

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Established 1980



August, 2002

Mark Your Calendars: Joint Meeting with the Southern Jewish Historical Society

October 25-27, 2002

Shreveport, Louisiana

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*For complete details, including
registration information, turn to page 11*

From the Prez

I want to thank the members of the Texas Jewish Historical Society for electing me as your President for 2002-2003. Thanks to the officers and board members for agreeing to serve in the upcoming year. Special thanks to Helen Wilk for chairing the nominating committee and to Davie Lou Solka for the outstanding installation ceremony.

I know this will not be an easy task, but I will dedicate myself to furthering the objectives of the Society in the manner of our esteemed past presidents. To this end, all the board meetings for the upcoming year have been set, so get out your calendars and

mark them. We want your attendance and input at all of our meetings. Our Fall Board Meeting and shared programming with the Southern Jewish Historical Society is October 25-27 in Shreveport, our Winter Board Meeting is January 24-26 in Tyler and the Annual Gathering and shared programming with the Dallas Jewish Historical Society takes place April 25-27, 2003 in Dallas.

The meeting in Shreveport will give us the opportunity to be exposed to top notch presentations from scholars in the field of Southern Jewish History. We will hold our own TJHS Board Meeting on Sunday

morning. A side trip to Branson is also being planned at this time to take place before the meeting. Please see page 18 for details.

As I told everyone at my installation, my door is always open to suggestions. I want to hear from you. My only request is if you e-mail me, please put TJHS in the subject, so it will not get deleted. I look forward to an exciting and productive year. With your help, we can accomplish many good things for the Society.



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Retail shops receive a 40% discount with a minimum order of any 10 packs.

A Texas Resale Certificate must be included with order.

NOTE:

If you know of any TJHS members who have passed away or married, requiring a change in membership status, please notify:

Fay Brachman, 3720 Autumn Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76109

Phone: 817-924-9207, E-mail: leonhb@flash.net

DEADLINE:

The deadline for the next newsletter is

November 1, 2002



Letter From the Editor *or Freedian Slips*

I once heard a story about a company

that had some 50 employees. An insurance salesman offered the company an excellent insurance policy, provided 100% of the employees signed on. When all but one employee signed up, the salesman told the company owner that unless the lone holdout signed, there would be no deal. The president then called the obstinate employee in to explain why he would not agree to the policy. After listening to his story, the president simply said, "if you don't sign, you're fired!" When the salesman asked the employee why he didn't sign when he asked, the now

cooperative employee said "you didn't explain it like the boss did." I would like to think that perhaps my April **Slips** had such an effect.

There is a Jewish superstition that to speak of something good is to risk (G-d forbid) the evil eye putting an end to it. This is sometimes referred to as giving a "canary." More properly, the term is *kayn aynhoreh*. So those of you familiar with this will understand when I say "kayn aynhoreh," we have received enough stories that Jack and I must save some articles for the next **NEWSLETTER**. What a great situation! Not to have to worry about filling another edition. Thanks to those of you who have taken the time to submit your stories.

There are yet many untold stories

of Jews who have contributed greatly to the growth and development of Texas. While he was not Jewish, in the next issue, I hope to be able to print a story about President Lyndon Johnson and his relationship with Jews in Texas. It should be very interesting.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone who can give me the names and addresses of people who may know or have known some of our Jewish pioneers. With this information, I will contact them for stories. I will be happy to hear from you, write, e-mail or phone.

