

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Est. 1980



Volume 7, Number 2, April, 2007

You Can Join TJHS Members on a Southern Caribbean Jewish Heritage Cruise February 3-10, 2008



Houston Historical Tours presents this incredible opportunity to set sail with your fellow Society members aboard Royal Caribbean Cruise Line's *Adventure of the Seas*.

Package Includes:

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- Exclusive shore excursion in Curacao to visit Landhouse Bloemhof and Mikve Emmanuel Israel
- Exclusive visit to the synagogue in St. Thomas
- Expert guide Keith Rosen
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Pricing:

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Inside cabins	\$1,039	\$1,399

Deposit of \$500 per person is due by July 10, 2007!

Itinerary:

February 3	Set sail from San Juan
February 4	Day at sea
February 5	Oranjestad, Aruba
February 6	Willemstad, Curacao
February 7	Day at sea
February 8	Phillipsburg, St. Maarten
February 9	Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas
February 10	Arrive in San Juan

Before the Cruise:

Join us for the weekend in San Juan! We will stay at the **Sheraton Old San Juan** in the heart of the historic district, within walking distance to a variety of shopping centers, attractions, and restaurants.

\$175 per person, per night (double occupancy) or \$300 per night (single occupancy).

There will also be a sightseeing tour of San Juan (\$30 per person).

For Information:

For information, please contact Brentwood Travel at 1-800-527-1059, ext. 121 or 114, dkokorudz@brentwoodtravel.com, crobenson@brentwoodtravel.com

Keith Rosen

Houston Historical Tours

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Send in your application on page 26 today!

History, Herstory, Yourstory

A Message from TJHS President
Vickie Vogel

Do you remember how much you enjoyed listening to Mama tell what life was like when she was growing up? Or all those great stories that Papa used to tell? Have you written them down yet? Then what are you waiting for! And what about your own stories? Are you planning to let your kids write them down? The son who never calls and the daughter who never visits? Okay, I'm just kidding you about



your perfect children.

The person who has the best memory of the event should write it down or record it. Stop and think for a moment about the great stories you have heard that you can ALMOST remember. How sad it is when they are lost forever.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society news magazine prints many of our stories. In the last issue, for example, we were able to read about Morris Seligman because David Seligman wrote it down. Or perhaps you remember Ilene Rosenfield's article on her mother, or stories on the Rubin, Gindler, and Edelstein families, among so many others. When my friend Myrtle Uhry died, I wrote an article

about her, because she never married and had no children to do it for her. I don't want her to be forgotten.

We have no staff writers, but we have members who understand the value of remembering. Our news magazine depends to a large extent on you. What better way to eulogize your loved ones?

Perhaps you are thinking, "But where would I start?" Try this technique: Write down your favorite story about your subject. Tomorrow, write down another item on a separate piece of paper. Each day, write down one true thing, short or long. When you run out of stories, put the papers in chronological order, connect them together, and you have an article! Our editor will fine tune it. The important thing is to get started. Don't put it off. It's important.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vickie Vogel".

President

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Volume 7, No. 2, April 2007 Quarterly News Magazine

The Texas Jewish Historical Society News Magazine is published four times annually. Stories about Texas Jewish history, oral histories, and requests for assistance with research are welcome, as are photographs and historical documents. Please provide color photocopies or scan at 300 dpi or greater, in .gif, .tif, or .jpg format and send electronically to Associate Editor Davie Lou Solka at davielou@solka.net or mail to 501 Bermuda Place, Corpus Christi, TX 78411, 361-852-5815. Be sure to include your name and contact information.

Publisher-Editor Alexa Kirk
Assistant Editor Davie Lou Solka
Photographer Marvin Rich

Note: The Texas Jewish Historical Society is unable to guarantee the safe receipt and/or return of documents or photographs. It is strongly recommended that only color photocopies of both color and black & white documents be provided. We welcome your comments and suggestions.



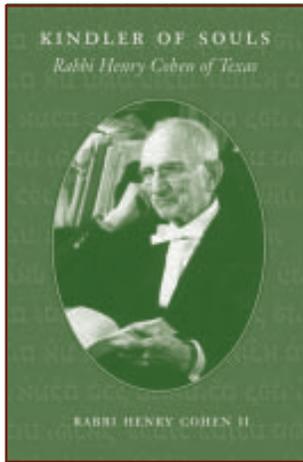
VISIT US
on the web at www.txjhs.org.

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New Book About Texas Rabbi

Rabbi Henry Cohen II, who spoke at the Annual Gathering of the Society in San Antonio in 2004, has published his book, *Kindler of Souls: Rabbi Henry Cohen of Texas*.

The encouragement that Rabbi Cohen re-



ceived at the Gathering was one of the factors that motivated him to write this biography of his father.

Rabbi Cohen would appreciate any feedback on the book. He may be contacted at 610-896-5663. For interviews, contact Stephanie Nelson at 512-232-7634 or stephanie@utpress.ppb.utexas.edu.

The book may be ordered online at www.utexaspress.com (you will receive a 33% discount) or call 512-232-7634. It is in hardcover and is \$24.95.

Yad Vashem Needs Volunteers

Yad Vashem has issued an urgent call for volunteers to initiate Names Recovery Campaigns. You may photograph memorial boards or Jewish tombstones bearing names of Holocaust victims in your community's synagogues and cemeteries. Digital photographs may be sent to centraldatabase@yadvashem.org.il with the name of the synagogue or cemetery as well as your name, address, and phone number. Printed photos may be mailed to Yad Vashem's Hall of Names, POB 3477, Jerusalem, Israel.

Also, please send the list of names with data on tombstones, including dates of birth and death, name of cemetery, and location of city to Ima Joy Gandler, 3001 Wooded Acres, Waco, TX 76710, so that this information may be included in the Records of the Texas Jewish Historical Society located at the Center of American History TJHS Records in Austin, Texas.

TJHS MEETING SCHEDULE 2007-2008

Save the dates!

Summer



July 13-15 in Fort Worth
Jack Gerrick
(Chair)

Winter



January 11-13 in Beaumont
David & Binnie Hoffman
(Co-Chairs)

Fall



October 5-7 in Amarillo
Robert & Jo Ann Holt
(Co-Chairs)



Annual Gathering, 2008

Date TBA, Waco
Ima Joy Gandler & Ed Katten
(Co-Chairs)

Congregation Rodef Sholom Dedication of State of Texas Historical Marker



Sunday, June 24, 4:00 PM
1717 N. New Road, in Waco, Texas

For more information, contact
Ima Joy Gandler at 254-772-5717.
Also, please let her know if you are coming.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society accepts matching funds from corporations. Please advise if your gift can be used in this manner.

