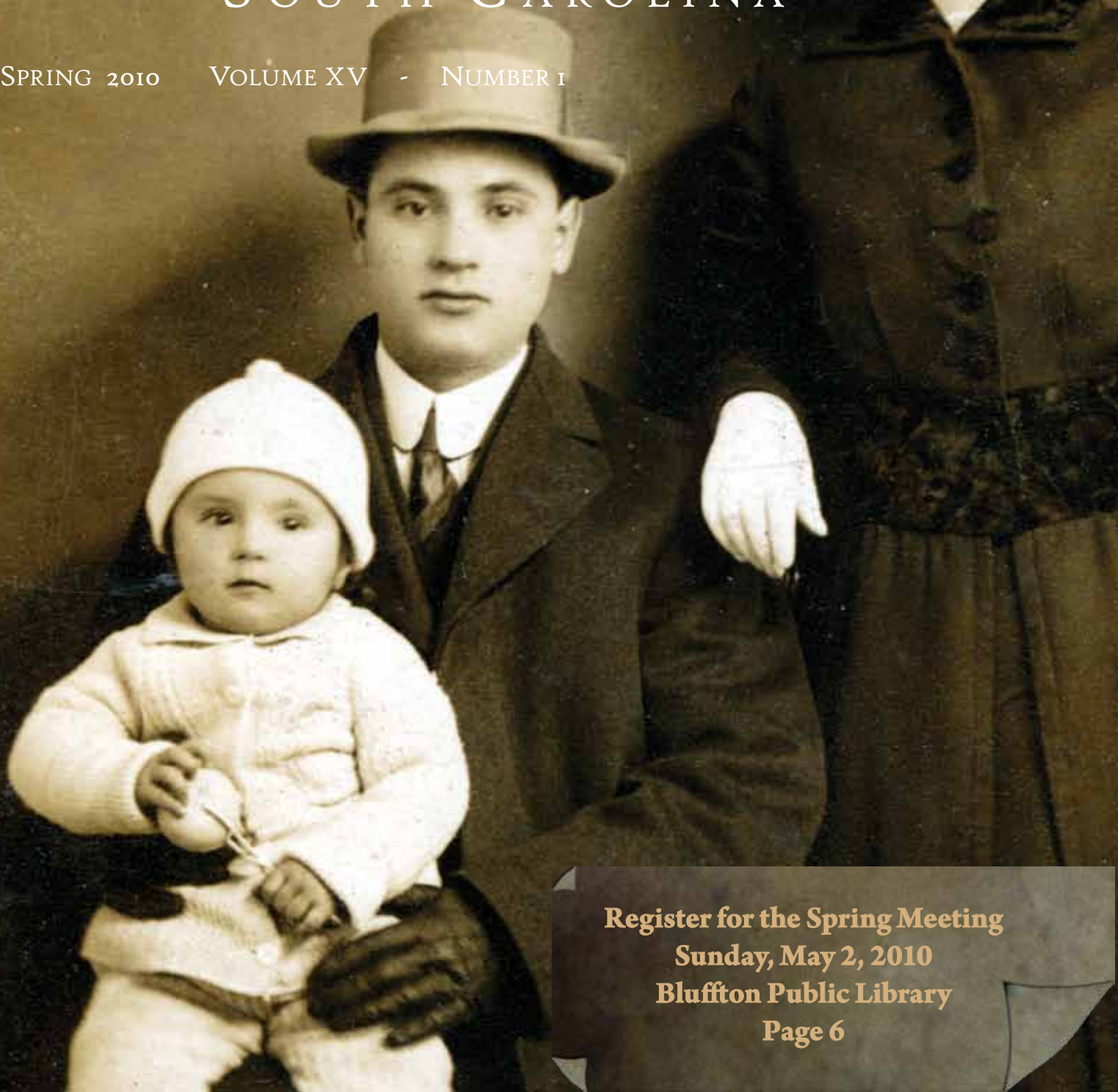


Leader page to JHSSC Spring 2010
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THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

SPRING 2010 VOLUME XV - NUMBER I



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Bluffton Public Library
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Ann Meddin Hellman
President

On the cover:

Sol Breibart at one year old, with his parents, Sam and Ida Goldberg Breibart, Charleston, SC, 1915. Photo courtesy of Sara Bolgla Breibart.



The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina Newsletter is published twice a year.

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www.jhssc.org

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A new outreach effort called the Rural Jewish Initiative aims to recruit student rabbis to serve small congregations across the Carolinas. Modeled on I. D. Blumenthal's circuit-riding rabbis of the 1950s to '70s, RJIC's goal is to sustain Jewish life in out-of-the-way places.

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Lopez descendants locate the graves of their prominent forebears in Charleston's Jewish burial ground on Coming Street and—surprise!—Magnolia Cemetery.

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With funding from two new grants, the College of Charleston's Center for Southern Jewish Culture plans to pick up the pace of activities this year and establish itself as a leading center for researching, documenting, and teaching Jewish history and culture of the American South.

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Dale Rosengarten

New treasures recently donated to the Jewish Heritage Collection are on display through May 2010 in Special Collections at the College of Charleston Library.

From the President of the JHSSC

There are many ways of acquiring historical data. We are accustomed to learning about the past from books, and we once were limited to sources we could find in our local library or purchase from bookstores. Today, the Internet allows us access to a wide range of media and information. The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina is doing its part. Our website shares the history and culture of the state's Jews with people all over the world. Featuring synagogue histories, cemetery surveys, book listings, back and current issues of the Society's newsletter, photographs of past meetings, and much more, the site is an invaluable asset to the Society and an excellent teaching tool.

Joe Wachter, Vice-President of Archives and Historical Sites, leads our efforts to index and photograph Jewish burial grounds across the state. Cemetery listings ensure that the names of those interred will live on in perpetuity and will not disappear because of erosion from weather or vandalism. The records we have compiled are available at www.jhssc.org, and have been added to www.jewishgen.org at its JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR). There's a great deal more work to be done, however, and as a grassroots organization, the Society needs your help. Please contact Joe at jhw@48th.com or me at hellmana@bellsouth.net if you would like to become involved.

We also have undertaken an initiative to erect historical markers at important Jewish sites in South Carolina. So far the Society has co-sponsored markers at Sumter's Temple Sinai and Columbia's first synagogue and Sunday school. You can suggest additional candidates for historical recognition by going

to the volunteer page at www.jhssc.org and entering your nomination.

Yet another way you can play a vital part is to become a Pillar of the Society. Pillars provide JHSSC with the means to accomplish all that it does. By committing \$1,000 a year over a five year period (or \$2,000 a year for institutional members), Pillars underwrite our operations and help us tell the world about Jewish history and culture in South Carolina. To make a pledge or to learn more about how you can contribute, please contact Vice-President of Fundraising and Membership Philip Greenberg at scgreenbrg@aol.com.

