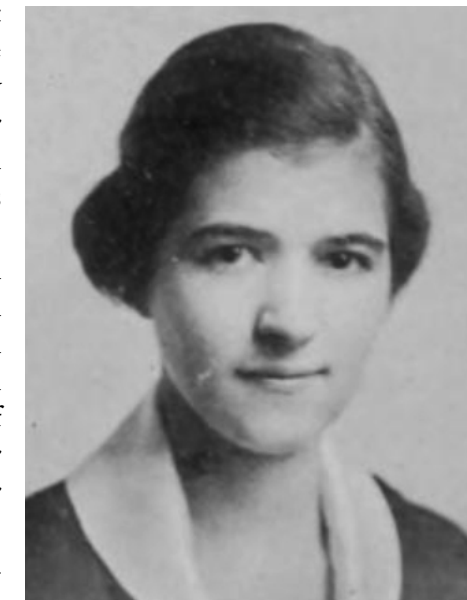
19. Dina Minis to Andrew Johnson, March 19, 1867, Georgia, Amnesty Papers, compiled 1865–67, record group 94, roll 0021, NARA, Fold3, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.fold3.com/image/20062381/minis-abraham-page-2-us-confederate-amnesty-papers-1865-1867>.

20. Leonard Rogoff, *Gertrude Weil: Jewish Progressive in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

21. Rabin, *The Jewish South*, 183.

22. Clive Webb, *Fight against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

also meant that white Jews may have viewed her through the lens of negative stereotypes, rather than seeing her as their coreligionist. Her example offers another perspective on Jewish women and the movement for Black civil rights, as well as on the participation of Jewish women in the synagogue.



*Dorah Heyman Sterne (1896–1994) as she appeared in her 1919 Smith College yearbook. The Atlanta native lived in Birmingham, AL, after marrying Mervyn Sterne. She was a philanthropist, activist, and organizer in state and local affairs. See Sterne’s Wikipedia page for image and more information, and see her oral history, Birmingham Public Library.*

This is not a case where a white Jewish woman fought for integration in schools or voting booths; here we see anti-Black racism threatening to restrict a Jewish women’s own rights within the realm of the synagogue, which, as we have seen, was a crucial site of activity for so many Jewish women.<sup>23</sup> The records of Beth Israel Congregation don’t tell us what happened to her. She may have moved to a different city or simply limited her religious practice to the home.

For most of southern Jewish history, women were not rabbis, and they did not serve in political office or own businesses. On gravestones they were praised for things like “sincere piety and social virtues,” while their husbands and fathers were lauded for public characteristics like “honesty, integrity, and ingeniousness.”<sup>24</sup> And yet they were crucial participants in southern Jewish history. Navigating Jewish tradition and local conditions indelibly marked by racism and intersecting ideas about

gender, they left permanent marks on their families, their Jewish communities, and their Christian neighbors.

23. Shari Rabin, “Responsa to Rabbi Perry Nussbaum,” *Southern Jewish History* Vol. 28 (2025), 127–149.

24. Barnett Elzas, *The Old Jewish Cemeteries at Charleston: A Transcription of the Inscriptions on Their Tombstones, 1762–1903, S.C.* (Charleston: Daggett Printing, 1903), 29.

**For details about Birmingham, AL, civil rights activists Dorah Sterne, Betty Loeb, and Gertrude Goldstein, see Kaye Cochran Nail, “Birmingham’s Jewish Women and the Civil Rights Movement ‘We could have done more,’” *Vulcan Historical Review* 14, no. 13, (2010), available through UAB Digital Commons.**



criticized more traditional Jewish women's organizations as "out of touch with the needs of their members," NCJW sections sought to respond to women's changing lives and the anxieties that could accompany change.<sup>11</sup>

Participation in the women's health movement is one revealing test case for the inclusion of southern NCJW sections in the history of feminist activism in the 1970s. With its support of health reform as well as feminist clinics and self-help, the movement appealed to activists of many different backgrounds and understandings of feminism. Activists took on several concerns including birth control safety, abortion access, breast cancer care, and feminist mental health services.<sup>12</sup> Records from the Charleston and Atlanta sections show that cervical cancer, breast health, abortion rights, and counseling services for rape survivors were among the pressing health issues members sought to address.<sup>13</sup> Charleston members joined the work of feminists

November–December 1976, Box 3, folder 1, NCJW Atlanta records.

11. Paula Hyman, "Volunteerism: The Great Debate," *Lilith* 5 (June 1978), <https://lilith.org/articles/volunteerism/>.

12. For a history of the women's health movement, see Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969–1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

13. *The Councillor* newsletter, January 1976, and *The Councillor* newsletter, February–March 1976, both box 4, folder 8, NCJW Charleston Section records; Phyllis Austin, "Assembly May Change State's Abortion Law," *The Columbia Record*, January 27, 1969; Letter to Larell Fett from Rachel Miller and Michal Hillman, December 18, 1974, box 23, folder 7, NCJW Atlanta Section records; Rape Booklet

around the country active in the anti-rape movement when they announced support for the People Against Rape crisis center in the *Councillor*. The newsletter called for interested members to fill support roles as counselors, office workers, and assisting in public relations and education efforts about rape.<sup>14</sup> NCJW sections formed an avenue for southern Jewish women to become health activists guided by both Jewish social justice values and feminist politics.

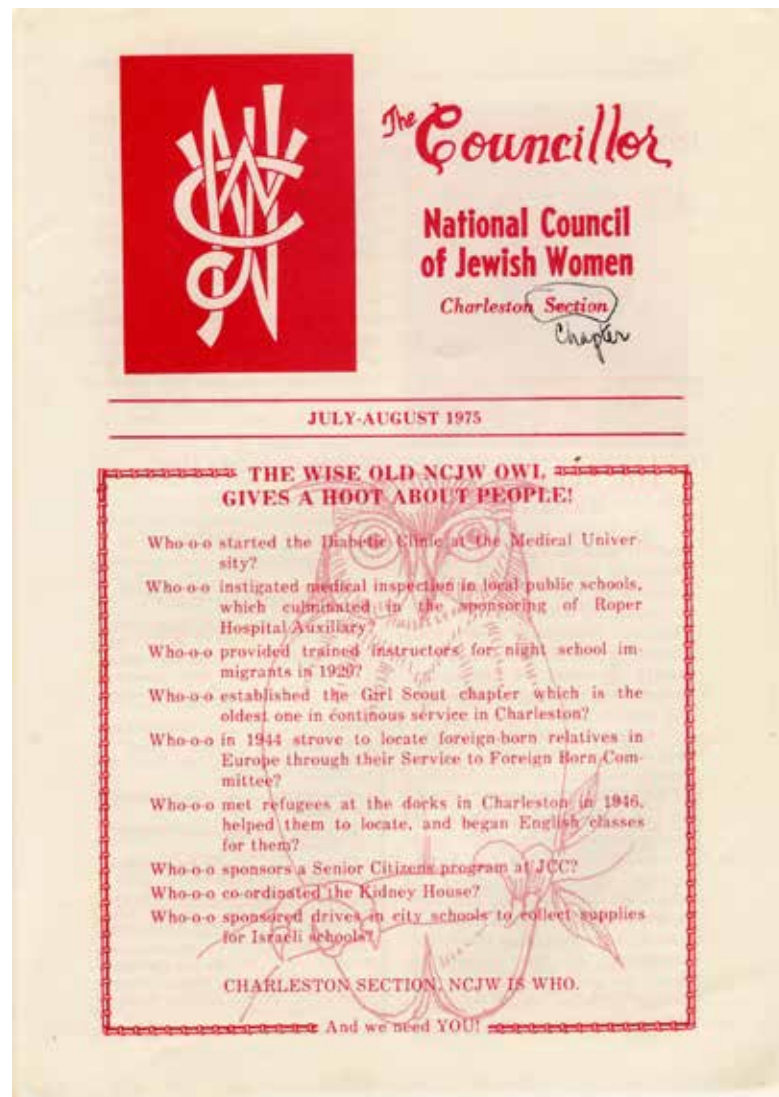
The NCJW Atlanta section's records also document a wide-ranging program of women's health activism throughout the 1970s. The *Bulletin's* reporting on sterilization abuse and restrictions to Medicaid funding for abortion care underscored the section's consciousness of how reproductive control, race, class, and medicine intersected. "There is now a great fear that safe abortions will become a middle and upper-class privilege and that women in lower

income brackets will once again be forced to resort to unsafe methods of aborting unwanted pregnancies," wrote the public affairs department.<sup>15</sup> Atlanta played a key role in the southern history of the women's health movement. The city's Feminist Women's Health Center was founded in 1976 and the National

flyer, box 23, folder 7, NCJW Atlanta Section Records; "Councilwomen in Action," *The Bulletin* newsletter, January 1978, NCJW Atlanta Section records.

14. Linda Schlanger, "RAP Session with P.A.R.," *The Councillor* newsletter, January 1975, box 4, folder 8, and *The Councillor* newsletter, July–August 1975, both NCJW Charleston Section records.

15. *The Bulletin* newsletter, October 1973, and "Women's Issues Update," *The Bulletin*, September 1977, NCJW Atlanta Section records; Brandau, "NCJW Involved in 'Movement,' Says Director."



The July-August 1975 issue of the *Councillor*, published by the NCJW Charleston section.