Philip Rich

The Russian Orphan who Became a Success

by Marvin and Hershel Rich

In the year 1901, a small, Jewish, eleven-year-old boy named Pinchas, in Schverne, White Russia, near Minsk, became an orphan. His parents, Hershel and Irene Oshman Ratchkovsky, died within weeks of each other.

He and his sisters, Rosie and Minnie, went to live with their grandfather, Maurice, and his wife who was their step-grandmother. They lived in a small wooden house that also served as a shop for the family business, which was wood-block printing colorful designs on all fabrics for tapestries, quilts, and drapes.

Pinchas's bed was located in a choice part of the house—on top of the clay oven, where a small fire was kept burning on most of the cold nights. The house had a small porch, and stood a short distance from the dirt street. It was near the chedar (elementary school), where Pinchas was a very good student. He wanted to attend yeshiva in a nearby shtetl after his Bar Mitzvah.

One day, a wagon passed on its way to the next town. Pinchas jumped on to the back of the wagon and went to the yeshiva. He met the rabbi, easily passed the entrance exam, and was welcomed as a student. He then went to seven different families to arrange for a free bed and meals for each day of the week.

After making his arrangements, Pinchas caught a ride on the back of a wagon returning to Schverne. When he arrived, he was welcomed as a hero. Since he had told no one of his plan, they all thought that he had drowned in the river.

Two days later, a letter arrived from his uncle, Pincus Oshman, from Richmond, Texas, USA. In 1903, that

was the Wild West! Enclosed was a five-dollar gold coin and a ten-dollar steerage ticket on the S. S. Chimnetz from Bremen, Germany to New York to Galveston. He would have to take a train from Minsk to Germany. The decision to go, alone, was a tough one because he hated leaving his little sister, his best friend Willie, his cousin Jake Oshman, his grandfather, and all of his other relatives. He spoke only Yiddish, a little Russian, Polish, and Hebrew.

Brave Pinchas decided to go for the great adventure and beautiful country that his uncle described. Before the big departure day, a small straw suitcase was found and packed with a change of clothes and food for the trip. Just before he left, his step-grandmother decided that two salami sausages were too much for such a small boy, so she removed one. He told many sad stories about the hard, hungry trip.

Thirteen-year-old Pinchas Ratchkovsky arrived from Bremen, Germany, on the S. S. Chimnetz at the port of New York on June 12, 1904. He went through immigration at Ellis Island with no problems. On the ship's manifest, he was one the few who were shown as being able to read and write. The Hanseatic Steam Ship Line had a contract with Southern Pacific Railroad to take passengers to Galveston, where they then took the train to their final destinations. When the train arrived in Richmond, Pinchas was so happy to get off and greet his Uncle Pinchas and Tante Fannie that he forgot his straw suitcase. He yelled in Yiddish, and everyone began screaming to stop the train. It backed up and Pinchas retrieved his suitcase.

In Richmond, Pinchas boarded

with another aunt, Mumme Schiff, who ran a boarding house, which was originally Jane Long's. There were several other "greenies" also living there. Pinchas worked at his uncle's grocery store that was across the tracks in what was known as Mud Alley because the street was not paved. He parched peanuts for seventy-five cents a week, and attended public school. Though he was thirteen years old, Pinchas was not much larger than the younger kids in the class, and the country boys were always teasing him. However, Pinchas learned English quickly and he loved to read books and magazines.

Another uncle, Max Rockoff, also came to Richmond. Pinchas had some money saved and along with Max, bought a horse and wagon, filled it with household goods, and traveled in Fort Bend and Wharton Counties to peddle. But the area was in a severe drought, and no one had money to buy goods. One day on the way home, they encountered a downpour. Their old horse could not pull the load through the mud and he died. So, Pinchas and Max had to pull the wagon back to Richmond.

Pinchas tried other ways to make money. He read an ad in a magazine for a venture to install gaslights in homes, and another ad for installing electric wiring in homes. One of his friends said that these sounded good, so they divvied up—his friend went to work installing electric wiring, and Pinchas tried to sell the gaslights. Pinchas' venture failed, but his friend made money.

After the failed gas venture, Pinchas opened the first moving picture theatre in Richmond. His gim-

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Philip Rich, continued from page 4

mick was that he had a sliding roof that opened in hot weather so that people could come in the summer.

Pinchas filed his Declaration of Intent for Citizenship in 1913 at the age of twenty-two. At that time, he was 5 feet, 2 inches tall and weighed only 118 pounds. He was drafted into the army during World War I and trained at College Station, Texas. He always said that he was a Texas Aggie. While he was in the Army, they said that his name was too hard to pronounce, so it was changed to Philip Rich. He then went to an artillery base in South Carolina and stayed there until his discharge. When he returned to Richmond, he found that the man who was in charge of his theatre while he was away had taken most of his money.

Philip fulfilled one of his main goals in life when he brought his two sisters, Rosie and Minnie, to the United States. They grew up in Richmond, and Rosie married Meyer Nathan, who owned the Grand Cleaners. Minnie married Aaron Greenberg, and they moved to Bay City, Texas, where he ran the Oshman's Dry Good Store on the Court House Square.

Philip rented the old county jail, which was across from the railroad station, and turned it into the Rich Hotel. He then opened the Palace of Sweets in Richmond and hired a cook who made the best chili in town. The Palace of Sweets always had an ad on the front page of the weekly *Herald Coaster* newspaper. There was often a story about the fresh chocolates being shipped in, or about how they always served Klein's ice cream. Philip was such a good customer that Nathan Klein came to Hershel's bris.

Before Philip was drafted, he met a beautiful Jewish girl named Bertha Krakower from Houston, who was visiting girl friends in Richmond. Bertha had five brothers, Jake, Nathan,

Izzie, Louis, and Herman, and three sisters, Bessie Pye, Sarah Aron, and Ethel Fargotstein. Philip fell madly in love and drove the long bumpy, sometimes muddy, trip to Houston once a week to visit Bertha, who lived in the Houston Heights.

During World War I, Bertha learned to operate a comptometer, the computer of that time, and made good money. When Philip was drafted, he wrote her beautiful love letters almost every day. She saved every one and they are still in the family, tied in blue ribbons.

Philip and Bertha were married in June, 1921, and lived in a small white house in Richmond. They continued running the café. When Bertha became pregnant with Hershel, she made a few hard trips to visit her Houston doctor. During the last two weeks of her pregnancy, she stayed with her sister, Bessie. Hershel was born on March 1, 1925. Bertha's brother, Herman, came to Richmond and ran the café so Philip could bring Bertha and Hershel home from St. Joseph Hospital.