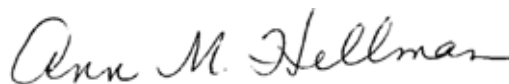
Mark your calendars for the Society's spring meeting in Bluffton on Sunday, May 2, 2010. Unlike many small towns, Bluffton has witnessed dramatic

growth of its Jewish population, thanks to its proximity to Del Webb's Sun City, a 5,600-acre community begun in the 1990s that has attracted a significant influx of Jewish "snowbirds." Four years ago these newcomers started a congregation, Temple Oseh Shalom, and Rabbi Robert Seigel of Charleston has recently been engaged to

lead services. At the meeting in Bluffton, JHSSC will participate in history in the making.

I look forward to seeing you on May 2nd.

Fondly,



Ann Meddin Hellman
hellmana@bellsouth.net

Be a Photojournalist in Your Own Town

Many cities and towns in South Carolina have buildings that testify to the state's Jewish heritage: Jewish storefronts, homes of Jewish civic leaders, buildings formerly housing synagogues or community centers. These structures will not be here forever, but their historic value can be preserved. An image and a story go a long way.

To help preserve our history, we ask you simply to take a picture of a place with a Jewish past, write a short paragraph about its history, and email the photo and text to jhsscwebmaster@bellsouth.net. We will add the materials to our digital archive and publish some submissions on our website. If you would like suggestions of sites that need documentation, contact Joe Wachter at jhw@48th.com.

Bluffton's Oseh Shalom: From 17 to 500 Members in Four Years

by Alvin B. Reuben

Bluffton, South Carolina, is located in southern Beaufort County, almost equidistant from Hilton Head Island and Savannah, Georgia. The town dates from the early 1800s when Lowcountry rice and cotton planters seeking high ground and cool river breezes built residences in what was then called Devil's Elbow Barony. Until the late 1970s and early 1980s, few Jews lived in the Bluffton area, but with the construction of new gated communities, the area's population swelled, and so did the number of Jewish inhabitants.

The trend escalated when the Del Webb Corporation began building Sun City–Hilton Head in the early 1990s. A 5,600-acre community for active seniors, Sun City eventually will contain 8,500 homes and over 15,000 residents spread over parts of Beaufort and adjacent Jasper County. From the beginning, the Jewish population of Sun City has been significantly higher than the demographics of most rural areas. Today the Sun City portion of greater Bluffton is five percent Jewish, and this contingent has become an engine for spirited growth of the Jewish population in the area.

Until 2006 most of the Jews living in Bluffton traveled to one of the synagogues on nearby Hilton Head Island or in Savannah for religious services, while a few made the 30-mile drive to Beaufort. Then, four years ago, 17 people from Hilton Head and Bluffton met to discuss the possibility of forming a new congregation closer to home. Six couples put up some seed money, rented a church, and printed a small number of custom-designed siddurim, calculating that about 50 people would attend the first service of this newly formed, non-affiliated eclectic congregation, Temple Oseh Shalom.

The inaugural service was conducted in June 2006 and,

to the surprise of all, 165 Jews—mostly from Bluffton, with some from Hilton Head—showed up. In just four years, the congregation has ballooned to upwards of 500 members, 83 percent of whom live in Sun City, 8 percent in greater Bluffton, 7 percent on Hilton Head Island, 1.5 percent in Beaufort and Ridgeland, and .5 percent in other nearby communities. The new residents come from across the country, from the eastern seaboard to the west coast.

Among the temple's original organizers was Rav Bob Wiener, who volunteered to serve temporarily as the group's spiritual leader and who remained in that position until recently, when Rabbi Robert Seigel from Charleston was hired on a part-time basis to lead the congregation.

Oseh Shalom serves its members in ways most congregations do not. The minimal dues structure (currently \$25.00 per year) is subsidized by voluntary contributions from members at times of Yahrzeit, illness, mitzvot, and through an annual Yom Kippur appeal. There is no building fund. Rather, the congregation rents space at a local Presbyterian church that not only permits the use of its sanctuary and social hall, but also has accommodated storage of the ark, Torahs, and other ritual items. Complementing the strong ties between Lowcountry Presbyterian Church and Temple Oseh Shalom



President Al Reuben benschng lulav on Sukkot, October 16, 2009. Photo: Judy Glazer.



Temple Oseh Shalom presently rents space in a Presbyterian church in Bluffton for Shabbat services on the third Friday evening of each month. A portable ark is to the right of the bimah.



Rav Bob Wiener and Cantor Ken Rosenberg (in cap) dedicate Oseh Shalom Gardens, a section of Bluffton Cemetery. Photo: Judy Glazer and Sue Wiener.



Judy Glazer and Cantor Ken Rosenberg with Jewish Marine recruits at Parris Island, November 2009. Photo: Jeff Glazer.

is an ecumenical outreach program that houses and feeds the homeless for short periods in various religious institutions in the area.

The temple's adult education program supports a variety of opportunities, including two Torah study groups. After a year of study, nine congregants honored the congregation last October by celebrating the temple's second b'nai mitzvah service. There has been no need for a Hebrew or Sunday school for children because the overwhelming majority of the membership's children are grown, although one teenager has celebrated her bat mitzvah after intense tutoring and preparation.

A lay cantor and 17-member choir, led by a music director, supplement the congregation's singing and provide music to enhance services. Land in an existing cemetery was recently consecrated for Temple Oseh Shalom Gardens, a Jewish burial ground with room for up to 500 grave sites.

Oseh Shalom is a congregation of active adults with the time, skills, and desire to take part in diverse projects. The



Table set with traditional foods for Tu b'Shevat seder, January 2010. Photo: Judy Glazer.

temple's board of directors is supported by volunteers serving on 15 committees. The Sisterhood and Men's Club donate innumerable hours to regional organizations, including local schools. At nearby Parris Island Marine Corps Depot congregants provide weekly and High Holiday services for recruits at the facility's Jewish chapel.

Temple Oseh Shalom's phenomenal rise is attributable not only to dramatic population growth, but to its members' dedication to the educational and spiritual enrichment of their fellow Jews and their involvement in programs that benefit the greater community. The congregation is likely to be a strong presence in the region for decades to come.



Bat mitzvah class of 2009. Left to right (top row): Moreh Rav Bob Wiener, Carol Rosenberg, Ellie Crystal, Ellen Altman, Judy Glazer; (front row) Phyllis Wilner, Susan Safranek, Jan Mintz, Ruth Kashine, and Minnie Levine. Photo: Sue Wiener.



Larry Katz plants a tree in the temple's Bluffton burial ground, Oseh Shalom Gardens, January 16, 2010. Photo: Jackie Katz.