Black Women's Health Project was founded there by Byllye Avery in the early 1980s.<sup>16</sup> The health activism of the NCJW Atlanta section adds another layer of organizational, religious, and communal complexity to this story. When interpreted alongside the legacies of Jewish women active in organizations like the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, the work of NCJW members allows us gain a fuller picture of how Jewish women advanced the women's health movement across the country.<sup>17</sup>

Tracing southern Jewish feminisms on the individual and organizational level encourages us to think about the reach of the feminist movement well beyond narratives based in New York, Chicago, and Boston. *Southern Israelite* headlines like "Lilith: Feminist Jews Have Forum in New Provocative Magazine," "Changing Times: Female Cantor Chants Out," and "Right On Jewish Sister!" underscore that southern Jews were very much part of a national discourse on Jewish feminisms, secular and religious.<sup>18</sup> Research on the NCJW complements studies like historian Joyce Antler's *Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement* and deepens our

16. Jennifer Nelson, *More Than Medicine: A History of the Feminist Women's Health Movement* (New York University Press, 2015), 3, 123–166; Biographical note, Black Women's Health Imperative records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Mass.

17. "Our Bodies, Our Jewish Selves" in Antler, *Jewish Radical Feminism*, 154–201; Jillian M. Hinderliter, "Muckraking Wonders: Jewish Journalist-Activists of the US Women's Health Movement, 1969–1990," *American Jewish History* 104, no. 2 (2020): 371–395.

18. Norma A. Orvitz, "Lilith: Feminist Jews Have Forum in New Provocative Magazine," *Southern Israelite*, March 25, 1977; Violet Spevack, "Changing Times: Female Cantor Chants Out," *Southern Israelite*, June 30, 1978; Vida Goldgar, "Right On Jewish Sister!" *Southern Israelite*, November 3, 1978.

understanding of feminism's adaptability in shaping the work of longstanding Jewish women's organizations.<sup>19</sup>

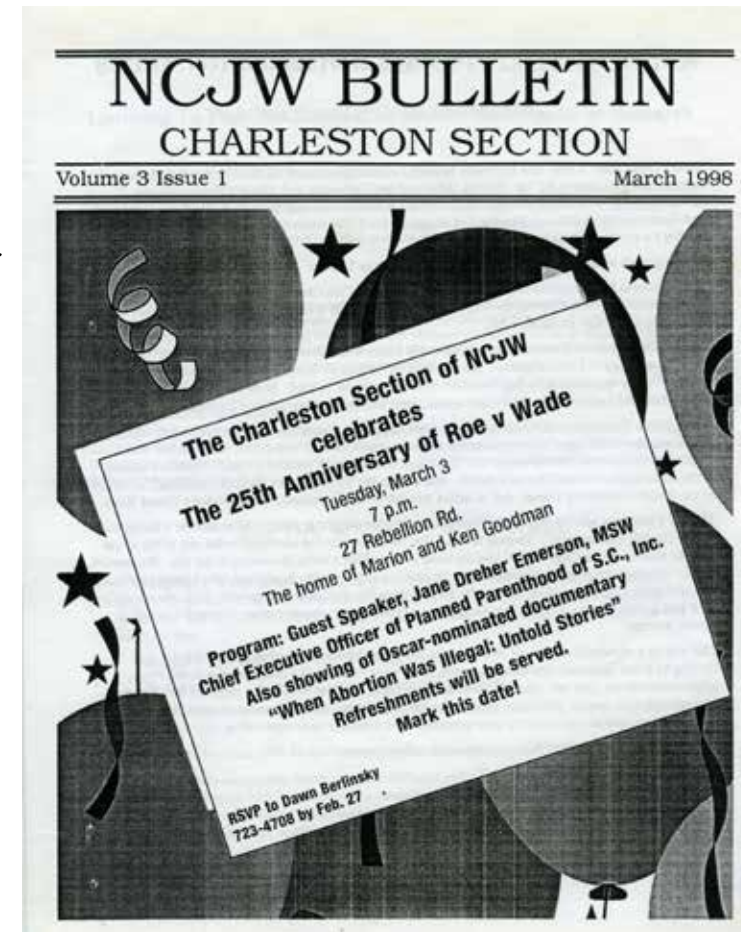
As Jewish feminists and feminisms adapt to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, the archive helps us see that there was never one singular way to be a feminist or to intertwine Jewish social justice and feminist values. The NCJW's health activism today connects to the women's health movement of fifty years ago and even reaches back to birth control advocacy in the interwar years.<sup>20</sup> Among their many projects, NCJW sections across the country now organize Repro Shabbat celebrations annually to "teach the Jewish value of reproductive freedom."<sup>21</sup> Revisiting the newsletters of the NCJW Charleston section and Atlanta section alongside meeting minutes, program advertisements, and correspondence with community partners allows us a chance to see how Jewish women in the

South created many avenues to feminist activism in the 1970s. Fifty years later, "A Woman's Role Is the Role She Chooses" remains a powerful statement of feminist thought and action.

19. Antler, *Jewish Radical Feminism*.

20. For more on NCJW's work, see Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York University Press, 2013), Emily Alice Katz, "NCJW Joins the War on Poverty: The National Council of Jewish Women and the Quest for Opportunity in 1960s Atlanta," *Southern Jewish History* 19 (2016): 75–124, and Kathleen A. Laughlin, "Our Defense against Despair: The Progressive Politics of the National Council of Jewish Women after World War II," *A Jewish Feminine Mystique?*, 48–64.

21. "Advocacy: Reproductive Health & Justice," NCJW Atlanta section, <https://ncjwatlanta.org/Advocacy/#reproductive-health-justice>.



Charleston's NCJW Bulletin, March 1998, announces a celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that declared a woman's right to an abortion up to the point of fetal viability was protected by the Constitution. That decision was overturned by the Supreme Court in June 2022 in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, a major setback in the fight for women's reproductive rights by organizations like the NCJW.

## Women Behind the Counter: Pearlstines & Wolffs of Allendale and Branchville

by Terri Wolff Kaufman

My father's hero was his mother, Rachel Pearlstine Wolff. He never really knew his father; Henry Wolff died suddenly from pneumonia when Dad was a toddler, leaving behind a wife and three children under the age of seven. With the help of her extensive South Carolina family, Ray raised those children, kept her husband's general store in Allendale going, and lovingly supported her children while pushing them toward education and success. Not so easy a list for any mother to accomplish, but decidedly more difficult in 1914 than today.

Rachel Pearlstine was born in 1870. She grew up on a farm in Branchville, South Carolina, one of eight surviving children of Louis Charles Pearlstine and Rebecca Tobish Pearlstine, immigrants from the Russian Empire. Louis studied Torah with a group of other Ashkenazi

Jewish men and together they founded Brith Sholom Congregation in 1854 in Charleston. Rebecca reportedly ran the farm, raised the children, slaughtered the chickens for Shabbos dinner, and sold home-churned butter from her front porch (*Dayenu!*—"It would have been enough"). Then, following Louis's death in 1886, Rebecca at age 46 opened a clothing store. "Mrs. R. Pearlstine's" helped Rebecca support herself and her children, at that time ranging in age from 20 to a one-year-old. The store exceeded expectations over its approximately nine-year life span, evolving into a successful general store in Branchville, R. Pearlstine and Sons Company, that sold to white and Black customers. Rebecca was at the helm from 1895 to 1903, after which the sons went into business for themselves and changed the store name to R. Pearlstine's of Branchville.

Ray, as Rachel was called since childhood, enjoyed painting pictures and reading romantic picture books. She worked at the family store and had an affinity for selling; her kind disposition contributed to her success with customers. Evidence and timeline suggest that she was introduced to Mr. Wolff, an immigrant from Prussia who was 22 years her senior, while working at R. Pearlstine and Sons Company when he visited to sell or buy goods there. The two were married in August 1901 in Branchville. After marriage, Ray always referred to her husband as "Mr. Wolff" around the employees and customers of his store, and called him that at home in front of the children as well—a mystery to my aunts, but not difficult to understand the continuity.

Ray and Henry by all accounts had a rich, Jewish life together outside of work: a beautiful wedding in Branchville written up in the local papers and a home life that included Ray's extended family. With hard work at the store and Mr. Wolff's

community engagement also came a certain prosperity and leisure (for example, sailing to New York and vacationing in the Catskills together in 1903). But Henry's sudden death in February 1914 brought an abrupt end to that.

Ray inherited the Henry Wolff & Co store and decided to keep it open in downtown Allendale, in continuing partnership with her brother Tom. In business under that name since 1886, the store earnings were reportedly up and down with the market but successful based on Mr. Wolff's stellar reputation in the community; and Ray needed the income.

To inform suppliers of Mr. Wolff's death and to let them know she would continue buying their wares, she sent out letters signed, "Mrs. Henry Wolff." It took a while for her to receive all of the replies by rail. Each contained a version of, "Sorry, Mrs. Wolff, we don't do business with women." The way my father told it (told to him by his mother when he was older), Ray had new business stationery made up and afterward signed everything "Ray Wolff" (typically a male spelling). She promptly found new suppliers through her correspondence.