Bertha missed her Houston family and in 1929, business was very slow. Philip was offered a job managing a dry good store in the Houston Heights, next to the movie theater on 19th Street, across from where Harold's store is now. Bertha helped in the store and hired a country girl as maid and sitter.

Philip was bored, and was always thinking of a way to go into business for himself again. He came up with an idea of putting coupons in chewing gum stick wrappers. Each coupon had a small replica of a card in a deck of playing cards, and pictures of prizes that could be won if you collected four Aces, Kings, Queens, Jack, a Joker or a full deck. Traveler's Gum quickly became a big hit.

Philip resigned his job from the dry good store, hired a secretary, and opened an office and assembly line in

the M&M Building on Main Street at the Buffalo Bayou bridge, where the University of Houston Downtown is now. Profits were very good and in 1932, he bought a beautiful large brick home at 2415 Wheeler in Riverside Terrace—between Dowling and Live Oak. Marvin was born soon after the move.

A major national candy distributor in New York offered to handle all sales and distribution on an exclusive basis if Philip would open an assembly line in New York or New Jersey. A small assembly line was established in Newark, New Jersey, and business boomed until New York State ruled that the plan was a form of illegal lottery. The distributor returned all of the products to Philip and he was broke again.

Philip then recognized that in most homes, the gas jets that projected from the walls near the floor for space heaters was dangerous. Small children and pets could open them and blow up the house. He invented the ProtectoCap, which was made of white molded rubber. They were sold to stores, where their sales were too slow to reorder.

Wrigley Gum Company in Chicago offered Philip a job in Chicago in distribution. While in Chicago, a manufacturer of gum dispensing machines offered him a better job as national sales manager. That went well, but buyers needed stands for the machines and there was no source. Philip found shops to make parts for the pedestal stands he designed, and he sold the stands with the gum machines. He also designed and sold stands that he had made for tabletop jukeboxes. He took a small space at the annual National Coin Machine Show where he received a flood of orders. He rented a shop, bought a few machines, supplies, and materials, and hired a shop manager, engineer, and workers to fill the orders.

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The Paula Dreyfuss Story

by Merilee Weiner

Paula Hirschberg Dreyfuss was born to parents Rachel Findling and Henry Hirschberg on April 30, 1922, in Oldenburg, Germany. As a little child, Paula learned to play with dolls and cats and was “in heaven” with the gift of a book. She began to read at age five. Paula inherited her mother’s good voice. The two of them walked down the street arm-in-arm, singing, to the amusement of passers-by.

Paula’s father, Henry, owned a huge wholesale establishment which supplied peddlers with merchandise. They could buy one dozen or one gross. It was a very profitable business. Henry was known for paying his bills promptly. Lesser known was his habit of keeping large sums of money in a hidden home safe. Oldenburg had a population of 100,000. It also had pretty, old houses

that were still standing from the year 1427.

The only son in the Hirschberg family was Julius, age 18, who went to Lubeck, Germany was an apprentice in a factory that taught students how to make brushes. He was there only to learn; he received no pay. At that time, no visas were required to travel to America. Just as soon as he completed his “brush” education, he left for America and secured employment at the Empire Brush Company in Port Chester, New York. He was assigned to the store room, which was in complete disarray. He created an inventory system, which did not exist before he arrived. When the store room was in order, Julius earned \$16 per week. In those days, he managed to buy a home for \$3,000. Eventually, he purchased a second home in nearby

Ryewood, New York for \$25,000, and he still lives there today. Julius was twenty-one when World War II began. He enlisted in the army, and for this service, he earned American citizenship. It was at that time that Julius Hirschberg legally changed his name to Jules Harris.

Relating Paula’s story as events unfolded, her parents waited too long to emigrate before Hitler’s minions struck on November 9, 1938—Czechoslovakia’s Kristallnacht. The very next day, the Nazis confiscated Henry’s business and incarcerated him. He told Rachel to stay in Germany, but to send the girls to America immediately. He managed to get word to his wife that he needed money to buy his way out of the concentration camp. Unfortunately, he had neglected to ever give his wife the safe’s combination. What was she to do now? She said to Paula, “Let me go into the other room and pray.” When mother Hirschberg returned, she instructed Paula to call a locksmith. When the locksmith arrived, he was able to ascertain the safe’s combination, but before the door was pulled open, Paula’s mother informed the young man that the safe contained a vast amount of money. She told him that he could reach in and take a handful for himself for his silence. He did this, and she proceeded to tell him, “Hide the money in the ground and when it is safe to do so, remove it and invest it and let it grow.” Luck was on her side. The locksmith marked the bill, “routine call,” and remained silent about the transaction.

Father Hirschberg then had access to money to bribe his way out of prison. He promptly got an affidavit from the ex-brother-in-law in New York who had previously secured

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Projects Finished - Success!

Index Complete

The Greater Houston Jewish Genealogical Society has completed its project to index the life cycle events published in the *Houston Jewish Herald-Voice* from its origination in 1908 to the present. The index is available at www.JewishGen.org, and articles may be obtained from the GHJGS as indicated in the explanation accompanying the index.

In about the first three decades of publication, reporters from many cities of Texas sent in news of their communities, so that much of the index includes statewide information, as well as inclusion of related family members from all over the world.

The TJHS contributed a much-appreciated microfilm reader to the project enabling its beginning in 1998. Although all of the microfilm has

been copied on computer disk, so that participants could work at home, the reader is still available for viewing film at the *Herald-Voice* office.

The success of the project may be measured by the fact that researchers from all parts of the country have ordered articles that have been helpful to them in their genealogical research.

Successfully Traced!

Martin Cahn tells us that he has traced Michael Livingston, who is the great-grandson of Mr. Cahn’s great-grandfather’s brother because of an article that was placed in the last issue of the Texas Jewish Historical Society’s News Magazine! We are always glad to help trace ancestors!

Paula Dreyfuss, continued from page 6

documents for the two girls. That relative was a doctor, and at the time, he was the Port Commissioner in New York. He had supplied the requisite documents for sixteen-year old Paula and her seven-year old sister, Helen. They set sail in first class from Bremerhaven, Germany two weeks prior to their parent's departure from Germany to America.

Paula immediately became sea sick, too ill to leave her stateroom. Her seven-year old sister decided to take a stroll and was found topside by the captain of the ship. He asked the little girl where she was going and she replied, "To the nursery." He said, "Well, then, I'll take you," and with that, he lifted Helen to his shoulder, took her to Paula's stateroom, and then to the nursery. This German

Captain was no admirer of Hitler and probably took pride in helping these youngsters get out safely. An aunt met the girl's ship in New York, and two weeks later, the arriving parents, Henry and Rachel.