JHSSC Meeting Schedule

Bluffton, SC – Sunday, May 2, 2010

All activities take place at the Beaufort County Library

Bluffton Branch, 120 Palmetto Way

Bluffton, SC 29910

Phone: (843) 757-1519 Fax: (843) 757-1505

10:30 a.m. Registration

10:45 a.m. Welcome

Ann Meddin Hellman, President, JHSSC

11:00 a.m. Hilton Head/Bluffton:

Decades of Phenomenal Growth

Alvin B. Reuben, President, Oseh Shalom

11:30 a.m. Sewing a Thin Gray Line:

Jews who Made Uniforms for the Union and Confederacy

Adam Mendelsohn, College of Charleston

12:45 p.m. Luncheon

Comments and Hamotzi

Rabbi Robert Seigel

2:00 p.m. Port Jews and Plantation Jews:

Carolina/Caribbean Connections

Dale Rosengarten, College of Charleston

3:15 p.m. Open JHSSC Board Meeting

BLUFFTON HOTEL INFORMATION

Holiday Inn Express

35 Bluffton Road

Bluffton, SC 29910

Phone: (843) 757-2002 Fax: (843) 757-2425

\$79.95/night (includes breakfast)

Special rate available until April 23rd. You must make your own reservations. Use code JHS or ask for a room in the Jewish Historical Society room block.

Bluffton Meeting Registration

You may also register online at: www.jhssc.org

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

The cost for this meeting is \$18 per person.

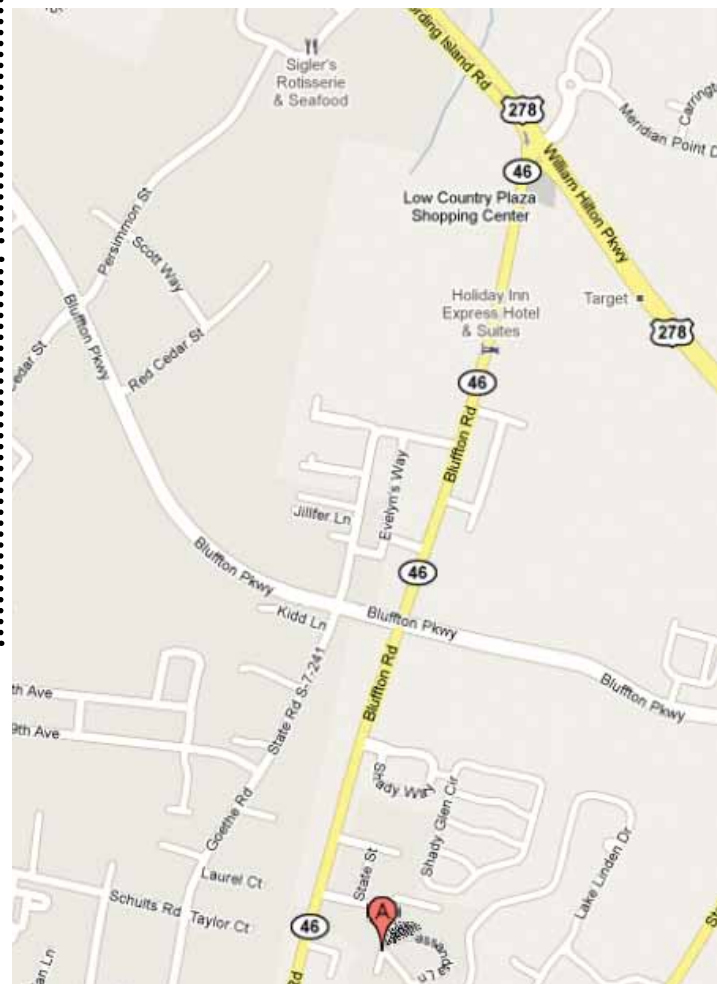
Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Return form to:

JHSSC / Jewish Studies Program

96 Wentworth Street

Charleston, SC 29424



Directions

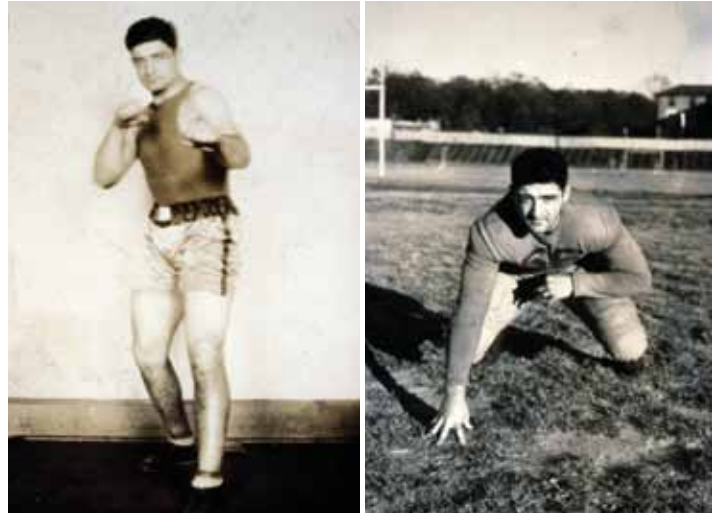
From Holiday Inn Express to library, head south on Bluffton Road (SC 46), left on Johnston, and right on Palmetto Way to the Bluffton Library (1.3 miles). If you are driving in on Sunday morning, follow US 278 (William Hilton Parkway) and turn right into Bluffton Road (SC 46). Proceed as above to the library.

The Jews of Anderson, South Carolina: Merchants and Manufacturers

by Alyssa Neely

The first Jews to settle in Anderson, the Lessers, came from Prussia by way of New York and Georgia and were established in the town well before the Civil War. During the post-war occupation of South Carolina, Michael and Martha Lesser took an injured Union soldier, Oscar Geisberg, an observant Jew who hailed from Vienna, into their home, and in 1871, their daughter, Carrie, married him. It appears that, for Geisberg and the Lessers, a common religious background trumped regional alliances.

Reflecting the national pattern, Anderson's Jews tended to be merchants of one sort or another. The Lessers ran a mercantile store on the main square and a number of their children and grandchildren followed them into the dry goods business. Dora Geisberg, Oscar and Carrie's daughter, owned D. Geisberg's Millinery, a ladies' ready-to-wear shop. Her brother, Harry, operated a shoe store, while his wife, Sadie, offered ladies clothing at The Vogue Shop. Another Geisberg brother, Leo, sold general merchandise. Oscar reputedly tried his hand at storekeeping but was not successful. He was active in civic affairs in his adopted hometown, however, as an organizer of the YMCA and the Board of Trade. In 1878, there were some 17 Jewish residents in Anderson, most or all of whom were members of the Lesser and Geisberg families.



Reuben Siegel played football and boxed for Clemson University, ca. 1930. Photos courtesy of Paul Siegel.

As the area's economic base shifted from agriculture to a combination of farming and manufacturing, the face of the Jewish community changed. Among the influx of Eastern European immigrants in the first decade of the 20th century were the Fleishman and Siegel families. Sam Fleishman was one of nine brothers who fanned out across southern North Carolina and northern South Carolina and established as many as 15 general merchandise stores. He opened his Anderson store in 1906 and soon was joined by his 12-year-old nephew, Nathan, who, two decades later, would succeed him in the business, Fleishman's "Outfitter from Head to Foot for Men, Women, and Children."

Max Siegel left Russia just after 1900 and settled in New York's Lower East Side. Unhappy with the cold winters and the big city atmosphere, he boarded a train headed south in 1908. His money took him as far as Anderson where he peddled first and later established a livestock business, supplying meat to local markets and Clemson College.