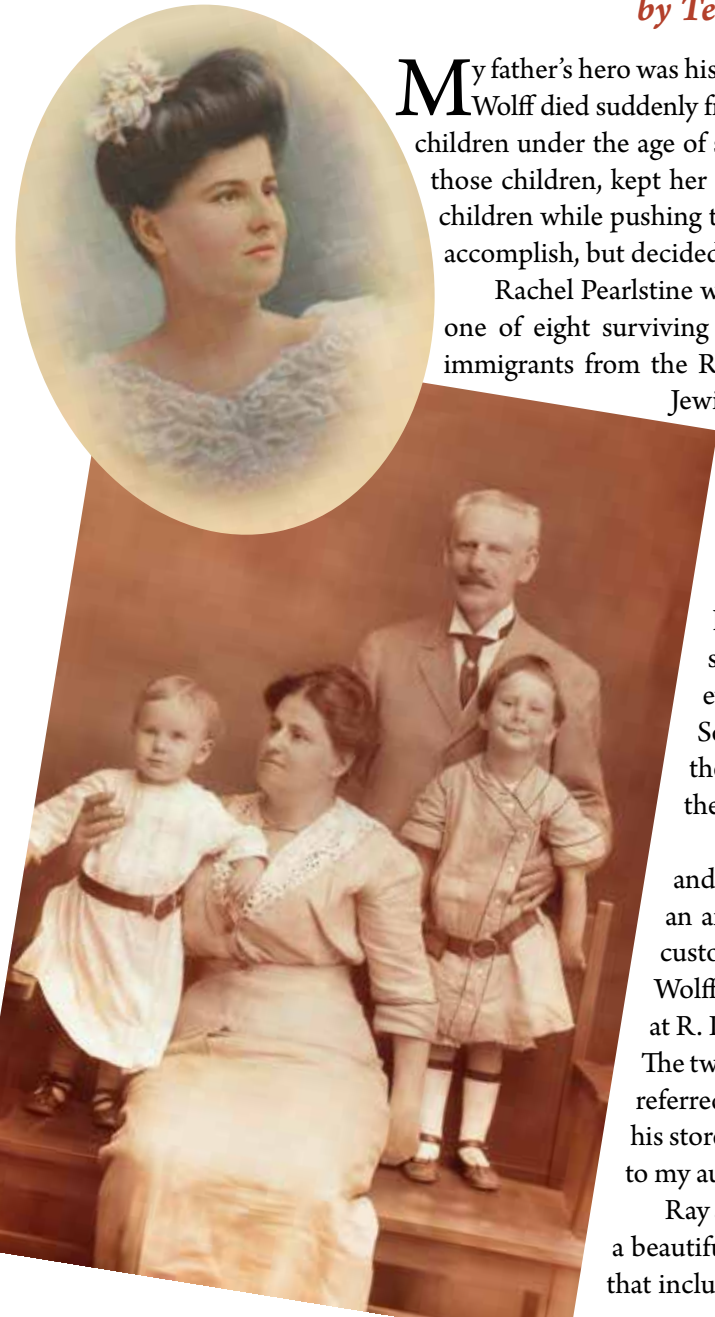
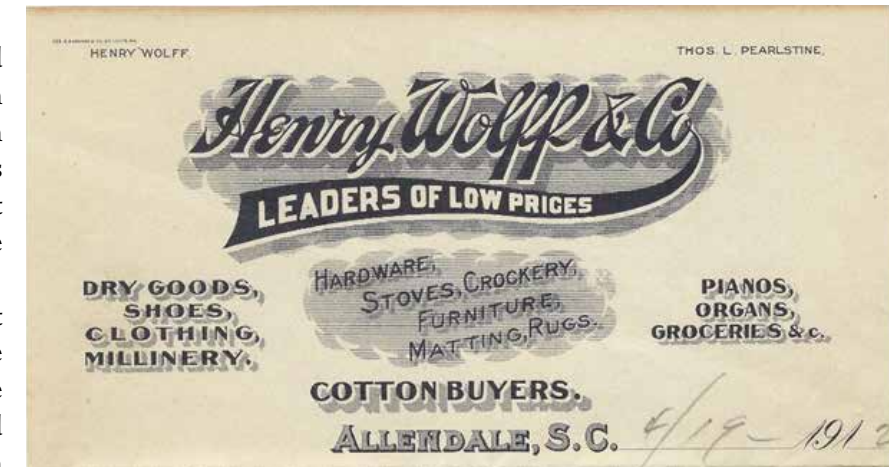
Running the store was hard work and the money earned didn't always add up to quite enough, but my grandmother and Tom made it work. Ray brought my three-year-old father to the store with her and paid a stock boy to look after him until little Louis was in school all day. (The stock boy grew up to become Reverend Sanders, a preacher for many years at a country church in Pomaria, South Carolina. He and Dad remained lifelong friends.)

Ray could be a fierce Jewish mother, too. My aunt Sura Wengrow\* told of running home after school one day to Mama in the kitchen. Breathlessly, Sura told her a bunch of boys had strung little primary-school Louis in a tree upside-down by his heels and were calling him a "dirty Jew" and other antisemitic taunts. Ray grabbed a broom and a kitchen knife and ran out of the house and down the road. She chased the boys away with a broom, then climbed up the tree and cut Louis down with the knife. (My father may have had the last word when he was a six-foot-tall football player in high school.) During his 13th year, Ray sent young Louis to Charleston on weekends to stay with her brother, Dr. Kivy Pearlstine, and study Torah at Brith Sholom Synagogue. Louis was bar mitzvahed with a lot of family looking on from the men's and the women's sections.

Of Ray's three children, my father and Aunt Sura [Wengrow] were highly educated and ambitious. They both married and raised children. My aunt Cecile ("Ceil") [Wolff] was loving and kind, but struggled in college and wanted to drop out—and she felt terrible about it. Ray wrote Cecile a letter dated December 8, 1925, in reply to her daughter's distress, which was understanding and encouraging, assuring her she'd still have a good life. In Ray's words, "The greatest people that made the Most Success is the ones that did not even graduate. Every body ain't cut out to be Teachers. Can make more money making hats or something else & everybody to their different talent. So don't let that worry you[.] Remember the story of Cinderella who never got an opportunity to go to School and then married a prince. . . . Mama."

Aunt Ceil doted on all her nieces and nephews. In my nuclear family, we four children spent a lot of time with her, the two girls more so; she was the cookie-baking, going to the movies, children-spoiling grandmother figure that we wouldn't have had otherwise. Ceil never married, but she did work at Haltiwanger's Department Store in downtown Columbia in the 1940s (and possibly the 1930s)—a third generation "woman behind the counter."

CCW from top left: portrait of a young Ray Pearlstine; Ray and Henry Wolff with daughters Sura and Ceil; ad for R. Pearlstine & Sons, Branchville, SC; Cecile Wolff (r) circa 1959, South Carolina State House grounds, Columbia, SC; Henry Wolff & Co. letterhead, Allendale, SC, 1912. Photographs courtesy of Terri Wolff Kaufman. Ad and letterhead courtesy of JHSSC, [Jewish Merchant Project](#).



<p><b>FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLAR STOCK!</b></p> <p>Except perhaps some articles that we are under contract to maintain established prices on. This will be an occasion afforded to you that you should not miss, as goods are advancing daily, and this opportunity</p> <p><b>On a New, Neat, and Large Stock,</b></p> <p>will not be offered to you again in the near future. Our buyers bought an enormous stock of</p> <p><b>MEN'S, YOUTHS', AND CHILDREN'S CLOTHING!</b></p> <p>at the Northern market this Summer at 5c. cotton prices.</p>	<p>You will have the benefit of it. The same story can be told of our</p> <p><b>MILLINERY, DRESS GOODS, DRY GOODS, CAPES, CLOAKS, SHOE AND HAT DEPARTMENTS.</b></p> <p>We have in one car each high grade</p> <p><b>Buggies &amp; Wagons.</b></p> <p>You shall have the benefit of the clearing sale prices on them. Also, two car loads</p> <p><b>FURNITURE AND CHAIRS, AND FIFTY STOVES,</b></p>	<p>bought before the advance; also on</p> <p><b>SUGAR CANE MILLS, KETTLES, AND PATENT PLOWS, SEWING MACHINES, ORGANS---ON EVERYTHING WE HAVE!</b></p> <p>We pay the highest market prices for COTTON, PEAS, CORN, PINDARS, COW HIDES, BEES-WAX, SYRUP, and HONEY.</p> <p>Remember the days of sale, as stated above, and that they are only effective at our Branchville Stores, at</p> <p><b>R. Pearlstine &amp; Sons,</b></p> <p>BRANCHVILLE, S. C.</p>
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\*Oral history interview with [Sura Wolff Wengrow](#), Lowcountry Digital Library. For more about Sura, see page 24 this issue.

## Fannie Barth Strauss (1892–1973)

Professor of German, Mathematics, Latin, Comparative Literature, and Mythology

by Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum

“Staunton can be proud to number Miss Strauss among its distinguished sons and daughters, for she was an ornament to the profession of Education, and her influence has reached the far corners of the country and abroad through the many hundreds who sat at her feet for Learning languages and life.” —*The Staunton Virginia News Leader*

My cousin Fannie Strauss was a woman before her time, born in Staunton, Virginia, in 1892 to Regina Barth of Staunton and Lamartine Strauss from South Carolina. Lamartine’s father was Maurice Strauss, a South Carolina merchant who started in Charleston, moved to Cokesbury (not a town anymore), and became known as the “Great Merchant of the Up Country”. He and his wife Fanny were married at K.K. Beth Elohim in Charleston. Maurice, his sister, daughter, and Fanny, who died during the Civil War are buried in the Coming Street Cemetery.