Living conditions were very cramped and when Henry could not find work in New York City, the four of them moved in with their son, Julius, in Port Chester, New York. Julius' knowledge of brush-making helped his father, Henry, perfect an idea that he had for a three-pronged dishwashing brush which he named, "Lola." From Port Chester, New York, the parents and daughters moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, which was a booming post war community. Henry eventually became prosperous again.

Earlier, when Paula was in Berlin's Dress Designer School, her

instructor bluntly informed her that her skills would be better put to use as a dressmaker. She heeded his advice, and that profession served her well when she eventually went to live in California. She earned her first money as a model.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, Paula attended the second best business school in the city. She was working in the family's five- and ten-cent store when a Parisian customer requested a brush to finish a sculpture. The store did not stock the brush, and Paula said, "I personally own such a brush which I will loan to you." This is how Paula met her first husband, Joseph Lefer, an artist.

After thirteen years of marriage and living in St. Petersburg, Florida, Joseph proved to be an impractical dreamer. As a child genius, and later, a muralist, he "lived for his art." Paula went to Reno, Nevada to obtain a divorce decree, which needed Joseph's signature to become final. She tracked him to New Orleans, Louisiana, and found him street painting in the French Quarter. He reluctantly signed the decree because he did not want a divorce.

Afterwards, Paula moved back to Bridgeport, Connecticut and secured a secretarial job. Her second husband, Ernst Dreyfuss, also came from Berlin, Germany. He was a widowed professional photographer working for a Los Angeles Company on assignment in Texas. The two met and married in Houston, Texas, and had a very good marriage. They coincidentally moved in the same art circles as that of her first marriage. Peter, Ernst's son from a previous marriage, and his wife, Sharon, live in Arlington, Texas.

Unfortunately, neither Ernst nor Paula was aware that he had cancer. Their brief five-year marriage ended with his death at 58. She has been a widow for 35 years.

Today, petite, well groomed Paula
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Contributions

*The following donations have been received by the
Texas Jewish Historical Society since January, 2007*

In Memory of

Blanche Sheiness

From

Victoria Wang

Marie Davis

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Rich

Dr. and Mrs. Howard Kessner

In Memory of

Libbie Stool

From

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Rich

Merilee Weiner

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Winkler

In Memory of

Milton T. Smith

From

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In Memory of

Ernie Golub

From

Mr. and Mrs. Max Reichenthal

In Memory of

Kenneth Rich

From

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Katten

Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Hart

Merilee Weiner

How Mamaloshah Found Me

The Shul, Brenham, Texas, 1944

by Lois Ruth (Levin) Roisman

That was the year my chin could finally reach the railing of the women's balcony. The Yom Kippur of the new blue dress, the one that matched the bluebonnets.

Below me, the men huddled close, wrapped in their white prayer shawls, shuttling left to right, forward and back. They looked like my Bubbe's feather bed after I'd jumped in.

If I leaped over the rail I could float down to their softness and Papa would turn just in time to catch me. Zeide would be startled, but he'd laugh and say *Vos machstu, meshugee?*

Then he'd let me pull his beard. I loved to pull his mossy beard! Beside me at the rail, my Bubbe on her wooden stool was making funny sounds into her hankie, so I turned to stare. She was

talking to her ghosts again in those strange syllables. This had happened many times, so I know how to make her better. Scrambling into her soft lap, I smoothed her hairs where

they had come undone. She wrapped her arms around me, her tears on my hair, dripping to my new dress. We never spoke because we didn't understand the other's words.

But I knew she loved my yellow curls, and I loved the white ones hiding underneath her bun. She rocked us softly and spoke again to her ghosts. Then looking deep through my eyes,

Bubbe slowly wiped her tears from our faces. And that was the moment Mamaloshah first appeared, looking out at me from Bubbe's eyes. Shy at first, then animated, she climbed out over the lids and leapt

into my life. What could I have done to stop her? Me in my bluebonnet dress, and my chin that barely reached the women's railing.

Lois Ruth (Levin) Roisman's family (Levin and Susnitzky) is from Brenham, Texas, and she now lives in New Hampshire. She is presenting this poem at Brandeis University and it is reprinted with her permission. Contact her at LoisRoisman@valley.net.

Obituaries

Kenneth J. Rich

Kenneth J. Rich was born in Houston, Texas, on April 14, 1963, and died February 23, 2007. He is survived by his loving parents, Shirley and Marvin Rich, brother Bernard Rich, and sister and brother-in-law, Elka and David Poor, three nieces, two nephews and many loving aunts, uncles, and cousins. Kenneth was the owner of The Brew Shop, and had many friends in home brewing clubs as well as throughout his Heights neighborhood. Services were held on Sunday, February 25, 2007, at Emanu El Memorial Park, Kagan-Rudy Chapal.



Paula Dreyfuss, continued from page 7 _____

Dreyfuss resides at Seven Acres Jewish Senior Care Services in Houston, Texas. She has friends from Germany with whom she still keeps in touch. In fact, a couple visits her in Houston once a year.

An active participant in many of Seven Acres activities, Paula particularly likes the program, "Read and Chat," and is very much at home in the Library. Additionally, she attends the Monday morning Yiddish Hour conducted by Bill Orlin and Zoly Zamir, who have their fascinating stories of their Hitler encounter in the past. For memory exercises, Paula keeps a daily diary.

In her modulated, soft-spoken voice, Paula's journey from Oldenburg, Germany to Houston, Texas contains many interesting experiences, including the study of piano and voice at age twenty-three, from a teacher, "who enjoyed teaching adults." She says she was never a good musician, but she still loves to sing to this day.

The Jewish Community of Big Spring, Texas

by Vickie Vogel

Big Spring, Texas, appropriately, once had a big spring (now dry) which was the only reliable source of water within a hundred miles. Skidi Pawnees and Quahadi Comanches, as well as Spanish explorers and later the United States Army, relied on the springs. The area remained unsettled, however, until after the Civil War.

Barbara Israel of Tempe, Arizona tells that her great-grandfather, William Fisher (b.1857), and his brother Joseph Fisher (b.1845) were both born in Schintlin, Austria. Shortly after William's birth, their father moved the family to the United States, settling in Indiana in the mid-1800s. During the Civil War, Joseph was a messenger/butcher boy, despite his broken English, for General George Thomas.

After the war, he ventured to California, and was joined several years later by William. They returned to Sanborn, Indiana toward the end of the 1870s and began a business, but Joseph heard about opportunity in West Texas, where the railroad had just pushed through on the way to El Paso.