Max's company thrived, enabling him not only to survive the Great Depression, but to provide assistance to the municipality. When the mayor and the city council approached him for help meeting the city's payroll, he loaned them \$50,000. He also was affluent enough to acquire the Anderson country club which, ironically, did not admit Jews. One year later he sold it to the city for the same price he paid, but when the city fathers offered him membership, he declined. Max's son, Sam,



Left to right: Sadie, Minnie, and Julia Cohen, Elberton, GA, 1904. Sadie moved to Anderson in 1914 when she married Harry Geisberg. Her daughter, Caroline, married Louis Funkenstein. Photo courtesy of Louis and Caroline Funkenstein.

recalled in a 1996 interview, “My father told them, ‘Nope, if the Jewish people can’t be a member, I don’t want to be a member.’”

Born in 1915, Sam recollected a childhood blighted by a lack of Jewish playmates and the taunts of other children. He was acutely aware of the power of the Ku Klux Klan, whose members, he said, controlled every facet of city life. He observed that while white Christians “tolerated” Jews, anti-Semitic attitudes prevented outright acceptance. During his high school years, the taunting subsided, which Sam attributed to the popularity of his older brother, Reuben, a star athlete who lettered in three sports at Clemson. Reuben’s football and boxing prowess won him the respect of admirers and he became known as “The Jewish Juggernaut” or “Jew Boy Siegel.”

Nathan Fleishman’s son, Alvin, born six years after Sam Siegel, estimated that 15 to 20 Jewish families lived in Anderson during his childhood. Though many stayed only briefly before moving on, he remembered having Jewish friends. Apparently his cohort was not numerous enough, however, to warrant a Sunday school. Nathan hired a rabbi to instruct him and, in 1934, Alvin’s bar mitzvah was the first to take place in the city of Anderson. “I made the day of my fountain pen speech at the Elks Club. It was the hit of the community for a while. They tried to figure out what those Jews were and they saw me and they decided, well, maybe they’re not too bad after all.”

Alvin also claimed in a 1998 interview that the Anderson congregation had existed as long as he could remember. The date of its founding and when it adopted the name B’nai Israel, however, remain unclear. Younger members of the second generation recall Sabbath services taking place with some



Rosenblum family Passover seder, 1941. Photo courtesy of Raymond and Sandra Lee Rosenblum.

regularity by the late 1930s, when the city’s Jewish population numbered roughly 72, mostly Eastern European immigrants and their offspring. Congregants met in the Woodmen of the World hall and, later, in a room over a grocery store, where High Holy Days services, Sunday school classes, and Purim plays also were held.

While some English made its way into the Hebrew liturgy, services were Orthodox, led by lay readers. Men and women sat separately. Members of the congregation taught Sunday school and hired rabbinical students from New York for the High Holy Days. Rabbi David Karesh, of Columbia’s House of Peace synagogue, presided over circumcisions, which were always held on Sundays, the day the merchants closed their stores. The Yiddish-speaking community with its strong sense of connectedness left an indelible impression on Raymond Rosenblum, who grew up on Peachtree Street in the 1930s. “The Jews of Anderson at that time were one extended family. Everybody knew everybody else’s business.”

In the years before World War II, virtually all of Anderson’s Jewish families operated businesses. Reuben Siegel returned from college and continued to trade livestock, opening his own barn. Nathan and Freida Rosenblum, Polish immigrants who had moved to Anderson in 1933 after trying their luck in Miami, Florida, and three other South Carolina towns, went into the dry goods business, selling new and used clothing. Nathan served as the cantor at Sabbath services.

Jules Kaplan moved to Anderson from Pennsylvania in the late ’30s and opened a shirt factory. He volunteered as a lay leader of the congregation’s weekly services. Ted Fleishman first worked for his brother Nathan, then opened his own store, The Hub. Younger brother Joe moved to Anderson in 1937 with his wife, Libby, and joined his brothers in the family businesses, which had grown to include a liquor store.

Sam Siegel, in the late 1930s, ran the Bern & Siegel Mule Company with his brother-in-law, Sam Bern, and achieved some renown by offering a helping hand to immigrant Kurt



Lt. Allen Rosenblum, pilot for the U.S. Army’s “Mighty Eighth” Air Force, flew 56 missions before being shot down over Germany in April 1945. The decorated pilot returned home safely after three weeks in a POW camp in Austria. The swastika on “Rosey’s” plane was a trophy from a German aircraft he shot down. Photo courtesy of Raymond and Sandra Lee Rosenblum.



Newsstand acquired by Kurt Sax, an Austrian Jewish immigrant, 1942. A neighbor remarked, "It would be only a matter of time until he owns the whole block." Photo courtesy of Kurt Sax.

toward a successful career as an executive in a large, well-respected company on the west coast.

In the 1940s, a rabbi reportedly came to conduct services on Sunday mornings and the congregation hired George Ackerman of nearby Walhalla, a Hebrew teacher and cantor, to lead High Holy Days services. Adult members continued to teach Sunday school classes and bar mitzvah candidates, and a chapter of B'nai Brith was chartered in 1945.

Max Siegel, Nathan Fleishman, Hyman Draisen, Sam Bern, and Nathan Rosenblum, among others, led the drive to build a synagogue—a 150-seat sanctuary with adjacent



Left to right: Michael Fleishman, Steven Siegel, and Edward Poliakoff ushering at Harriet Fleishman's confirmation in the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Libby Fleishman.

Sax, who had fled German-occupied Austria in 1939 and landed in Anderson at age 19. Sam gave the needy and ambitious young man a dollar and a note to hand other local Jewish business owners, urging them to do the same. The assistance Kurt received enabled him to open a kiosk, where he sold a "complete line of magazines, newspapers, soft drinks, cigarettes, cigars, tobaccos," and gave him a kick-start

toward a successful career as an executive in a large, well-respected company on the west coast. In the 1940s, a rabbi reportedly came to conduct services on Sunday mornings and the congregation hired George Ackerman of nearby Walhalla, a Hebrew teacher and cantor, to lead High Holy Days services. Adult members continued to teach Sunday school classes and bar mitzvah candidates, and a chapter of B'nai Brith was chartered in 1945. Max Siegel, Nathan Fleishman, Hyman Draisen, Sam Bern, and Nathan Rosenblum, among others, led the drive to build a synagogue—a 150-seat sanctuary with adjacent classrooms, social hall, and kitchen. Supported by a Jewish population that had nearly doubled since 1937, Temple B'nai Israel was completed in 1948, in time for its first bar mitzvah, Ronald Bern. According to Ron, who wrote about growing up Jewish in Anderson in his 1975 novel, *The Legacy*, the impetus behind the building project was his grandfather Max Siegel's desire to see the ceremony take place in a proper synagogue. With a congregational membership of 20 to 25

families, the women organized a Sisterhood and affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

Anderson's manufacturing industry continued to grow in the 1950s as Duke Power Company came on line and construction began on the Hartwell Dam. The promise of a substantial power supply was just one of a number of attractions for would-be manufacturers, such as Bill and Elaine Epstein, who moved to Anderson in 1953 and opened a ladies' apparel factory, Iva Manufacturing Company. The business became quite successful, expanding to include six plants. Bill developed a patent on a sewing device and was recognized by Clemson University for his management style.