As a child, my cousin Fannie was in an accident that left her deaf. This disability never stopped her from doing anything. In 1912, Fannie graduated from Mary Baldwin Seminary’s first organized class. In 1930, she received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia. (At the time, UVA did not admit women, so it must have been through a special arrangement, possibly through Mary Baldwin.) She then received a master’s degree from Teachers College of Columbia College in New York in 1935. When Fannie finished her education, she returned to Staunton and Mary Baldwin where she remained on the faculty for 44 years, an almost unheard of feat for a young Jewish woman in a small southern town.

Besides her academic accomplishments, Fannie was the advisor to the yearbook for 35 years, treasurer of the Mary Baldwin Association for 44 years, a member of Delta

Kappa Gamma, and is listed in *Who’s Who Among American Women*, 1959.

Also active in the Jewish Community, Fannie founded Temple House of Israel’s Sunday school and taught there for 45 years. She was also treasurer of the temple from 1942 to 1973.

During World War II, she rescued many Jewish families from the Holocaust.

Fannie was well known in this small community. She hated cars and navigated the streets of Staunton in her horse and buggy until her last horse died, all of them named “Fannie Horse.”

She spent a lot of time going to area churches, educating the congregations about Judaism. Former students would visit her house with their children where she kept them entertained with a box full of toys kept under the stairs and her miniature collection, most of which were gifts from her students and now in my home.

Fannie was beloved by her family, her students, and the professors at Mary Baldwin. When they dedicated the 1959 annual, *The Bluestocking*, to her, it read “She is a dedicated teacher who breathes the very spirit of the German Language

she teaches. Known as Miss Fannie to all her ‘Children’, she has extolled more than two generations of students the great truths of world literature and mythology. . . . her genuine interest in the personal welfare of her students and the traditions of Mary Baldwin has made her a revered part of the college life for more than half a century.”



*Fannie Strauss, Fannie Horse, and Fannie’s cousin Herman Weinberg (the author’s uncle). Courtesy of Mickey K. Rosenblum.*

### MAY MEETING REGISTRATION

#### Fees (per person):

\$75 Saturday & Sunday  
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Charleston, SC 29424

#### Questions:

Alyssa Neely  
[neelya@cofc.edu](mailto:neelya@cofc.edu)

OR

Rachel Barnett  
[jhssc2020@gmail.com](mailto:jhssc2020@gmail.com)

OR

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For links to meeting registration and hotel booking at the special rate, go to: [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming)

## Southern Jewish Women: Uncovering Stories of Everyday Greatness

May 2–3, 2026 ~ Columbia, SC

All events, except the reception, will be held in USC’s Campus Room, Capstone House, 898 Barnwell Street, Columbia, SC

### Saturday, May 2

11:30 A.M. Registration and lunch

12:15 P.M. Welcome ~ Mickey Rosenblum, President, JHSSC ~ Saskia Coenen Snyder, Director, Jewish Studies Program, University of South Carolina ~ Ashley Walters, Director, Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, College of Charleston

12:30 **Looking Inward, Looking Outward: Jewish Women in the American South** ~ Shari Rabin, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies, Religion, and History and Chair of Jewish Studies, Oberlin College; author of *The Jewish South: An American History* (2025)

1:15 Ashley Walters and Shari Rabin in conversation

1:45 Break

2:00 **“A Woman’s Role Is the Role She Chooses”:** **Southern Feminisms and the National Council of Jewish Women in the 1970s** ~ Jillian M. Hinderliter, Assistant Professor and the Moses M. and Hannah L. Malkin Fellow in Jewish History and Culture, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2:45 **In Pursuit of Equality** ~ Lauren Sklaroff, Professor of History, University of South Carolina, leads a discussion with Jillian M. Hinderliter, Lilly Filler, and Harriett Steinert

3:15 Break

3:30–4:30 **Trailblazing Mothers** ~ Moderator: Dale Rosengarten, Curator Emerita, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston Libraries. Panelists: Fern Litman Mazo and Deborah Litman (Judith Greenberg Litman Lindau, lawyer), Marsha Silver Greenhill (Helen Schneider Silver, journalist), Beth Bernstein (Carol Bernstein, first president of Beth Shalom, Columbia), Joe Butwin (Frances Mazo Butwin, writer), Ben Means (Norma Mazo Perlmutter, artist)

5:00–6:00 **Reception** ~ Anne Frank Center, University of South Carolina, 1731 College Street, Columbia, SC



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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

### Sunday, November 9

9:30 A.M. Brunch and Welcome

10:00 **“You Never Call! You Never Write!”: A History of the Jewish Mother** ~ Joyce Antler, Professor Emerita of American Jewish History and Culture, and of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Brandeis University

11:00–12:00 P.M. JHSSC Board Meeting. All are welcome.

## The Life of Helen Rose Schneider Silver: From Bread Crate to Bat Mitzvah and Beyond

by Marsha Phyllis Silver Greenhill

My mother, Helen Rose Schneider Silver, was the daughter of emigrants from Lithuania. In 1910, at age 14, Mollie Simon left her shtetl, Smargon, for Brooklyn. Three years later, Julius Schneider emigrated from Vilna, where he had been studying to be a chazan and shochet like his father Zalman Dovid Schneider of M'yadl. They met while working in the garment industry, began courting, and married on October 30, 1920. Julius went by train to Knoxville, Tennessee, the very next day! He purchased a tiny grocery store with living space attached. Once settled, he sent for Mollie. Their first child, Helen Rose Schneider, was born on December 11, 1922. My grandparents found a larger corner store at 600 East Church Avenue, and Mom said they “transported” her to the new apartment above the store, “using a bread crate as my cradle.”

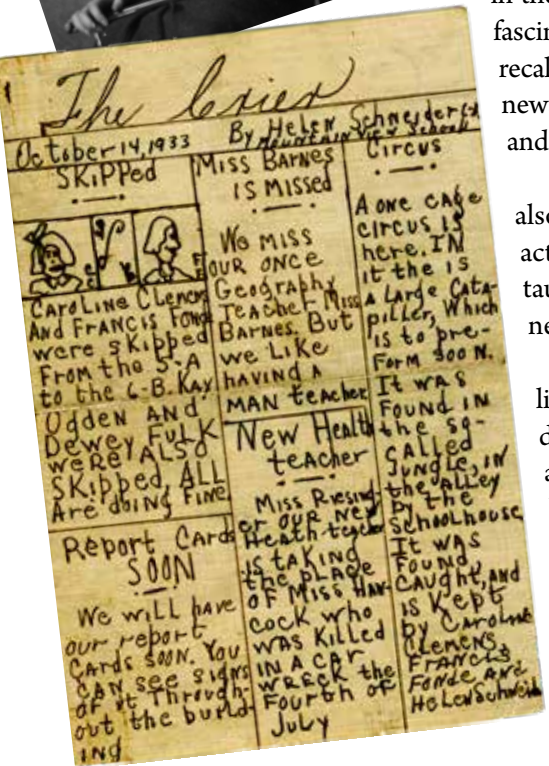
My grandparents spoke English, but preferred speaking Yiddish, especially when they did not want customers to know what they were talking about. Mom’s first language was Yiddish. She recounts that “like most parents, they often quoted what they considered my most amusing early childhood expression. It seems I had announced to a total stranger, having his shoes shined in the chair next to my Dad, ‘I am a Jew baby and an American Beauty.’ Through the years, I cringed whenever this story was repeated. Today, I can see that even as a very young child, I had sensed that I was a dual person, both an American and a Jew, and I had also learned about the ideal feminine image.”

Mom’s only sibling, Saul David, whom they called David, was born in 1926. They both attended Mountain View School and were the only Jewish students. At age eight, my mother showed a talent for reporting. Her mentor, Mamie McCallie, “like[d] my work in third grade English and appointed me school news reporter. Each week I’d write about the important happenings at our school in my neatest hand and take the reports to the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* and *Knoxville Journal*. The clacking of the typewriters in the news room and the roar of the presses spinning off the latest headlines filled me with fascination.” This early fascination inspired my mother’s love of writing and journalism. She recalled, “When I was given a typewriter upon entering junior high school, I produced a newsletter for my Zionist youth group, and through the decades, many bulletins, programs and skits emerged from my beloved Remington portable.”

My grandparents willingly sacrificed so both children could take violin lessons. Mom also had dance and elocution lessons “to help bring me out of my innate shyness.” Summer activities included reading, knitting and embroidery—“the skills little Southern girls were taught in that era.” Movie-going was a must in the age of the golden screen. Picnics in the nearby Smokies just before they became a national park were a regular activity.

My mother learned about prejudice at a young age. On her way home one day, a little Black girl confronted her and tore at the trimming of her favorite blue dress. Mom defended herself with her lunch box and ran home to tell her parents. The remedy was an alternate route home in the company of taller classmates. My mother was called “Jew baby” on the school playground and by the school safety patrol as she crossed the street. “I just pretended not to hear instead of reporting it to the teachers.” In seventh grade, the non-Jewish girls began having parties with boys their age. When Mom explained that she was not allowed to attend, these “friends” dropped her immediately!

From top: Julius and Mollie Schneider, the author’s grandparents; Helen Schneider and her brother, David, with their violins, 1938; page 1 of *The Crier*, the Mountain View School newspaper written and published by Helen Schneider, Knoxville, TN, 1933.