Until the coming of the Texas and Pacific in 1881, Brownwood supplied the settlers in Big Spring and the mail came in from Fort Concho (San Angelo). Once the railroad came through, Howard County and especially Big Spring, were benefited by a railroad maintenance shop established there. Big Spring turned into a major trading center, a shipping point for livestock and produce, and a supply point for an area extending from New Mexico to Lubbock.

Arriving in Texas, Joseph Fisher first bought a lot in Sweetwater, but quickly decided that Big Spring, as a railroad division point, offered greater opportunity.

As Joseph had anticipated, the population of Big Spring grew rapidly.

In 1880, the entire county had a population of only fifty; by 1900 the number of residents had increased to 2,525.

In 1882, Joseph started his business in a tent at First and Scurry. It was soon replaced by a wooden building, which burned shortly thereafter.

Just as William had followed Joseph to California, he now followed him to Big Spring in 1884. William and Joseph replaced the destroyed building with one of native stone on the west side of Parker (Main) Street, in the



middle of the 100 block. The Earl of Aylesford had raised the first masonry building in town, and the J&W Fisher Company became the second. Bressie Bro and Denmark built a two-story rock building across the alley to the north, and before long, the Fishers acquired this.

Joseph, who later married Anna Kaufman, built a stately home behind the first rock store facing west on Scurry, and William, who married Anna's sister, Nettie, built his home next door.

The brothers built up their inventory until they soon called it the "Store That Has Everything"—from paper to needles to threshing machines. The Fishers specialized in durable merchandise such as California (Levi) pants and shirts, heavy-duty boots, Stetson hats, heavy woolen goods for winter, and bolts of cotton prints.

They stocked hardware and everything to keep the wagon in good working order. Their grocery department held thousands of pounds of flour and stacked cases of canned goods, 100-pound sacks of "red" beans, dried fruit, barrels of salt-cured bacon, and buckets and barrels of lard. They often bought their inventory in carload lots.

Because the Fishers cashed warrants (pay checks) the railroad people traded there as well as the ranchers. For them, the Fishers carried fancier goods such as canned fruits, cured meats, "cake" flour and the new solid shortening.

There was also a demand for ready-made clothing. The Fishers carried the latest styles and had a separate millinery department. The story is told of a drunken cowboy who liked the fluffy ostrich feathers and ordered six for his hat. By the time he was sober, he had lost three. He returned the ones he still had and paid for the lost ones.

In 1927 a small group of Jewish families formed Temple Israel in Big Spring. At first they met in homes and later in the Settles Hotel. The Pragers were another Jewish family in town; Bill Prager, according to Barbara Israel, now lives in Dallas. The Pragers also had a store in Big Spring.

The Fisher business operated until the 1930s (except for when the Fishers returned to Indiana to educate their children), being later managed by William's sons, Joye and Bernard Fisher. Joseph's son, Albert, went into business for himself as A.M. Fisher Co. W. H. Brennand, who built one of the show-place residences of Big Spring in the 1300 block of Jack (Lancaster) Street, bought the store from the Fishers, but later sold it back.

continued on page 11

A week later, two shady men came into his office. They said they represented "The Syndicate," Al Capone's gang. They said that for him to be a part of the coin machine industry, they had to have ownership of the business. They would pay for their share out of the first year's profit, but Philip said he didn't need a partner. They said, "Think about it."

That day, the electricity and lights went out, and Philip couldn't get them back on. After six weeks, he had the machines returned, and he and his family left in the middle of the night, driving back to Houston.

When the Rich family returned to Houston in 1940, their home on Wheeler was rented, which paid the mortgage. They lived in a duplex on Jackson at Elgin and cousins sub-rented the back bedroom. Marvin went to Allen Elementary School and Hershel attended San Jacinto High School. He worked for Walter Pye at Columbia Dry Goods and developed a *Houston Press* route. Marvin sold Liberty magazines door-to-door in the neighborhood. Bertha worked for her brother, Herman Krakower, at Plumbing Supply Company.

Philip was an inventor. At that time, fountain sodas were made by putting syrup in a glass and adding carbonated water. Philip made electric root beer barrels using cooling coils and washing machine parts, which mixed the syrup and soda water together, cooled it, and dispensed the root beer. But when World War II began, he couldn't get sugar for syrup or parts for the barrels.

Herman Krakower bought a small plumbing supply store at 1519 Congress Avenue. It carried both new and used plumbing. He took all of the new supplies and gave the store and used supplies to Philip and Bertha. During World War II, there was price control on new parts, but not on used ones. So Philip cleaned and then sold the used parts at good prices. Marvin

would go to the store and sort through bins and boxes of used fittings to be cleaned and sold. Philip also advertised and bought used fixtures, tubs, toilets, water heaters, and radiators. He would repair them and then sell them.

He also bought small motors and twelve-inch fan blades, had wooden boxes with mountings made, and assembled fans in another building on Congress Avenue. The fans sold quickly because at the end of the war, there were no new ones available.

Philip located a wire fan guard manufacturer in Chicago and had the guards shipped to Houston. He located a motor manufacturer near Detroit who had made small motors for aircraft and now needed business. Philip flew to Detroit and contracted for 5,000 motors, and bought fan blades from Connecticut. He had college students assemble the fans for one dollar each, and every afternoon trucks from several Houston stores would line up to buy an allotment of fans to sell.

By 1946, the demand for fans was terrific. It was very hot and fans were beginning to be manufactured again. Philip developed an improved household fan that was powerful, light, and would tilt on a wire base. He named it the "Windmaker." The amount of business his company could do was limited by the lack of working capital.

Hershel returned to Houston from the Navy in August, 1946, and returned to Rice University, where he majored in Mechanical Engineering. Marvin worked part-time after classes in any way that he could to help, including assembling fans. At Rice University, Hershel fell in love with a sweet, lovely, brilliant sophomore named Hilda Atlas. After graduation in June, 1947, he began working with Philip full time. He and Hilda were married September 7, 1947.

Manufacturer's representatives were hired to sell on commission in the

Southern states. Philip bought a warehouse at 709 Berry, west of Main Street for expansion, but that location was soon outgrown. It was sold to the Alley Theater, and the warehouse continued to outgrow several future locations, including 1519 Congress, three lots at 2401 San Jacinto, and 2900 Caroline and Tuam. Philip was always brave and optimistic and was never afraid to go into debt. Even though he lost fortunes at least five times, he never took bankruptcy, and always paid his debts.

Hilda graduated from Rice in 1948 with a major in philosophy. She soon decided that the business was much more interesting than staying home or playing cards with her friends. She moved a desk into Philip's office and helped him with plans, making real estate deals, and enjoying the company. Philip loved to joke with her and ran a lot of ideas by her, even though they did not always agree.