Louis Funkenstein, who married Caroline Geisberg, a granddaughter of Oscar and Carrie Geisberg, moved to Anderson at the end of World War II and, with the encouragement of Jules Kaplan, opened a plant that manufactured paper boxes. Jules used Louis's boxes to pack his shirts.

By the 1950s, B'nai Israel's Orthodoxy appears to have been a source of contention among members. Funkenstein, among others, wanted the congregation to align its practices with the Conservative movement. Nathan Fleishman reportedly encouraged his fellow elders to defer to the younger generation regarding ritual preferences in order to keep them involved. The senior members followed his advice and the two groups compromised. Weekly services followed Conservative customs, while High Holy Days were observed according to Orthodox tradition. Men and women sat together and the Sunday school was well attended.

The congregation's flexibility helped keep it viable as the first generation of immigrants gave way to second and third generation Americans. In the 1950s, B'nai Israel hired Rabbi Goldberg, a retired Reform rabbi living in Augusta, Georgia, to provide services once a month and on High Holy Days. He served the congregation for many years, including presiding over marriages and funerals.

Sons and daughters of immigrant families who stayed in Anderson tended to operate their own businesses and take seriously their civic duties. Reuben Siegel, who had left the live-



Caroline Geisberg and Louis Funkenstein, wedding photo, 1943. Photo courtesy of Louis and Caroline Funkenstein.



Alvin Fleishman emcees at Temple B'nai Israel's 50th anniversary celebration in 1998. Photo: Dale Rosengarten. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

stock business and gone into finance, was a charter member of the Anderson Sertoma Club, served as its president, and was influential in creating its Scholarship Awards Program. In appreciation of his years of service to the community, the Club established the Reuben Siegel Scholarship Award in 1983.

Inspired by the struggles of one of his brothers, Reuben devoted much of his time to improving the quality of life for people suffering with mental illness. He served as president and vice president of the Anderson County Mental Health Association, and helped to establish the Anderson-Oconee-Pickens Mental Health Center and the Patrick B. Harris Psychiatric Hospital. In 1986, Reuben was recognized by the Anderson mental health community for his leadership in fundraising and advocacy. A gymnasium at the Harris Hospital was named in his honor, marked by a dedication ceremony at which Rabbi Israel Gerber, one of B'nai Israel's visiting rabbis, offered the invocation.

After serving in the Navy during World War II, Alvin Fleishman returned to Anderson to join the family business and, in the 1960s, opened a second location. When his department store closed in 1984, he kept busy working in Fleishman's Liquor Store and teaching business courses at Tri-County Technical College in neighboring Pendleton. In the 1990s, he established the Alvin Fleishman Scholarship at the college.



Executive Officer Louis Funkenstein (left) on the seaplane tender USS Curtiss in the South Pacific, ca. 1943. Photo courtesy of Louis and Caroline Funkenstein.

A number of Jewish-owned businesses continue to operate in Anderson and neighboring towns today. They include manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers, and a music company. Most Jews living in the area, however, work in professions such as education, medicine, and the law.

Participation in Sabbath services dwindled in the 1970s and '80s. Perhaps to attract more members, B'nai Israel joined the Reform movement, a move that appears to have led to a return to regular Sabbath services. Temple B'nai Israel's official affiliation with the Reform movement, however, was brief. The congregation did not maintain its relationship with the national



Members and friends celebrate Temple B'nai Israel's 50th anniversary, June 1998. Photo: Dale Rosengarten. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

organization and today its practices are not explicitly aligned with either the Conservative or Reform traditions.

While the B'nai Brith chapter has not been active in decades, the Sisterhood continues to function. Currently, 36 families—few with young children, however—belong to the congregation. They meet Friday evenings for Sabbath observance led by members. On the High Holy Days, the temple fills up for services conducted by Robert Kimmel and his son, Brian. While the congregation is small, membership losses are offset by newcomers, mostly retirees, and B'nai Israel is optimistic about its future.

ISJL Online Encyclopedia

Drawn from material in the College of Charleston's Jewish Heritage Collection, illustrated histories of several South Carolina Jewish communities, including Anderson, have been added to the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, produced by the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, based in Jackson, Mississippi. Go to www.isjl.org/history/archive and click on SC. Please send comments and corrections to neelya@cofc.edu. We are especially interested in finding photographs of Jewish-owned stores, family events, congregational activities, and streetscapes in these South Carolina locales.

Rural Rabbis for the Carolinas

by Jonathan Cohen



I. D. Blumenthal flanked by “traveling rabbis” Howard Friedman and George Ackerman, ca. 1950. Photo: Gift of Sarah Burgen Ackerman. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

ism’s influence are visible. Yet, with the passage of time, things change. Jews in small towns such as Orangeburg and Sumter now face the consequences of an exodus of younger generations to metropolitan centers like Charleston, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Raleigh. While these cities have seen their Jewish populations double over the past 20 years, small-town congregations across South Carolina have dwindled.



Congregants of Beth Israel Synagogue, Beaufort, SC, 2000. Photo: Bill Aron.

A journey across South Carolina from the upcountry to the lowlands affords travelers glimpses of the historical imprint Jews have left on the Palmetto State. From Aiken to Anderson, from Beaufort to Bishopville, from Chester to Conway, signs of Judaism’s influence are visible. Yet, with the passage of time, things change. Jews in small towns such as Orangeburg and Sumter now face the consequences of an exodus of younger generations to metropolitan centers like Charleston, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Raleigh. While these cities have seen their Jewish populations double over the past 20 years, small-town congregations across South Carolina have dwindled.

A native of Kinston, North Carolina, and a rabbinical student at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, California, I recently conceived the idea for a program to help offset these demographic trends. In partnership with Rabbi Robert Seigel—the first South Carolinian ordained as a rabbi—I have launched a new non-profit, pluralistic outreach effort called the Rural Jewish Initiative for the Carolinas, or RJIC, which aims to supply student rabbis to congregations on a part-time basis.

At the present time, three South Carolina congregations are participating in the RJIC—Temple B’nai Israel in Anderson, Temple Beth Elohim in Georgetown, and Beth Israel in Beaufort. After Pesach this year, services will be led once a month by rabbinical students from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hebrew Union College.



Temple Beth Elohim, Georgetown, SC, 2000. Photo: Bill Aron.

RJIC is modeled on a “circuit-riding rabbi” program established by I. D. Blumenthal that provided itinerant rabbis to rural North Carolina and border towns in South Carolina from the 1950s through the 1970s. This program received such notoriety that in 1955, Harold Friedman, “The Traveling Rabbi,” was featured in *Life* magazine detailing his trek of more than 1,200 miles every two weeks to serve some 300 Jewish families in ten communities.

Today more than 14 congregations in North and South Carolina do not have full-time clergy, which means some 1,000 affiliated Jews are without rabbinic resources. In many cases these communities are geographically isolated with the nearest rabbi several hours away. Our goal is to ensure that no more synagogues in North or South Carolina close their doors. By providing rabbinic support and empowering congregational lay leaders, we hope to shape a future for Judaism in the Carolinas that will carry forth through the 21st century.

