

Newsletter

of the Texas Jewish Historical Society

Volume 1, Number 1
August, 1980

Texas Jewish Historical Society Founded

The Jewish presence in Texas has been long and outstanding, extending back perhaps even before the Austin Settlements in 1821. That history is well worth preserving and disseminating. With such a goal in view, the Texas Jewish Historical Society was established on the evening of January 26, 1980, and incorporated on February 15, 1980.

The purpose of the Texas Jewish Historical Society is to collect, preserve, publish, and popularize materials which concern the settlement and history of Jews in Texas and their participation in and contributions to its social, economic, religious, political, professional, and cultural growth.

T.J.H.S. Collection Established

On March 24, 1980 Dr. Don F. Carleton, Director of the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas at Austin, extended to us an offer to establish a Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection. His letter offered the facilities of the Center to serve "as the official repository for the historical collections of the Texas Jewish Historical Society." Under such an arrangement, all papers will become the property of the Barker Texas History Center once donated, but they will be listed in finding guides as being in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection.

After consultation with the Executive Committee, the President informed Dr. Carleton that we wished to formally accept his kind offer and that of the Center. Under these provisions, the Center will assume all responsibilities for the preser-

vation of the materials donated, while the Society will receive both credit for its efforts and a permanent collection.

The papers of Rabbi Henry Cohen, already owned by the Center, will be made part of the T.J.H.S. Collection. A new addition to the Collection, the marriage certificate of Moses Albert Levy, a surgeon general under Sam Houston, will be presented by Rabbi Jimmy Kessler.

If you would like to contribute to the new T.J.H.S. Collection, please contact Larry Gretsky (1507 Edgewood, Austin 78722), our Archivist.

(This arrangement was established to allow those individuals who so desire to place their papers in a central location. It was not meant to replace or to compete with local archives, but rather to supplement them.)

From Our President

The publication of our first newsletter is clearly a momentous occasion as it signals another step in the establishment of the permanent presence of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. A great deal of thanks is due to Donna Berliner (Dallas) and Barry Green (Tyler), our editors. In addition, much gratitude must be conveyed to Mrs. Helene Levy (Galveston) for handling the distribution of all our recent mailings, particularly this newsletter.

There are several items of which I must ask you to take cognizance. The first is in the realm of the production of materials for sharing and publication. Future newsletters will require such materials. If you will remember from the First Gathering, one of the purposes of the T.J.H.S. is to encourage publication by amateur historians and to provide vehicles necessary for such publication. By virtue of your membership, you are entitled to use your Society and its facilities for such purposes. I want to encourage you to do so. Whether it is an anecdote, or a family history, or in-depth research, regardless — do submit it. Contact Donna Berliner (8500 Hillcrest, Dallas 75225) or Barry Green (4801 Richmond, Tyler 75703) for any further information.

In as much as we will be producing a quality annual publication, I wish to urge you to be involved. Consider either putting forward your own work for consideration and/or asking others to do

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President's Column, continued

the same. Clearly, the goal is to establish an outstanding literary journal, open to all who wish to write on the Texas Jewish experience. Needless to say, the existence of such a publication will stimulate the production of such work. Yet, we need materials with which to begin. If you are interested, contact Seth Wolitz (7506 Huntleigh Lane, San Antonio 78209) for further information.

As standard fare in our newsletter, we wish to establish a column for sharing. In this "What's Do'in" portion, we want to solicit brief descriptions of current research, projects, efforts, and activities. Moreover, if information is being sought for research, our newsletter would be a perfect mode for circulating such a request. Please send along such materials to Donna or Barry for inclusion in our next issue.

There are two projects in which I hope all of us are getting involved. One is a personal family history. Not just a tree, but a collection of data that reflects genealogy, biographical information, family movements, and any other facts that would contribute to the writing of Texas Jewish history. The other is collecting histories of the older (chronologically) members of your communities/synagogues. Their personal histories, as well as reflections on the communities in which they live or lived, must be preserved. If you are not doing it personally, then consider involving either other organizations in your area or the families of those to be interviewed. Each of us can be involved in this effort directly or indirectly. The superb work done by Mrs. Ina Joy Gandler (3001 Wooded Acres, Waco 76710) will be shared through this newsletter. All it takes in either or both efforts is a cassette recorder, time, and interest.

As the T.J.H.S. grows, we will need not only more members, but local, informal organization as well. These mini-gatherings will serve to reinforce the comradery of our Society and provide a forum for the sharing of information.

Officers will be elected annually for a period of one year and with a limitation of three consecutive years, with the exception of the Archivist and Associate Archivist.

Following are the officers for 1980-81.

Executive Committee

- President Rabbi Jimmy Kessler (Galveston)
- 1st Vice President . . . Mrs. Frances Kallison (San Antonio)
- 2nd Vice President . . . Mr. Herbert Ginn (El Paso)
- Corresponding Secretary Mr. Lionel Schooler (Houston)
- Recording Secretary Mr. Stuart Klein (McAllen)
- Treasurer Mr. Edwin Lax (Dallas)
- Archivist Dr. Larry Gretskey (Austin)
- Associate Archivist Mrs. Doris Glasser (Houston)

Standing Committees

- Legal Judge Norman Black (Houston)
- Archives Dr. Larry Gretskey (Austin)
- Publications Mrs. Doris Glasser (Houston)
- Editorial Board
- Quarterly Mrs. Donna Berliner (Dallas)
- Dr. Barry Green (Tyler)
- Annual Dr. Seth Wolitz (San Antonio)
- Membership Mrs. Lynn Schwarz (Houston)
- Finance Mr. Milton Smith (Austin)
- Public Relations Dr. Sanford Karter (Houston)
- Mrs. Mona Gotter (Seabrook)
- Regional Organization Mrs. Helen Smith (Austin)

Such groups will allow our state-wide organization to maintain a firm grassroots foundation while permitting Society involvement in local historical projects.