Buddy Freed

What to Ask in an Oral History Interview

Compiled by Miriam Weiner

- Was our name changed? If so, what was the original name?
- Do you know the origin of the name?
- Who were you named after and how are you related to that person?
- What towns did your family come from in Europe? Where were those towns located?
- In what other nearby towns did you have family members?
- Who was the first ancestor in your family to immigrate from the "old country?" When did he come?
- When your ancestor came to this country, did he/she travel with other relatives? Who were they?
- Who received your relative when he first immigrated and did he join a landsmanshafn society?
- Do you know the name of the ship and port of entry?
- Do you know if your immigrant ancestor was naturalized? If so, in what court and when?
- Do you have any old family documents or old photos?
- What was life in Europe like? What are some of your early childhood memories?
- What were the family occupations—in the old country and the early years here?
- Did any of the family members serve in the military armed forces, either here or in the old country?
- Were there any special family traditions that have been handed down through the years?
- What were the names and relationships of family members who perished during the Holocaust?
- What contact continued with the old country? Did you receive letters from relatives who remained in Europe? Were those letters saved?
- Do you know of any cousins (including distant cousins) who emigrated to the U.S., Canada, South America, England, France, Australia, South Africa and Israel before and after World Wars I and II? Do you have names and addresses of relatives who continue to live in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe?
- Is there a "cousins" club or family circle club in existence?
- Do you know of any relatives who have recorded the family history? Has anyone published a history of your family?

Mount Sinai Congregation, Texarkana, Texas/Arkansas

History and Evolution: 1885-2002

Compiled by Leon (Lonnie) Lurie of Fort Worth, Texas

The Very Early Years Prior to Jewish Settlement

As early as 1840, rudiments of a permanent town began to take form at Lost Prairie, in the Old Caddo Territory, some 15 miles east of the present Texarkana. Railroads were seeing the potential of the vast new territory and in the late 1850's the Cairo & Fulton Railroad was pushing across Arkansas from the East. By 1874, the railroad had crossed the Red River and was at the Texas State line, which opened up service directly to St. Louis, Missouri. At this same time, the Texas & Pacific Railroad was pushing across Texas from the West, and the logical end-point was to connect to the Cairo & Fulton. This connecting point was to be Texarkana. The Texas & Pacific Railroad sold the first lots on December 8, 1873, and thus the migration began, coming from the West and from the East.

There seem to be no reliable records of Jewish families who came prior to the joining of the two railroads, but from 1873 on, Jewish families came to northeast Texas from many points west, including Galveston via Dallas, and from the East Coast via St. Louis, Missouri, including the author's great-grandparents and grandparents. These early Jewish families saw the opportunities af-

forded by the railroads and put down their roots, which led to the establishment of the Mount Sinai Congregation.

Mount Sinai 1875-1900

The first record of Jews coming to Texarkana seems to be in early 1875, and immediately they became involved with the city's development. Family names included Heilbron, Kosminsky, Marx, Berlinger, Sandberger (author's great-grandparents), Scherer, Krouse, Deutschmann, Mendels (author's great-uncle), to name a few.

Initial services were held in Kosminsky Hall and there is a record from 1875 of a meeting of the Texarkana Hebrew Benevolent Association. Obviously, the early families came together for services prior to 1875, but original incorporation documents were lost, so the 1875 date was selected. Rabbi Friedman of Camden, Arkansas, conducted the first recorded High Holy Days Service, in 1885. There was no permanent rabbi until the end of the century, with the first being A. Shriber.

Records indicate that a Jewish cemetery was also established in 1875. In 1890, the congregants decided it was time for a permanent place of worship. The Episcopal Church at 5th

and Olive was for sale, to be moved. The building was purchased, moved to 8th and State Line, and transformed into a synagogue. In 1892, the building next to the synagogue caught fire, totally destroying the block. This was a defining moment for the congregation, so they drew on their pioneering spirit and decided to try again. Property was available at 4th and Walnut, which was bought and a new synagogue was built and dedicated in 1894. In 1893, a constitution of Mount Sinai Congregation was adopted and signed by all 29 member families.

It should be noted that among the movers and shakers, Joseph Deutschmann was at the forefront. A major canal was named after him. He was part owner of the first streetcar line. In addition, he financially assisted many of the early Jewish merchants in getting on their feet. Records also show his generosity to the city's non-Jewish organizations, possibly paving the way for all Jewish families to be accepted throughout the new town.

There were many articles published locally about the Jewish community, including:

- 1884 – *Best cafe in town run by Martin Levy;*
- 1884 – *Marks Kosminsky, the leading merchant hires a female clerk to assist the ladies;*
- 1885 – *Wedding of Larry Klein of Galveston to Miss Nettie Marx of Texarkana;*
- 1886 – *Leon Rosenberg, a collector for the Citizens Bank;*
- 1886 – *Charles Goldberg converts*

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The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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