If you or your congregation would like more information on the Rural Jewish Initiative for the Carolinas, please call me at (786) 487-5004 or write to: jonathan.yahel.cohen@gmail.com.

My Brother, My Teacher: Solomon Breibart

by Jack Breibart



Photo: Bill Aron, 2000.

The scene is my father's grocery store at 743 Meeting Street, in Charleston, corner of Maple, probably in 1937. I am six years old and sitting on the broad wooden counter that separates the customers from the family. My brother, Solly, then 23, is showing me the *News and Courier* sports

pages and he is asking me to sound out the names—mainly Italian—in the New York Yankees lineup. I'm sure he knew it was a difficult assignment but that was Solly. There were standards to be met and, no matter how high, one should at least try to meet them. He never, never wavered from this belief.

This is one of my earliest memories of Solly, who died the last day of October 2009, a week shy of his 95th birthday, after a lifetime of touching people with his teaching, writings, and the strength of his personality. Sol became a legendary figure in the southern Jewish historical community and we were always proud of his accomplishments, but to the family he was first a son or a brother.

The story at the counter is significant because it is a metaphor for a relationship between brothers who were almost 17 years apart. Sol was not my companion but my teacher, my mentor, my hero.

Solly and I were the bookends of five children born to Sam Breibart and Ida Goldberg, who immigrated to the United States from Russia in the early part of the 20th century, met and got married in New York, and then moved to Charleston to join Ida's brother, Harry Goldberg, in the grocery business.

Our family was spaced. Two years after Solly came George. Six years later, to the day, there was Mickey. Five years later Sidney, and then, almost three years later, me.

Like many Jewish families in Charleston at the time, we lived above the store. In many ways, the store dictated our routine. Open from early in the morning until late at night seven days a week, the business was entirely staffed by family—sometimes not without complaint. It was closed a full day only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Except on Jewish holidays, meals were seldom eaten together. My mother's kitchen would be open for dinner—

southern noontime dinner—from around noon to 3 o'clock, depending on demands of the store and school schedules.

We lived together as a family only ten years—from 1931 when I was born until 1941 when George married Bertha Lazarus from Summerville. The next year Sol married Sara Bolgla from Augusta and left the household, although he had been away a couple of years before that at graduate school at the University of North Carolina.

This was the period of the Great Depression. My father was 39 and my mother 37 in 1931. They were busy keeping the store going, raising five children, and helping our black and white low-income customers through hard times with extended credit.



Sol, ever studious, with his brother George, and Buddy Shukoff of Atlanta, in the Breibart family grocery store, ca. 1935.



Sam Breibart Groceries, 743 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC, ca. 1930. Left to right: Ida Breibart holding baby Sidney, Sol, Mildred (Mickey), and Sam.



Sol becoming a bar mitzvah, 1927.

Solly was already a super academic achiever but, like George, he had to clerk in the store, deliver groceries, and keep an eye on the younger siblings. He had been the top graduate at James Simons grammar school and the High School of Charleston, and later again at the College of Charleston. I can't remember how many times my mother asked, "Why aren't you more like Solly?"

Much of my upbringing fell to Sol. He labored with me through my public school assignments and Hebrew school lessons. He took me to baseball games and let me be batboy for the Jewish Community Center softball teams on which he played shortstop and outfield. He criticized my batting stance. He introduced me to encyclopedias and the wonders to be found in books, newspapers, and magazines. Later, when I started writing for the *News and Courier*, he would praise me and then point out errors of grammar. "That is a transitive verb and needs an object," he would say.

Solly led us all into the world of the Jewish youth fraternity, Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA). He was the first in the family to become Aleph Godol (president), followed in that position by George and later Sidney and me. Mickey got in the act, too. She was the chapter "Sweetheart."

Family stories of Sol's early years always focused on independence—or "stubbornness," as my mother would say—honesty and modesty.

I also remember his playful side. He liked to take me and Sidney for rides in the car and on the way home turn off



Left: Sol as a graduate of James Simons grammar school, 1928. Right: Sol on the sax and his cousin Joe Cohen on the fiddle, ca. 1929.



the motor and coast into a parking place outside the store. And then there was his ear wiggling which pleased a couple of generations of the family. He also pleased generations of Charlestonians with his beloved saxophone, which he got in childhood and played in dance bands and the symphony in the 1930s and '40s and the county band in the next century.

There is one image of Sol which still shocks me because he always seemed to be in complete control of himself. I think it was at the wedding reception for George and Bertha at the Meeting Street house. Solly is sitting at the top of the stairs on the back porch, utterly drunk and talking nonsense.

It probably was the only time in his life.

I figure that Solly lived about 34,700 days—give or take leap years. It was a good, productive life.

We in the family miss our tribal chief.



Sol and his students on the steps of the High School of Charleston, 1940s.

JHSSC lost a great friend when Solomon Breibart (b. November 8, 1914) passed away on October 31, 2009. Sol helped found the Society in 1994, sat on its board of directors for 15 years, and was one of only three recipients of the Order of the Jewish Palmetto, JHSSC's highest award. He was instrumental in reviving the Southern Jewish Historical Society in 1976 and he planted the seeds that led to the establishment of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston in 1995. His *Explorations in Charleston's Jewish History* (History Press, 2005), a compilation of essays carefully wrought over a long and productive career, remains a lasting legacy and a gift to the city of his birth.

All photos are gifts of Solomon Breibart. Special Collections, College of Charleston.

Under a Magnolia Tree: Discovering Lopez Family Roots in South Carolina

by John Franklin Davis with Linda Montedonico Davis



John Davis at the grave of his ancestor David Lopez, Jr., in the Coming Street Cemetery, Charleston, SC. The ornate tomb of Lopez's first wife, Catherine Dobyn Hinton, is in the background. All photos courtesy of John Davis.

As I grew into adulthood, I became interested in learning about the Lopez side of our family. My grandfather, Moses E. Lopez, Jr., died when I was one year old. My mother, Jane Hinton Lopez Morris, had no records of her Lopez background nor did she know where her father was buried, except to say he was buried “under a magnolia tree” in Charleston, South Carolina.

On a recent trip to Charleston, my wife, Linda, and I discovered Magnolia Cemetery. This seemed like a logical place to start looking. We went to Magnolia’s administrative office and asked if a Moses E. Lopez was buried there. Superintendent Beverly Donald was thrilled to meet us, as she had been looking many years for a Lopez heir.

Ms. Donald took us to the family plot. There were headstones in place for Moses E. Lopez, Sr., and his wife, Cecilia Cohen, who died in 1907 and 1909 respectively. The records showed that Moses E. Lopez, Jr., was buried there in 1934, but no tombstone marked his grave.

Linda, our daughter Mary Jane, and I made another trip to Charleston in 2009. We had a headstone erected for my grandfather and we buried my mother and father’s ashes beside him.