At the Caroline Street plant, wire fan guard manufacturing began. A way was developed to make safety guards, so that the unprotected sharp fan blades could not cut children and pets. The household fans were improved by adding a ring around the guard, which gave the fan universal positioning. The new fan was called the "Satellite Windmaker," since it went to market right after the Russian Sputnik was placed in orbit.

In 1952, Philip and Hershel became full partners and Hershel was named President of the Phil Rich Fan Manufacturing Company, Inc. Many types of fans were made, including attic fans, commercial and industrial pedestal fans, Navy bulkhead fans, oscillating fans, and ceiling fans for the government.

Products were sold nationally through manufacturer agents, selling distributors, and dealers. All of the auto plants in Michigan used Rich's thirty-inch fan mounted under bar

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joists. Both Sears and Montgomery Ward sold Rich's attic fans that had been painted in different colors—grey and red. *Consumer Report* magazine tested both and reported that the grey one was better than the red one.

Marvin joined the business in 1953, when he returned from the army. He had attended the University of Texas and majored in marketing, and was a very good salesman. He sold fans to Texas and Louisiana dealers, school systems, and manned national trade show booths. Marvin married lovely Shirley Mayer on August 28, 1959, and became Marketing Manager for the company.

Philip served on the Board of the new Temple Emanuel, where Marvin became the first Bar Mitzvah. Philip was a member of the Downtown Optimist Club and was active until he died in 1964. Hershel assumed his membership. At the age of sixty-five, Philip took the Dale Carnegie course "How to Win Friends and Influence People," where he won a prize for the most improved public speaker.

One of Philip's life ambitions was fulfilled when he and Bertha took a trip back to Schverzne in 1958. When he returned, he wrote a five-page let-

ter to his boyhood friend, Willie Gallow, in Detroit describing his visit. It is a very emotional letter and so descriptive that when Marvin and Shirley went to Schverzne in 1994, they used the letter as a guide.

The Houston Chamber of Commerce recognized Philip for his excellent business practices. The *Houston Chronicle* recognized him as "A Neighbor of Note" in 1969. In that article, Philip said, "Look at me. I was 52 years old, flat broke, and in debt. And I haven't done so badly. You can do the same."

Philip was a real entrepreneur. After each move of the fan company to larger facilities, he converted the property to rental, and then would sell it. He was also a partner in an apartment project with Allen Fields called RichField Manor, still operating on Blodgett Street. He and Hershel were also partners with Melvin Silverman in a large project called Rosewood Apartments, near Texas Southern University.

He built forty units of apartments off of Telephone Road behind a building that was another expansion of Phil Rich Fan Manufacturing Company at 6040 Telephone Road. The General

Services Administration wanted the building for NASA, and the building was later sold to Ambox Manufacturing Company. Another profitable real estate venture was the 3333 Fannin Building, designed by Joseph Krakower and built in ninety days by Meyerson Construction Company. Southwestern Bell occupied the building for seven years, and it was leased to two major tenants until it sold several years ago.

Philip and J. B. Belin developed Hilltop Lakes Resort City in Leon County. He and Bertha enjoyed visiting for the weekend and staying at the Lodge. Philip's final venture was with United Inns of America, which had the franchise for Holiday Inns. Philip met the owner, Dr. Cockcroft, and they became good friends. In a partnership with Dr. Cockcroft, they built the Holiday Inn Central. It was under construction when Philip died on September 15, 1964, which was Erev Yom Kippur.

Philip died the week before Morty, Hershel's son, was to become a Bar Mitzvah. Philip Rich truly lived an American dream and his children and grandchildren are proud to carry his name.

The Fishers were remembered for their integrity and generosity to the community, donating to construction of schools, churches, and lodge halls. Poor families were treated with respect and generosity.

"I am part of the line that come from Joseph and am still trying to find out where one of his sons went and connect with his descendents. But this will help, I think," writes Barbara. "Joseph had two children, Albert and Zadie. Albert had two sons Albert and Edward. Edward married and lived in San Angelo and had no children. I believe Albert, Jr. moved to Sacramento

in the 1950s and he had two sons, Paul and Gregory. As for William, he and his wife had three children, Bernard, Joye, and Irma. I stay in contact with Irma's daughter, Babbette Samuels. She lives in Corsicana, Texas. My mother, Betty Jean, was an only child and Bernard and his wife had one child as well. To make relationships close again, my great-grandparents were two brothers marrying two sisters (William Fisher/Nettie Kaufman) (Joseph Fisher/Anna Kaufman) and my grandparents did the same (Joye Fisher/Rhea Eckhaus) (Bernard Fisher/Francis Eckhaus)."

If you have information about Joseph Fisher's descendents, write txjhs@yahoo.com.

Bibliography:

- Barbara Israel, Tempe, Arizona, email correspondence with author.
Howard County, The Handbook of Texas Online. [http://www.tsha/utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/HH/hch20.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/HH/hch20.html)
John R. Hutto, *Howard County in the Making* (Big Spring, Texas: Jordan's, 1938)
Joe Pickle, *Getting' Started: Howard County's First 25 Years* (Big Spring, Texas: Heritage Museum, 1980)

Echo Hill Ranch Plans 55th Anniversary Celebration

by Barbara Raynor

Echo Hill Ranch in Medina, Texas, will host a 55th Anniversary Family Camp and Alumni Retreat July 28-29, 2007. Activities will include hill climbs, swimming, horseback riding, and fried chicken for Sunday lunch! Saturday night will be a 55th Anniversary Celebration around the camp fire.

“When my Mom and Dad opened the Ranch fifty-five years ago, they wanted to create a non-competitive, child-centered summer camp, where each child could grow and explore his

or her own interests and talents in a well-supervised, structured, but relaxed environment,” said Roger Friedman, co-owner and Executive Director. “Times have changed—and my parents are no longer with us—but their spirit and vision for Echo Hill is still evident in everything we do.”

In fact, a day in the life of Echo Hill Ranch in 2007

is virtually identical to a day in the life at Echo Hill Ranch in 1957—and neither the staff nor the ranchers would have it any other way. Jewish values also play a key role in shaping the camp’s philosophy. Friedman continues, “My parents believed that ‘you should always leave a place better than you found it,’ which echoes the Jewish teaching of *tikkum olam*, or repairing the world.

“So we try to instill in our campers an appreciation and respect for the world and the people around them by provid-

ing them with ways to take care of that world and their fellow campers.”

Participants for the Anniversary Celebration are welcome to stay at the ranch, and everyone who attends will receive a complimentary 55th Anniversary t-shirt. For registration and more information, go to www.echohill.org or call 830-589-7739.