As Mom and Uncle David reached adolescence, my grandparents joined Heska Amuna Synagogue, where they would have more contact with other Jewish children. This new Conservative congregation was led by a young, dynamic rabbi, Israel Levine. My mother remembered that Rabbi Levine “introduced us not only [to] the basic *Aleph Beth*, but to a love of traditional Jewish observances and values. We girls in the group were given the equal honor of reading from the pulpit during the youth group Sabbath and junior congregation.”

When Mom and Uncle David were teens, “Sunday and Hebrew School activities became even more important than ever.” They joined Young Judaea and attended conclaves where they met Jewish kids from other southern cities. My mother served as secretary and president for both Young Judaea and Junior Hadassah. In 1941, she was overall chairperson of the Regional Young Judaea Conclave in Knoxville. From 1940–42, my mother taught nursery class at Sunday school. Mom wrote, “Thanks to the foresight and dedication of parents and teachers, we gained a strong Jewish identity in a very non-Jewish environment.”

At city-wide Knoxville High School, my mother had a circle of Jewish friends and pursued a variety of interests. She was school news editor, played in the orchestra, auditioned successfully for a seat in the 1940 All-State Orchestra, won second and third place in the Tennessee State Latin Competitions, and was a member of the Junior and Senior National Honor Societies. After graduating from Knoxville High School in 1940, Mom had hoped to attend college. My grandparents who were old-school thought higher education was necessary for men who would have to support a family, but not essential for women.

My mother attended Knoxville Business College for a year. Her first job after graduation was as a clerk-stenographer in the personnel office of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). While reporting to sign employment papers, she noticed a tall, dark, handsome young man who “looked Jewish.” Sidney Silver was a recent Georgia Tech graduate, an electrical engineer from Atlanta. He saw the green-eyed young woman with light brown hair and peaches and cream complexion and he thought “pretty shiksa,” which happened often to my Mom. They were formally introduced a week later. My parents both became counselors for Young Judaea. Soon they were dating and, 18 months later, they married on October 18, 1942. Dad’s parents were immigrants from Uman, Ukraine, who owned a mom-and-pop grocery store, so their backgrounds were similar. When my father joined the army signal corps, Mom followed him from place to place working as a legal secretary and clerk-stenographer for the U.S. War Department and later for a private law office.

When my mother became pregnant in 1944, she decided to go back to Knoxville for consistent medical care and parental support. I was born on April 22, 1945, but it wasn’t until I was three months old that my dad got leave to meet me for the first time. In 1946, my family reunited and moved to Chattanooga, where Dad worked at Combustion Engineering Company. While she stayed home, Mom volunteered and cultivated a new interest—voice lessons. To expand her skills, she performed with the Chattanooga Opera Association. The family grew bigger as Richard Michael (Rick) arrived in 1949 and Harold Steven (Steve) was born in 1952. Somehow, Mom found time to work from January to June of 1950 in the TVA power plant division.

From top: Sidney Silver and Helen Schneider outside Heska Amuna Synagogue, Knoxville, TN, possibly around the time of their engagement; Sid Silver, on leave with Helen in Gatlinburg, TN, meets his daughter, Marsha, for the first time, July 1945; Sid and Helen Silver’s children, Steve, Marsha, and Rick, 1956.



In 1956, Dad was transferred to Orlando, Florida, where Combustion opened a new branch. My parents joined the Congregation of Liberal Judaism where Mom was gift shop chair for one year and then sisterhood president for one year. She also

served in the Winter Park Hospital Auxiliary for one year in the snack bar and gift shop one morning a week. They built their dream house in Winter Park. Unfortunately, Combustion closed their Orlando office, and Dad was transferred back to Chattanooga in 1959.

Once settled, my mother continued volunteering. She was co-editor, editor, and advisor for the *Chattanooga Hadassah Bulletin* for about ten years. From 1962 to 1966, she was elected vice president and then president of the Chattanooga Chapter of Hadassah. She was wills and bequests chair for the southern region of Hadassah for two years. In the 1960s, my mother edited the Hadassah yearbooks.

My parents taught Sunday school at Mizpah Congregation. They encouraged us to grow culturally and intellectually. Scouting, dance and piano lessons, sports, and concerts were part of our lives, plus family vacations to Florida, Washington, D.C., and New York for the 1964 World's Fair. Mom and Dad placed high

value on education. All three of us have college degrees. I have a master's in library science. Rick and Steve both became medical doctors.

My brothers were approaching college age when my mother began working part time as a clerk-stenographer in the TVA plant results section in 1966 to help with college expenses. In July, she was hired full-time in the TVA Water Quality Lab. In 1968, Combustion transferred my Dad to their home office in Hartford, Connecticut. My parents visited Hartford and did not like it.

My dad applied to and was hired by the Department of Agriculture Rural Electrification Department in Washington, D.C. My mother took a job at the National Weather Service. She took writing courses at Georgetown University and used her newly honed skills to write articles for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Science Services Administration. My parents reveled in the culture available in D.C. and the presence of family. My husband, Bill, and I, plus numerous cousins, lived in the area. In 1971, they became grandparents for the first time. They would have five grandchildren whom they adored.

After they joined Temple Sinai, Mom decided to fulfill her longtime wish to have a bat mitzvah. When she turned 13 in 1935, there were no bat mitzvahs in Knoxville. Instead, my grandparents gave her a beautiful gold octagonal locket with her initials, HRS, engraved on the back and a marcasite *Mogen Dovid* on the front. A locket was no substitute for a bat mitzvah! On October 24, 1981, at Temple Sinai, my mother proudly recited her Torah portion about Noah and the Rainbow.

In 1982, we threw a surprise party for my parents' 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and the next day, they left for their first trip to Israel. They went to Israel a second time to observe the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hadassah Hospital. Their travels also took them to Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, and sites in the U.S.

In 1974, my mother decided to try free-lance journalism and began by writing articles for *Pioneer Women Magazine* (now known as *Na'amat*

*From top: Helen Schneider Silver, 1964; Helen Schneider wearing the locket her parents gave her when she turned 13; Helen and Sid Silver in Temple Sinai, Washington, D.C., on the occasion of Helen's bat mitzvah, October 24, 1981.*



*Magazine*) and for *Hadassah Magazine*. Starting in the mid-1970s, Mom worked at the Jewish Telegraphic Agency's Washington Bureau for ten years. She even covered for Wolf Blitzer when he was on vacation.

My parents retired to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1984. My mother continued to write travel articles for the Hadassah Traveler column in *Hadassah Magazine*. In 1987, her articles on Charleston and Washington, D.C., were published in the first edition of the *Jewish Traveler, Hadassah Magazine's Guide to the World's Jewish Communities and Sights*. In 1994, Mom updated her earlier articles and contributed new articles on Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia, for the expanded second edition. Mom considered her work with the JTA and her chapters in the *Hadassah Jewish Traveler* to be defining moments.

My parents joined the Reform congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, where my mother was a member of the sisterhood and worked in the gift shop. She compiled the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Program for the KKBE sesquicentennial in 1991. My mother was a proud founding member and board member of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. In addition, she was their newsletter editor. When Sol Breibart retired as editor of the newsletter for the Southern Jewish Historical Society, my mother took over from 1990 to 1998.

In October of 1992, my parents celebrated their joyous 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with Friday night services and an oneg at KKBE, a fantastic party at the Mills House on Saturday, and a brunch hosted by family on Sunday. Ten years later they observed a milestone 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with their children and their granddaughter, Kate Silver. They shared 61 happy years together!



*Helen and Sidney Silver's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, Charleston, SC, 1992. First row: Helen, Joshua Silver (son of Steve and Patty Silver) on Helen's lap, Sidney. Second row: Molly Silver (daughter of Steve and Patty Silver), Kate Silver (daughter of Dunlap and Rick Silver), Marsha Silver Greenhill, Julie Greenhill, aka Ephiah Thibault (daughter of Marsha and Bill Greenhill). Third row: Patty Silver, Steve Silver, Dunlap Silver, Rick Silver, Bill Greenhill, Daniel Greenhill (son of Marsha and Bill Greenhill). Images pages 16-19 courtesy of Marsha Silver Greenhill and Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*

Mom's story starts like so many in America. A child of immigrants, she was a product of humble beginnings and subject to the expectations society had for women of her era. Nevertheless, with the importance of family and education always in mind, she pursued her passions with determination. Her volunteer work and her appreciation of the arts enriched her life and the lives of those lucky enough to be part of her circle. Sadly, on January 1, 2003, Mom died from complications due to Parkinson's disease. She remains much-loved and leaves a lasting literary legacy. Without a doubt, Mom would tell you that one of her proudest moments was when she became a bat mitzvah nearly 46 years after receiving that gold locket.

The [Helen Schneider Silver papers](#) are archived in the Jewish Heritage Collection in Special Collections at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library.

All quotes are from the article "Growing Up Jewish in Knoxville, Tennessee" by Helen Silver, published in *Southern Heritage*, May 1990, v. 3, no. 2.