While in Charleston we also visited the Coming Street Cemetery where my great-great-grandfather, David Lopez, Jr., is buried. Lopez pur-



A live oak stands over the graves of Moses E. Lopez, Sr., and his wife, Cecilia Cohen, in Magnolia Cemetery.

chased the family plot in 1843, when his first wife, Catherine Dobyn Hinton, died in childbirth. Because she was not Jewish she was denied burial in the cemetery of Shearit Israel, the congregation that David belonged to at the time. He purchased land adjacent to the Orthodox burial ground, which itself was separated by a wall from the newly reformed Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim.

Today, the wall has come down and Lopez himself is warmly remembered for his work rebuilding Charleston after the fire of 1838. He built KKBE’s second sanctuary, still standing at 86 Hasell Street, as well as many other buildings, including the Glebe Street Presbyterian Church (now Mt. Zion AME Church), and the Farmers’ and Exchange Bank at 141 E. Bay Street, notable for its Moorish architectural style and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1980.

Our excitement at discovering some of the Lopez family history has inspired us to plan another trip for further explorations.



In 2009, the Davis family erected a marker for the author’s grandparents and buried his parents’ ashes in the Lopez plot at Magnolia Cemetery.

Center Talk *by Adam Mendelsohn*

The new Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston has made impressive strides over the past few months. Both the Jewish Heritage Collection and the Jewish Studies Program have received prestigious grants that will help us bring our passion for southern Jewish history to a broader audience. We aim, quite simply, to become the region's leading center for researching, documenting, teaching, and popularizing Jewish history and culture of the American South.

In November the Jewish Heritage Collection was awarded \$184,000 by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) to process and catalog recently acquired

our year of events and programs will focus on the theme, "Jews, Slavery, and the Civil War."

Beginning next fall we plan to sponsor guided walking tours that provide a window onto the world of Charleston's antebellum Jews, and a series of public lectures by speakers from the Lowcountry and beyond. We are working with the National Park Service to develop special cruises to Fort Sumter highlighting Jewish participation in the Confederate war effort.

Plans are underway to host a two-day conference at the end of May 2011, featuring leading scholars, including Jonathan Sarna, Gary Zola, Pamela Nadell, and Eric Goldstein.



The Last Council of War of Confederate President Jefferson Davis with his military chiefs and advisors, a mural by Wilbur G. Kurtz, 1922. At Davis's left sits Judah P. Benjamin. Collection of the City of Abbeville, SC.

archival materials. These include the magnificent William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection; 75 collections donated by survivors, liberators, and eyewitnesses of the Shoah who have settled in South Carolina; and more than a hundred new collections documenting southern Jewish life.

CLIR's support is a ringing endorsement of the importance of the archives and a cause for celebration. As one of only 14 successful candidates among 91 applicants, JHC now faces the task of raising additional funds to match the grant.

The Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program also has good news to report. In December, the Program was awarded \$22,000 by the Legacy Heritage Jewish Studies Project to organize a year-long series of public events in Charleston. The College of Charleston was one of five applicants selected from a national pool to pioneer this new initiative. To commemorate the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Civil War,

Sessions will cover a broad range of topics, such as Jewish attitudes toward slavery and abolition, Jewish soldiering and wartime service, the Jewish experience on the home front, and the roles Jews played during the eras of Reconstruction and the return to "white rule." The conference will be open to the public and we very much hope you'll join us for the discussion and debate.

The College also has added to the Jewish Studies curriculum. In January, I began teaching a class on the history of Jews in the South, the first of a regular rotation of new courses we will offer on southern Jewish life. Twenty-seven students are enrolled in the class. You are welcome to sign up for these new offerings in future semesters.

Only a few months since its inception, the Center for Southern Jewish Culture is beginning to blossom. Your help and enthusiasm will enable us to thrive.

New Gifts to the Jewish H

בסימן טוב

רביעי בשבת אחד עשר יום לחדש ניסן שנת חמשת אלפים ויש מאור
 ושתים עשרה לבריאת עולם ושבעים ושלש לחרות אמירי למנוח שאנו מניין
 כאן מאננה במדינת דשורשיא איך הבחור אברהם בר שלום המכונה
 אוסטרס אורליוס סולומון אמר לה להרא בתולתא קאתאריין איליאבית
 בת ברוך הכהן המכונה קאתאריין איליאבית בהן היו לי לאנתו כדת משה וישראל
 ואנא אפלה ואקיר ואיזון ואפרנס ימיני בהלכות גיבורין יהודאין דפליחין ומוקדסין וזלז
 ומופרנסין לנשיהון בקיטטא ויהיבנא ליכי מהר בתוליכי כסף זוזי מאתן דרזלי ליכי
 מדאורייתא ומחזיקי וכסותי וסיפיקי ומיעל לותיבי כאורה כל ארעא ועבארת
 מרת קאתאריין איליאבית בתולתא הא וחות ליה לאנתו ודין נדוניא דהנעלת ליה
 מבי נשי בין בנסף בין ברהב בין בתכשילין במאלי דלבישא ובשימושא דערסא רמזין
 לטריין ועבי אברהם המכונה אוסטרס אורליוס סולומון חתן דזלז והוספלה מן די ליה
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 עלי ועל ירתי כתרא להתפרע מכל שפר ארג נכסין וקלינין דאית לי תרומת
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 דין ואפילו מן גלימא דעל כתפאי בתים ובמות מן יומא דזלז ולעלם ואחריות
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 העשויין בתיקון הזל דלא כאסמכתא ודלא כטופסי דשטרי וקנינא סך
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 איליאבית בת ברוך הכהן המכונה קאתאריין איליאבית בהן בתולתא דא
 בכל מה דכתב ומפורש לעיל במנא דכשר למקנא על