The Friedman Family, 1961, top to bottom: Uncle Tom, Richard, Aunt Min, Marcie, and Roger



The Friedman Family, left to right (top): Roger and David, (bottom): Amanda, Roz Beroza, and Michaela

Lone Stars of David—A Hit!

by Davie Lou Solka

The book about Texas in the Brandeis Series in American Jewish History is being acclaimed by everyone who has read it. Published by the University Press of New England, in association with the Texas Jewish Historical Society, the book is now in its second printing.

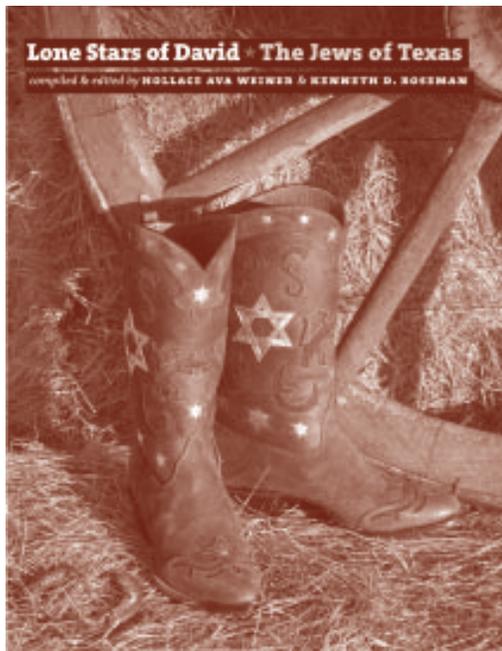
Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas, compiled and edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth

D. Roseman, Texas Jewish Historical Society members, is a collection of twenty-one chapters by three dozen knowledgeable authors. Each chapter is written with its own bibliography and tells the stories of the varied roles that Jews have played in Texas history in regard to education, petroleum, merchandising, and philanthropy. There are

continued on page 27

Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas Hits the Road!

The Texas Jewish Historical Society is pleased to co-sponsor a series of public programs in May in conjunction



with the publication of the new book *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas*, co-edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman. Partnering with the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, the TJHS will present lectures in Dallas, Houston, Waco, and Wichita Falls by historians who contributed to the book. Weiner, a writer and archivist, and Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Director of the History Department at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, will headline this tour. Weiner will discuss the challenges of compiling this new collection of essays on the history of Jews in Texas while Rockoff will discuss his essay "Deep in the Heart of Palestine: Zionism in Early Texas."

On May 8, Weiner and Rockoff will speak at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art at 7:00 PM. On May 9, Rockoff will speak at the annual meeting of the Dallas Jewish Historical So-

ciety held at the Jewish Community Center of Dallas, with Weiner introducing him and sharing a slide show of photos from the anthology. The Dallas meeting starts at 7:00 PM, with the program to begin at 7:30 PM. Weiner and Rockoff travel to Temple Rodef Sholom in Waco on May 10 for a 7:00 PM program. The tour concludes on May 14 at the Houston Jewish Community Center, with Dr. Bryan E. Stone of Corpus Christi's Del Mar College joining Rockoff and Weiner to discuss his essay, "On the Frontier: Jews without Judaism." The Best Little Klezmer Band in Texas will kick off the event at 7:30 PM, with the historians starting at 8:00 PM. These events will be part of celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month, which was recently created by congressional legislation and signed by President Bush.

Co-sponsors for the *Lone Stars of David* tour, besides the TJHS and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of



Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Director of the History Department at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.



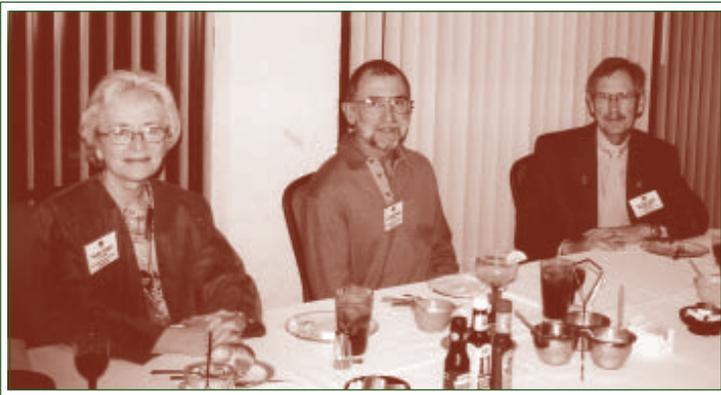
Hollace Ava Weiner



Dr. Bryan E. Stone, contributor to the book.

Southern Jewish Life include the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, Congregation House of Jacob in Wichita Falls, the Wichita Falls Area Community Foundation, the Waco Jewish Community Council, and the Houston Jewish Community Center. The tour is also supported by Humanities Texas. For more information, contact TJHS president Vickie Vogel at txjhs@yahoo.com or Stuart Rockoff at 601-362-6357 or rockoff@isjl.org.

TJHS Members Meeting in



The TJHS Meeting and Banquet was held January, 2007 in Kingsville. Left to right: TJHS President Vickie Vogel, David Vogel, and guest speaker Dr. Allen Rasmussen of Texas A&M University in Kingsville.



Lolo, a King Ranch retired cowboy (referred to as a Kineño), played Red River Valley on his harmonica for us.



TJHS Members at King Ranch



Rebecca and Maurice Schmidt



David Hoffman

Board Members Jan Hart, Charles Hart, and Greg Meyer are hard at work.



Kingsville, January, 2007



Left to Right: Binnie Hoffman, Nancy Hoffman, David Hoffman, Charles Hart, Jan Hart.



Jake and Beverly Trachtenberg



Left to right: Keith Rosen, Barbara Lack, Jay Lack, Don Teter, Gertrude Teter



Maurice Schmidt tells Society members about his art, which is in the background.



Shirley Gindler, Bob Gindler, Ed Katten



TJHS Board Members



Mabel Massin

Meeting in Kingsville, January, 2007



TJHS Treasurer Ben Pfeffer.



Marilyn Jorrie, Jane Guzman, David Vogel, and Vickie Vogel



Board members from left to right: Mitzi Milstein, Rusty Milstein, David Hoffman, Marvin Leshin, and Beverly Trachtenberg



Bryan Edward Stone



Left to right: Mitzi Milstein, Sally Drayer, Charles Hart, Jan Hart, Rusty Milstein



Keith Rosen



Sally Drayer

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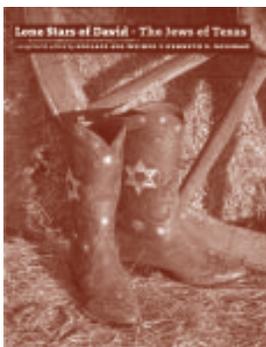
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The book about Texas in the Brandeis Series in American Jewish History is being acclaimed by everyone who has read it. Published by the University Press of New England, in association with the Texas Jewish Historical Society, the book is now in its second printing.

Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas, compiled and edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman, Texas



Jewish Historical Society members, is a collection of twenty-one chapters by three dozen knowledgeable authors. Each chapter is written with its own

bibliography and tells the stories of the varied roles that Jews have played in Texas history in regard to education, petroleum, merchandising and philanthropy. There are chapters on particular families, areas, individuals, and topics.

Order *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas* while supplies last.

Number of books _____ x \$34.95 = \$ _____

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Texas Jewish Historical Society's Annual



Roy Elsner and Barbara Graff. Commissioner Graff, an Odessa County Commissioner, gave the welcome address on Saturday.



Left to right: Roy Elsner, Essie Elsner, Selma Winkler, Ed Winkler, Max Stool



TJHS members toured the Jewish section of the Odessa cemetery.



Hollace Weiner was presented with a surprise gift from TJHS President Vickie Vogel.



Dr. Frank Kasman was the chair of the Saturday evening banquet.



Members toured the Odessa Presidential Library.

Gathering in Odessa, April 21-23, 2007



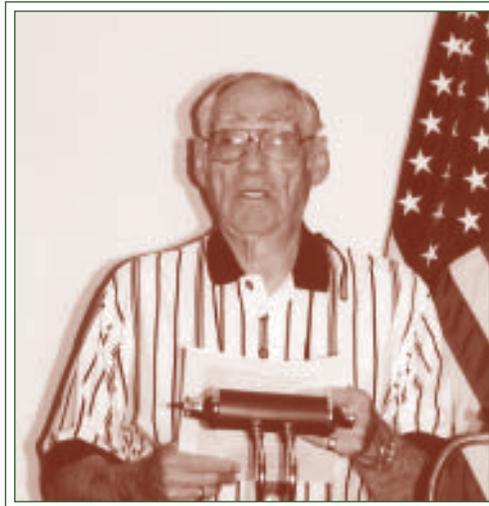
*Dr. Jane Winer, our speaker, Dr. Monty Strauss,
and Dr. Frank Kasman*



Hollace Weiner and Gary Whitfield



*Barbara Rosenberg, chair of
book marketing*



*Roy Elsner gave a
history of Jews in
Odessa and the Per-
mian Basin.*



Rusty Milstein

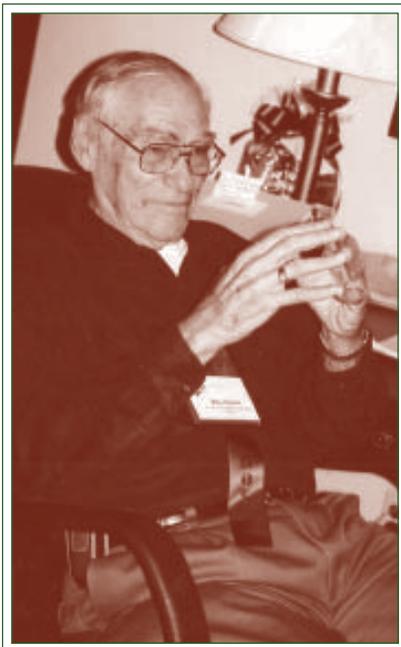


The Attendees of the 28th Annual Gathering



Barbara Graff

Annual Gathering in Odessa



Roy Elsner



Sonja Stein, Jane Guzman, and Jim Stein



Frank Kasman, Jan Hart, and Sheila Rosenfeld



Roy Elsner, Bob Gindler, and Ben Rosenberg admire the "Nose Art" at the Commemorative Air Museum.



Standing: Dr. Monty Strauss, Dr. Jane Winer, and Paul Felt. Seated: Hollace Weiner, Noel Graubart, Mickey Graubart



Dr. Jane Winer Spoke about Texas Tech University's West Texas Jewish Archives.

Texas Jewish Historical Society 2006-2007

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Del Rio, TX 78840
830-775-1803
dbraudaway@stx.rr.com

Brooks, Richard & Claire
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Austin, TX 78765

Cohen, Marvin
355 N. Post Oak Ln., #646
Houston, TX 77024

Cohen, Sylvia (Deener)
252 Shadow Mountain Dr.
El Paso, TX 79912
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tootsey@aol.com

Eisen, Jay & Mindy
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Beaumont, TX 77706

Krause, Dan & Carolyn
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Richardson, TX 75080

Langston, Scott
206 Mitchell
Weatherford, TX 76087

Levine, Michael & Sarah
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Waco, TX 76710
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fax: 254-754-5538
mlevine@grandecom.com

Litwin, Martin & Ruth
5813 Wild Ridge Ct.
Plano, TX 75024
972-370-0100
fax: 972-407-1567
rlitwin@litwinco.com

Maqom
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Houston, TX 77031

Rosenzweig, Sara
1432 Spur
Lubbock, TX 79423

Serebrin Family
2210 South Blvd.
Houston, TX 77098

Statman, Max & Jan (Berliner)
461 Country Place
Longview, TX 75605
903-663-0645

Straus, Monty J. & Jane L. Winer
4209 88th St.
Lubbock, TX 79423

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Lone Stars of David, *continued from page 12*

chapters on particular families, areas, individuals, and topics.

The book has been awarded the Doeleece Parmelee Award for achievement in Preservation through Historical Research from the Texas History Foundation. Weiner and Roseman accepted the award at a banquet in April. *Lone Stars of David* is one of the books in the Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, published by the University Press of New England, in association with the Texas Jewish Historical Society, and is available at major bookstores or from the TJHS.

It's difficult to choose which chapter is a favorite – they are all well written and interesting. Tumbleweed Smith, Texas Folklorist, has said, "...It's a fascinating scholarly work written by some talented storytellers."

Lone Stars of David may be purchased at major bookstores, gift stores, or from the Texas Jewish Historical Society. It is \$34.95, plus \$7.13, which includes tax, shipping, and handling. Make check payable to Texas Jewish Historical Society and mail to P. O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193.

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YES! Count me in! My dues are enclosed. Please **update** my information

Check the Appropriate Box(es)

New Member Gift Membership/Recipient's Name(s): _____
 Renewing Member Maiden Name: _____
 Updated Information Only Address: _____
Occasion: _____

Membership Category

\$36 Annual Member \$100 Sponsor \$500 Benefactor
 \$50 Supporting Member \$250 Sustaining Member \$1,000 Patron

Donor or New Member's Name(s): _____

Maiden Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home telephone: (____) _____ Cell: (____) _____ Fax: (____) _____

E-mail address(es): _____ Website: _____

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