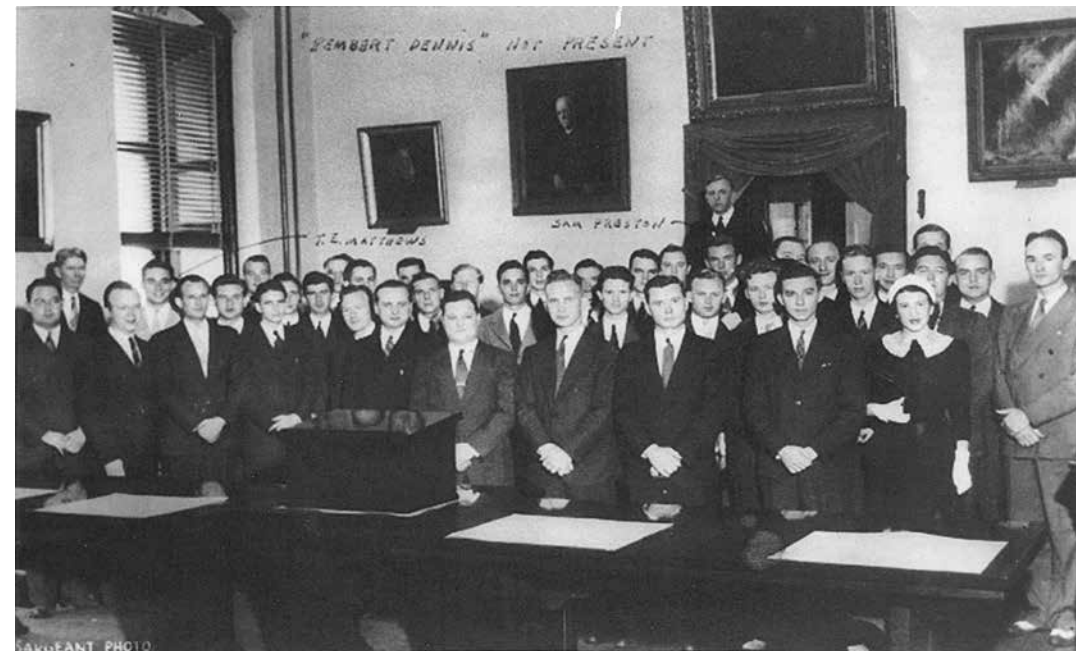
## “If they Can Do It, I Can Do It”: The Legacy of Judith Greenberg Litman Lindau

by Dr. Fern Litman Mazo and Mark E. Mazo

Judith (“Judy”) Greenberg Litman Lindau was a strong, extraordinary woman who was a pioneer in law in South Carolina. Judy was born on October 11, 1917, in Florence, South Carolina, and died at age 95 on March 12, 2013. Proud of being both Jewish and a South Carolinian, Judy was an accomplished and resilient lawyer, a Jewish community leader, and a devoted mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, wife, sister, and daughter. She inspired everyone she met.

Judy’s parents, Louis Greenberg and Fanny Horowitz, came to Florence in the typical way that Jewish families settled in small southern towns at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fanny came with her family from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Philadelphia where they established a business. Louis fled Russia (Minsk) by himself and first picked apples in Connecticut. A matchmaker introduced Louis and Fanny, and after their wedding, Louis took the train as far south as he could afford a ticket—Florence, South Carolina. Over the years, Louis built a prosperous and prominent business in Florence, starting as a peddler selling to farmers and small-town merchants the goods that Fanny bought in Philadelphia and sent south.

Fanny joined Louis in Florence, where they raised Judy and her two older brothers, Abe and Samuel. Always committed to their religion, Louis helped establish a temple for the small but observant Florence congregation and served as the community’s shochet, slaughtering meat for families who kept kosher. Louis became a community leader in Florence.



University of South Carolina Law School Class of 1940 with Judith Litman, right front. Courtesy of Dr. Deborah Litman

He ran many successful companies, including L. Greenberg Company, a tannery business; and Florence Iron and Metal Company, which made significant contributions to World War II. He also was a real estate developer in the growing city.

Judy grew up in a home that emphasized hard work and education. She loved Florence and played multiple sports in high school. However, she missed having Jewish friends her age; she waited eagerly all year for her friend Eloise Franklin to come to Florence from Atlanta to stay with her grandmother for the summer.

Fanny was determined that all her children graduate from college and have a profession. Judy’s brother Samuel became a pharmacist, but, sadly, he died while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. Her other brother, Abe, became a prominent physician who served the entire Florence community, white and Black, with unwavering care and dedication until his death in 1987.

Fanny was equally determined for Judy to graduate from college and become a professional, achievements that were highly unusual for women in the 1930s, particularly in South Carolina. Judy enrolled in Woman’s College of North Carolina in Greensboro (now the University of North Carolina, Greensboro). One of the most exciting parts of Judy’s college experience was having a Jewish roommate and Jewish friends her age.

After her first two years at Woman’s College, Judy transferred to the University of South Carolina (USC) in Columbia where she graduated in 1938, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. Judy was prominent at USC as president of Sigma Delta Sorority, and a member of the Pan-Hellenic Council and the Girls Leadership Society. Among numerous other honors, she consistently appeared on the Dean’s List, and was selected for the May Court.

Always committed to pursuing a profession, Judy enrolled in the USC Law School, where she was not just the only woman in her class, but also the only woman at the school. Despite the barriers that Judy encountered, she was the best student in the class, so her male classmates wanted to use her notes. She even was chosen class historian.

In the 1930s certain law school courses, like family law, were not considered proper for a lady, so Judy was not allowed to take part. However, her classmates would keep the door open so she could listen from the hallway and take the notes they used to study. Judy graduated from law school in 1940 with honors and at the top of her class.

Judy passed the South Carolina bar exam and was sworn in, however, no established firms in Columbia would hire her as a lawyer because she was a woman. They told her to work in the law library instead. Undaunted, Judy practiced for years, handling the legal work for her family’s growing commercial businesses in Florence. She also wrote wills, leases, and legal documents pro bono for older members of Columbia’s Jewish community.

While at law school, Judy met Samuel Litman, a USC engineering professor from Boston. They studied together, fell in love, and married in August 1940, a few months after Judy graduated law school. With Judy’s support, Sam earned his Ph.D. in engineering at Johns Hopkins University. He taught electrical engineering at USC and was an entrepreneur who co-founded WNOK radio and television stations in Columbia.

Judy and Sam raised their two daughters, Fern (Dr. Fern Litman Mazo) and Debbie (Dr. Deborah Litman) in Columbia, and actively guided their education through Columbia public schools, to college (Wellesley College for Fern; Duke University for Debbie) and then to medical school (Tufts University School of Medicine for Fern; Medical College of Virginia for Debbie).

In 1969, when her younger daughter was in high school, Judy went into private practice joining a young litigation lawyer in Columbia, who relied on Judy to collaborate in writing briefs and handle his clients’ business and estate matters. About a year after joining this practice, Judy’s partner suffered a heart attack and died suddenly. Rather than leave clients in the lurch, Judy took over the practice, being sure to pay out her partner’s widow generously.

For the next 35-plus years, Judy continued in the solo practice of law in Columbia (with one secretary) as the “Law Office of Judith Litman.” She was an energetic advocate for her clients, most of whom were pursuing personal injury claims. By the time Judy entered private practice, her law school classmates—who all knew “Miss Judy” well as the smartest student in their class—had become judges and established lawyers in Columbia. As her classmates retired, the next generation of Columbia’s judges and senior lawyers were the friends and high school classmates of her daughters. They also knew Mrs. Litman well, and were glad to collaborate with her, particularly on the more contentious cases. Judy mentored female members of Columbia’s legal community and provided encouragement and advice to many young women lawyers.

Judy was a member of the South Carolina Bar for 70 years and proudly wore her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary bar pin every day. She finally closed her office in 2006, at age 89, because she was “just not having fun anymore.”

Judy had a resilient spirit throughout her life. Her oft-repeated motto was: “If they can do it, I can do it.” This guided her through challenges and the discrimination she had faced as

a woman working in a male-dominated profession. She passed on this motto to her daughters and to her six grandchildren. Another of Judy’s favorite sayings, “You can stand anything for 24 hours,” helped her daughters get through many all-night study sessions and 24-hour hospital shifts as residents.



Above: Judy Greenberg Litman and Samuel Litman on their wedding day in 1940. Below: Judy Greenberg Litman Lindau’s professional portrait. Images pages 21–22 are courtesy of Dr. Fern Litman Mazo and Mark E. Mazo.



Judy was disciplined in her private life. She woke at 5:30 A.M. every day to walk three miles before breakfast—not because she liked exercise (she said she hated it), but to stay healthy. And she was practical. Her first selection at any buffet dinner was dessert, before her favorites ran out. As a South Carolina lady, she was always elegantly dressed, with heels, lipstick, and tasteful jewelry.

Despite hardships in life, Judy persevered and moved forward with optimism and determination. She survived breast cancer in the 1960s and then her husband, Samuel, died in 1975. In honor of Sam, Judy served on advisory boards at the engineering school at USC and established the Dr. Samuel Litman Distinguished Teaching Award in Engineering.

In 1981, Judy married Dr. Jules Lindau III, a widower who was a long-time family friend and business partner, and a prominent businessman who founded Lindau Chemicals. Through Jules, Judy was introduced to Midland Technical College, which Jules had actively promoted. Following Jules' death in 1986, Judy served as a commissioner of the college until 2009, supporting the school's growth from a small campus to a large presence in Richland, Lexington, and Fairfield Counties. She was particularly interested in programs to help women enter the workforce and, to that end, she established the Judith Litman Lindau Scholarship at the college.

Judy was dedicated to supporting Jewish life in Columbia and was active in the sisterhoods of both Beth Shalom Synagogue and Tree of Life Temple. She and her first husband, Sam, helped build the Columbia Jewish Community Center and the new building for Beth Shalom Synagogue, where Sam served as president.