הכר שרידי וקדים

חתן

עד

C. H. Cohen

עד

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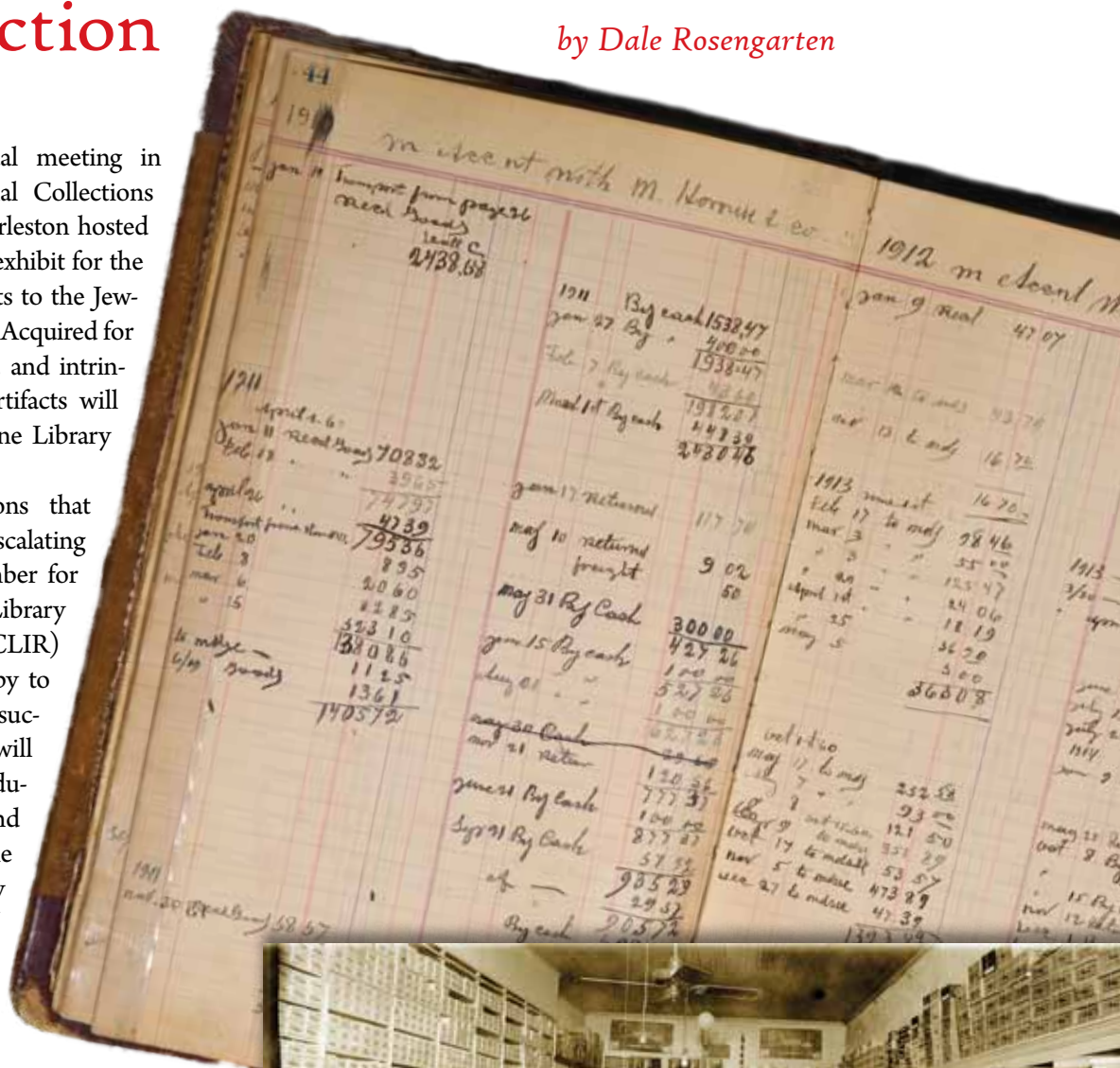
Heritage Collection

by Dale Rosengarten

During JHSSC's annual meeting in October 2009, Special Collections at the College of Charleston hosted an open house and created an exhibit for the occasion showcasing recent gifts to the Jewish Heritage Collection (JHC). Acquired for their rarity, age, research value, and intrinsic worth, these remarkable artifacts will remain on display in Addlestone Library through May 2010.

To process the collections that flow into our archives at an escalating pace, JHC applied last September for a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) in Washington D.C. I am happy to report that our application was successful and, in July 2010, we will add a project archivist and graduate intern to our archival team and tackle our backlog in earnest. The wonderful materials currently on view represent just a few of the collections soon to be arranged, described, catalogued, and made available to students and researchers around the globe. Among the treasures are:

- The ketubah of Augustus Aurelius Solomons (1829–1891) and Catherine (Kate) E. Cohen (1833–1876); photos of the couple and several of their children; and tintypes of two servants who worked for the family, including Susie Grantham, a “cook for the Solomons for years & a fine one.” The collection includes a wide range of 19th-century imaging techniques—daguerreotypes, tintypes, cabinet cards, and a miniature portrait. Donated by Barbara Schwartz Burchstead.
- A ledger from the Yelman dry goods store in St. Matthews, recording accounts with suppliers and customers between 1909 and 1919; a 1930s photo of Judah and Hannah Gordin Yelman, Russian immigrants who moved to South Carolina from New York in 1908 and within a year had opened their “Jewish hardware”; and a group portrait of the Yelman and Gordin families on the front porch of the Yelmans’ home, ca. 1923. Gifts of Shep Yelman and his daughter Brenda Y. Lederman.





- A photo album packed with pictures of Sumter's Jewish gentry, including a photograph of a Purim party for Temple Sinai Sunday school children, ca. 1913, at the home of Perry and Rosalie Virginia Levy Moses—the son and daughter-in-law of Andrew Jackson Moses and his wife Octavia Harby. The album, compiled by Samuel Harby, is a gift from Emily Cribb Moïse.

- On display is a sampling of prints and postcards from the vast William A. Rosenthal Judaica Collection—166 cubic feet (in archival lingo) comprised of dozens of portfolios of fine art prints of historic synagogues, hundreds of rare books, some dating to the 1600s, tens of thousands of vintage postcards, broadsides, newspapers, manuscripts, cartoons, medals, and games. Gift of Mrs. Irene Rosenthal.

- A photo of the Brith Sholom men and boys' choir led by Reverend Jacob Joseph Simonhoff (center, second row), Charleston, South Carolina, ca. 1916. Harry Simonhoff stands to his father's left, and his younger brother, Sam, is in the front row wearing glasses. Isadore Givner, whose daughters donated the photograph, is seated far right. Gift of Joan G. Bovarnick, Eileen G. Goldfless, and Barbara G. Goodman.

- Four choir books written by Rev. J. J. Simonhoff for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices. The rabbi, who emigrated from Lithuania in 1892, served as spiritual leader of Brith Sholom in the early 20th century. Gift of his granddaughter Sherna Simonhoff Brody.



Art and artifacts donated by descendants of some of the state's first families reflect the intellectual vitality of Sumter's Jewish population, but also the sad reality of its decline. The stewards of Temple Sinai have sought safe haven for their heritage in our archives, and several private donors also have made JHC their repository of choice. Visitors to Special Collections can contemplate such original works as:

- A leather-bound copybook of essays by Isaac Harby, scholar, journalist, academy master, political philosopher, and Jewish reformer, as well as several books from his library, donated by his great-great-granddaughter Alice Moore Harrelson.
- Harby's manuscript prayerbook, described by historian and archivist Harlan Greene as "ground zero of Reform Judaism in America," a gift from Temple Sinai.
- A first edition of Penina Moïse's *Fancy's Sketch Book*, donated by Hamilton College library in New York state, and two manuscript lyrics the poet and hymnalist inscribed in an autograph book on the occasion of Octavia Harby's 15th birthday, donated by Philip Moïse in memory of his mother, Cecile Rosenberg Moïse.

Just as the waning of small-town congregations creates a windfall for archives, so the closing of Jewish-owned businesses produces a bittersweet yield. Also on exhibit are:

- Promotional materials for Red Goose Shoes from the Lipsitz Department Store, established in 1902 in Beaufort, South Carolina, and operated by the family until February 2009, when they closed their doors for the final time. Also donated by the Lipsitz family are copies of the 1926 program for the first confirmation at Beth Israel and Yiddish New Year's cards exchanged by Beaufort's Jewish families in the early 1900s.

Come and feast your eyes.





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