In 2009, Judy moved to Chevy Chase, Maryland, to be closer to her daughters Fern, a neonatologist, and Debbie, a rheumatologist, and her six grandchildren: Samantha, Dana, Ross and Courtney Mazo, and Marisa and Lauren Mizus. Judy

was equally cherished by her two sons-in-law, Mark Mazo and Dr. Irving Mizus, who knew her to be loving and generous to her family.

Judy played an active and formative role in the lives of her grandchildren. She passed on to each of them her self-confidence and belief in hard work and education, her determination in the face of challenges, and her love of Jewish life. Her grandchildren wrote about her in school essays as the person they most admired. While still in Columbia, Judy traveled to Chevy Chase every holiday to join her family at Washington Hebrew



Judith "Judy" Greenberg Litman Lindau with her six grandchildren on the occasion of her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, 2007. Left to right, seated: Dr. Marisa Mizus, Judy, Courtney Mazo; standing: Lauren Mizus, Dr. Dana Mazo, Samantha Mazo, Dr. Ross Mazo.

Congregation services and to take part in Passover Seders. Participating in all six of her grandchildren's bar and bat mitzvah services were among her proudest moments. Judy attended their graduations from elementary and high school, college, medical school, and law school. She lived to dance at many of their weddings. Judy also was blessed to hold her first great-grandchild, Hannah, in her loving arms.

After Judy's death, Beth Shalom Synagogue held a memorial service where Columbians honored her. Long-time friends and many lawyers, both young and old, spoke lovingly about her life and career. They told numerous and sentimental stories about her contributions to the legal community and her devotion to Jewish life. Women lawyers expressed their appreciation for her mentorship. Judy's friends remembered her weekly attendance at Friday night and Saturday morning Shabbat services, noting she always stayed for the big lunch after the Saturday service, the capstone of her week. Multiple generations of women praised her decades of commitment to the sisterhood. The memorial service was particularly meaningful to Judy's grandchildren as it revealed the significant impact she had on members of the Columbia community.

While Judy's passing was deeply mourned, she truly lives, as it is said, "through blessed memory," particularly through her two children, her six grandchildren and her 12 great-grandchildren.

## South Carolina Snapshots

We all know her. You may be her. The woman who follows her heart while going against the grain; who drops her head down and leans into the headwinds; who overcomes challenges meant to thwart what drives her; who carries the weight she *chooses* and, often, the kind of weight she would not wish on anyone else. And she just keeps going. Backwards and in high heels.

Certain pioneering southern Jewish women who have made a mark too big to be ignored have received at least some of the attention they deserve, such women as South Carolinians Penina Moïse, the Pollitzer sisters, and Harriet Keyserling (a New York native who earned her South Carolina chops, so to speak). Nevertheless, the work to record women's place in history demands more depth and certainly more breadth.

In this issue, and at our May 2026 conference, we hope to make a dent in documenting the lives of southern Jewish women, from the ordinary to the exceptional, the mundane to the sublime. Women who, while pursuing passions and fulfilling expectations, are first and foremost nurturing family—immediate, extended, chosen—and in many cases raising children and making sure the stuff of daily life keeps humming along. We know that every day, year after year, southern Jewish women have been going about the business of repairing the world, and it is our imperative to make sure those stories of everyday greatness are part of the big picture.

The following "snapshots" are teasers that we hope will pique your interest and encourage you to learn more. You should know that this is just the tip of the iceberg.

—The Editor

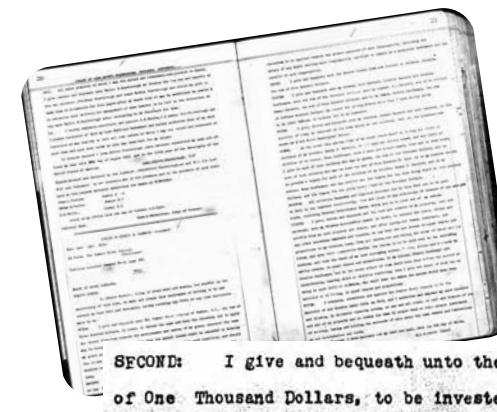
**Norma Mazo Perlmutter (1917–2001). Artist.** Daughter of George and Sonia Mazo, proprietors of Mazo's Deli, 171 King Street, Charleston, South Carolina. Sister to Frances Mazo Butwin and Earl Mazo. Examples of her early work—as a teen, no less, and a keen observer of her surroundings—can be found in Special Collections, College of Charleston, in the [Frances Mazo and Julius Butwin papers](#): color illustrations/caricatures of life at her parents' deli (see the cover of this issue and our spring 2017 issue) and Frances's bookstore in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her painting *Payday* (r) focuses on African-American workers at the United Fruit Company docks in Charleston. Citadel professor Kieran Taylor featured *Payday* in his 2018 book [Charleston and the Great Depression: a Documentary History, 1929–1941](#). For more information, see "Teveye on King Street: Charleston and the Translation of Sholom Aleichem," by Joseph Butwin, *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (June 2007), and the [Principles of Family Business Law](#) by Benjamin Means, Cambridge University Press, 2026.



**Minnie R. Barnett (1855–1922). Postmistress.** Second child of B. J. and Zelda Barnett of Manville, South Carolina, situated in Lee County between Columbia and Florence. In 1869, the *Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, SC) posted a story that announced Minnie Barnett, at the tender age of 14, had been named postmistress of Carter's Crossing, Man(n)ville. In her oral history, B. J.'s granddaughter, Ruth Barnett Kaye, notes that B. J. arrived in the area as a peddler and eventually was able to buy land

and begin to farm, as well as run a country store. The country store became "the center of the community . . . the gathering place. . . Minnie Barnett, the one who was the big mother to everybody, she was the postmistress. She got a little job as the postmistress at the store, and all the people who got to live in the rural area there, came to that store to get their mail. So, they knew the whole county. They knew everybody. They knew all the gossip and all the news and everything that was happening and going on." Minnie never married, but lived in Sumter with two of her spinster sisters and her brother, Henry D. Barnett, until he married. In her will, Minnie left a substantial amount to Temple Sinai in Sumter, as well as \$500 to each nephew and \$1000 to each niece. She was the

epitome of an independent woman who took care of family and community.



Minnie Barnett's "snapshot" and image of her will is courtesy of Rachel Barnett. All other written content, pages 23–25, are by the editor and all other images pages 23–25 are courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.

**Mina Surasky Tropp (1897–1990). Artist, with focus on using flora. Activist.** Daughter of H. C. and Freidel Copeland Surasky, Aiken, South Carolina, merchants. Mina's cousin Rose Surasky Seldin and Rose's sister-in-law Evelyn Goodman Surasky Caplan, in their oral history interview, call Mina (pronounced My-nah) "the first hippie." The poet-painter (r) and her husband, Ralph Tropp, were restaurateurs and art studio owners in New York. Mina lobbied for passage of the Wagner-Rogers Bill (it failed), intended to pave the way for the U.S. to admit refugee children from Germany during World War II. She worked with Golda Meir in support of creating a Jewish homeland. Archival collections related to Mina and the Surasky family: [Arnold Michael Shankman papers](#) and the [Surasky family papers](#), Winthrop University; [Surasky/Persky photograph albums](#) and interview with [Mordecai Persky](#), College of Charleston; Shankman interview with Mina Surasky Tropp, Winthrop University ([original](#)) and College of Charleston ([copy](#)) in the Southern Jewish Historical Society papers.



**Evelyn Marcus (1887–1963). Lawyer.** Daughter of Mitchel and Hannah Rich Marcus of Orangeburg. Passed the South Carolina bar (the first woman in Orangeburg County to do so) in 1920 without the benefit of a formal education. By one account, at the time there were about six female lawyers in the state. Evelyn practiced in Orangeburg and did so despite a significant hearing impairment. See Ruth Williams Cupp's book, [Portia Steps Up to the Bar](#), 2003, and Survey of Hebrew Cemetery at Sunnyside Cemetery in Orangeburg in the Jewish Heritage Collection [Fieldwork Files](#).



**Lillie Goldstein/Lisa Lubin (1923–?). Opera Singer.** Daughter of Abraham and Bessie Lazerovsky Goldstein, shoe and menswear merchants in Charleston, South Carolina. Lillie got her start at seven years old singing for a WCSC Radio program that aired from the top of the Francis Marion Hotel. Her professional and married name was Lisa Lubin. She recorded an oral history [interview](#) with Dale Rosengarten in 1998 and donated a [small collection](#) that includes photos and a CD compilation of select performances to the Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston. The CD has been digitized to m4a files that can be readily shared with researchers [upon request](#). Her publicity photo (l) was taken for William Stein, singers' manager for the Metropolitan, San Francisco, and Chicago operas. The photographer appears to be the famous Bruno Bernard Sommerfeld.

**Sura Wolff Wengrow (1908–2016). Volunteer. Librarian. Baker and Cake Decorator.** Daughter of Rachel "Ray" Pearlstine and Henry Wolff, proprietors of a general merchandise store in Allendale, South Carolina. In her 1999 oral history interview, she said about her hometown: "I always felt there was somewhere else I wanted to be. There was a fuller life for me than staying in Allendale." Nevertheless, after graduating from University of South Carolina (USC) in 1928, followed by marriage to Sam Wengrow, she found herself back in Allendale, raising a family in a small rural town that was lacking. Her eldest son turning 12 and in need of bar mitzvah instruction was the impetus for the move to Columbia, South Carolina, where Sura took advantage of the opportunities available. "I joined everything that was Jewish. I volunteered for everything because I was ready for it. I wanted it and had longed for it for twenty years." Besides pursuing a career later in life as a librarian, her elaborate cake decorating skills, in demand for weddings, birthdays, bar and bat mitzvahs, were renowned in the Jewish community. For Arnold Wengrow's article about his mother's culinary avocation, see the 2023 book [Kugels & Collards](#) or the [Fall 2023 issue](#) of the JHSSC magazine. The Wengrow family established the Sura Wolff Wengrow Undergraduate [Research Award](#) in Jewish Studies at USC in 2000 to support the study of South Carolina's Jewish history, culture, religion, and heritage.



**Ann (Anna) Bamberger Karesh (1923–2019). Artist.** Daughter of Thea and Ludwig Bamberger, owners of the German toy manufacturing company DBL-Spiele. See the [Holocaust Quilt: Commemorating Charleston Survivors](#) website for story and images relating to the Bamberger family's escape from Nazi Germany. Ann met and married Charleston, South Carolina, native Karl Karesh in London during World War II. They raised three children in Charleston. Ann's legacy as a painter and sculptor is preserved through her many works. Her painting *Deserted Village in Desert Israel* is on display in the first floor lobby of the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, College of Charleston. Learn more about Ann by visiting [annkaresh.com](#). Ann is featured in the book *Contemporary Artists of South Carolina* by Jack Morris, 1970, available at Charleston County Public Library and college libraries statewide, and in the exhibit catalog [Expressions of Nature in Art](#), exhibited at the Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, S.C., Nov. 23, 1975–Jan. 1, 1976, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C., Jan. 4–Jan. 25, 1976 [and] *Gibbes Art Gallery, Charleston, S.C., Feb. 1–Feb. 29, 1976*, available at the South Carolina Historical Society archives, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston. [Special Collections](#), College of Charleston, is the repository for the Ann Bamberger Karesh papers.



**Irene Krugman Rudnick (1929–2019). Lawyer. Politician. Educator.** Daughter of Jean Getter and Jack Krugman, a Columbia, South Carolina, merchant. Raised two children in Aiken with her husband Harold Rudnick, who owned a furniture store. There seemed to be no end to Irene's energy, sense of humor, and willingness to put others first. While practicing law, she taught at USC-Aiken for 57 years; was a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Aiken, for 14 years; and served as president of Adath Yeshurun Synagogue for decades. Those are just the highlights—there is more! For details, see [Irene's obituary](#) in which she is described as a *bitzu'ist*, someone who gets the job done. See also Irene's 2014 oral history [interview](#) and the [Irene K. Rudnick papers](#) in the Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston; Ruth Williams Cupp's book, [Portia Steps Up to the Bar](#), 2003; and Irene's memoir, "Apples of Gold: My Life and Times," in the [fall 2014 issue](#) of the JHSSC magazine.

**Isabel Cohen Doud (1867–1945). Artist.** Charleston, South Carolina, native, descended from the Cohen, Hart, and Lazarus families. See the Johnson Collection of Spartanburg, South Carolina, for a [biographical summary](#). Isabel is reported to have flouted the constraints of Charleston society, including painting nudes, one of which is held by the Gibbes Museum in Charleston. A graduate of the College of Charleston, she left her estate to the college, and Special Collections, Addlestone Library, is the repository for the [Isabel Cohen Doud collection](#), which includes the floral oil painting on the right.



**Frances Mazo Butwin (1911–1996). Writer. Sholom Aleichem Translator.** Daughter of George and Sonia Mazo, proprietors of Mazo's Deli, 171 King Street, Charleston, South



Carolina. Sister to Norma Mazo Perlmutter and Earl Mazo. In her era, foremost translator of the works of the popular Yiddish writer [Sholom Aleichem](#). Bookstore owner. Communist Party member. The [Frances Mazo and Julius Butwin papers](#), Special Collections, College of Charleston, is chock full of her writings dating back to when she was a young girl living in Poland. Like her sister, Norma, Frances's perceptiveness, revealed through her art form, provided informed interpretations of time and place. For more information, see ["Teve on King Street: Charleston and the Translation of Sholom Aleichem,"](#) by Joseph Butwin, *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (June 2007), and the [Principles of Family Business Law](#) by Benjamin Means, Cambridge University Press, 2026.

## Archives Update

*News from Max Daniel, Jewish Heritage Collection Coordinator, Special Collections*

The [Jewish Heritage Collection](#) at the College of Charleston continues to add new collections to its archives, expanding and deepening our understanding of South Carolina's Jewish history. There are many recent acquisitions worth highlighting and donors worth thanking, but limited space allows us to mention only a few.

JHSSC's most recent meeting inspired many attendees to donate items highlighting their time in Jewish youth groups across the state. Mindy Kligman Odle, Mickey Kronsberg Rosenblum, Diane Barbanel Vickers, and Ellen Feldman Arnovitz each donated scrapbooks and other materials including photos, newsletters, and more from their time in B'nai B'rith Girls, while Alex Cohen, Steven Goldberg, and Jerry Emanuel offered materials that enrich our understanding and appreciation for the AZA boys' groups.



Shortly before his recent passing, artist [Sigmund Abeles](#), who grew up in Myrtle Beach, generously sent us additions to his existing collection of personal and professional papers. The South Caroliniana Library at USC also holds a substantial collection donated by him.

Connie Aaronson of Maryland, a descendant of the Mordecai-Davis family, entrusted the JHC with a gorgeous, hand-painted genealogical book, pictured here, from 1929 that documents her family's lineage dating back to medieval Spain, through the Caribbean, and into South Carolina and New York.

If you have materials you may be interested in preserving and making available for future generations through the Jewish Heritage Collection, contact Dr. Max Daniel at [danielme1@cofc.edu](mailto:danielme1@cofc.edu).

## “Southern Jewish Women: Uncovering Stories of Everyday Greatness”

*by Rachel Gordin Barnett, JHSSC Executive Director*

Partnerships with like-minded organizations are important, and the JHSSC is very lucky to have partners whose missions align with ours. In sponsoring and planning the 2026 spring conference we are joined by the talented and special people from Jewish Studies at the University of South Carolina as well as the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture and the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston. This collaboration brings together these organizations to plan and execute “Southern Jewish Women: Uncovering Stories of Everyday Greatness.” I want to thank committee members Saskia Coenen Snyder, Ashley Walters, Alyssa Neely, Teri Wolff Kaufman, Lisa Strauss, and Mickey Rosenblum



*Rachel Gordin Barnett with her mother, Miriam Brotman Gordin, September 2024. Courtesy of Rachel Barnett.*

for their work on planning this special weekend in May. I enjoy brainstorming and this group has risen to the occasion by seeking out stories of women who made a difference in their communities. We plan to illuminate the role of women in the arts, education, business, and medicine, just a few of the many arenas where they have made an impact, but often don't receive the recognition they deserve. The May conference is our opportunity to shine a spotlight on certain individuals and add their stories to the historical record. I hope you will make plans to join us for what promises to be a stellar weekend.

My mother was such a woman. Miriam Brotman Gordin was born in 1933, in Charleston, South Carolina, to Ralph and Charlotte

Brotman, both immigrants. Her father died when she was 12 and it was left to her mother to carry on the business of the small army-navy store on upper King Street and to raise her only child. Charlotte wanted her daughter to have an education and a good life. While Mama was attending the College of Charleston, she met my father, David Gordin, on a blind date. They married in August 1955, shortly after she graduated, and moved to my father's hometown, Summerton, South Carolina, a small farming community. My father wanted to be near his father, Morris Gordin, who operated Gordin's, a dry goods store. Dad was a pharmacist and opened Rowe-Tomlinson Drugs in Summerton. In July 1956, I made my appearance, and in 1958 and 1961, my siblings arrived.

My mother did what most women of her generation did—she played bridge, occasionally worked in the store, took art classes, and raised her children. That changed in 1966 when the elementary school principal's wife arrived at our back door with a cake in hand. Her husband had heard my mother had a college degree and wanted to ask if she would be interested in teaching just “until they found someone.” That lasted “only” 50 years as my mother went on to teach in many schools in Clarendon County. Along the way, she and her friend Norville Walker attended USC-Sumter and obtained their masters' degrees.

Mama, quiet and unassuming, was a strong force in my life. She was very pro-women's rights, and she made sure I was aware that a woman should have her own money and agency, and be self-sufficient. My mother left an impact on generations of students across Clarendon County. She taught social studies and government and made sure we all knew and could recite from memory the Preamble of the Constitution, understood the importance of voting, and practiced good citizenship.

Raising her four children in a town where we were the only Jewish family meant that she and my father had to go that extra mile (literally miles) to get a Jewish education for us. We would pile into the Ford station wagon and travel to Sumter, South Carolina, weekly for Sunday school at Temple Sinai. Mama taught Sunday school and became involved with Sisterhood. Our parents made sure we observed Jewish holidays and instilled Jewish values in each of us. For the only Jewish kids in a small town, it was definitely a different way to grow up compared with our counterparts in cities like Columbia and Charleston, but we didn't know otherwise.

My mother passed away in October 2025 at the age of 92. Losing one's mother is never easy, no matter the age. My mother was kind and sweet, but she was determined and strong in her belief of *tikkun olam*.

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Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to address above.

Register now for the May 2-3 meeting at [jhssc.org/events/upcoming](http://jhssc.org/events/upcoming).  
See page 15 of this publication for program information.