Expectations for the future are many: grants, publications, meetings, lectures, seminars, and much more. Each takes time, effort, involvement, and interest. The purpose of the T.J.H.S. is to create an atmosphere in which such achievements can be attained. Do plan to be involved, because you are the only ones who can bring these possibilities to fruition. We need active participants, we need research and papers for our next annual Gathering and our publications, we need committee members, we need local ambassadors spreading the name of the Society; in short, we need you. The T.J.H.S. will grow in strength — only if you make it happen. Do be involved.

Jimmy Kessler

Directors

- Mrs. Susanne Friedman (Houston)
- Mrs. Ginger Jacobs (Dallas)
- Rabbi David Jacobson (San Antonio)
- Mr. Adrian Levy, Sr. (Galveston)
- Dr. Barbara Schachtel (Houston)
- Mr. David Schwarz (Houston)
- Mr. Milton Smith (Austin)
- Dr. Seth Wolitz (San Antonio)

First Gathering Keynote Address

Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, "the Dean of American Jewish historians," was the keynote speaker on the evening of January 26, 1980. The following is excerpted from his address.

"I came down here . . . to congratulate you all. To congratulate you because in a way, Jewish history in North America began in Texas. And in a way, that is literally true — in Texas and in neighboring Mexico.

"About ninety years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, Hernando Alonzo, a man of Jewish descent, was burnt at the stake in Mexico City on the charge of being a heretic, a secret Jew. In the late 1590's and the early 1600's, another man of Jewish descent, and a man who proclaimed himself proudly as a Jew, was burnt at the stake. He lived in a province of northern Mexico that included part of Texas territory. In the late 1600's, there were two governors of Jewish origin who were arrested by the Inquisition, and tried; both died in Inquisitional prisons. One was in a northern Mexican province that included part of Texas, and the other was in the province that we know today as New Mexico.

"In all probability, approximately during the time of the War of 1812, there was a West Point graduate who was fighting here, on Texas soil. In 1826, there was a German Jew, Adolphus Stern, who fought in the Fredonian Revolt, and later on became a very distinguished Texan. I come from Cincinnati, and we have a Jewish family there called the Johnsons. They're still Jews, still good Jews. Edgar Johnson was massacred in 1836 by the Mexicans at Goliad when Colonel Fannin and his men were all murdered. . . .

"You have a glorious history, a history that is worth studying and worth knowing about . . .

"You have a wonderful history in this great Lone Star State. You have a Bible, where you have the greatest sentence the world has ever conceived and the human hand has ever written: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' And over 2,000 years ago, we had a religious leader, before the birth of Christianity, who taught us our golden rule: 'What is hateful . . . unto you, do not unto your neighbor.'

"It is my faith, hope, and conviction, that when every Jew is distinguished among his fellow citizens, for his personal integrity, then nothing on God's green earth is going to shake his position. Character is the most important thing in life. If you're good men and women, then all the storms of life may whistle and howl about your ears. But when the din and the noise and the turmoil have passed away, and the dawn of a new day comes shining over the horizon, — you will still be standing here, erect, unflinching, undaunted: an eternal people."

Our Society Incorporated

On February 15, 1980, the Secretary of State for the State of Texas issued charter number 509732 to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, Inc. Two weeks after the First Gathering of the T.J.H.S., our organization took an official place in the records of the State. Much thanks is due to Mr. Lionel Schooler, our Corresponding Secretary, for carrying out this effort to its fruition. Currently, Lonnie Jimmy Kessler, and Ed Fax, our Treasurer, are in the process of applying for tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service.

Survey

If you know of any projects completed, underway, or projected in the field of Texas Jewish History, or sources of information and location of documents, please forward one copy to the newsletter editors and one to Dr. Larry Gretsky, T.J.H.S. Archivist. This will be the beginning of our cataloging of the Texas Jewish experience.

Memberships

in the

Texas Jewish Historical Society

are available on a Regular, Patron, Gift, and Organizational basis.

Contributions to the Texas Jewish Historical Society are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

For Membership information, contact: Rabbi James L. Kessler
Temple B'nai Israel
3008 Avenue G
Galveston, Texas 77550

Recording Family Histories

The T.J.H.S. represents an organized effort to preserve and disseminate the history of Jews in Texas. As an individual member of a Texas Jewish family — whether it is sixth or first generation — you may work toward that goal by researching your family history. Ima Joy Chodorow Gandler of Temple Kodesh Sholom in Waco has been working in this area, and shares with us some of her methods. In this issue, we look at oral and written histories and some pertinent questions regarding the generation of great-grandparents.

Oral History

Clarity is foremost. Be sure that the tape used when interviewing is of the highest quality and that the speakers speak clearly. Any material written in conjunction with the taped interview should be legible. (If no recording equipment is available, write it out.)

Interview anyone on your mother's side and/or on your father's side of the family. Full names, dates, and places are very important. Begin with the older members of the family, if possible. If they do not live near you, begin then with your parents and write letters to relatives. Keep all correspondence.

Begin the tape with the following statements.

My full name is:
I am the son/daughter of:
I live at:
Today's date is:
I am interviewing:
He/She lives at:

Then begin the interview with the following questions:

What do you know about your ancestors before your great-grandfather and great-grandmother? (If possible, answer the following pertaining to those ancestors before the great-grandparents.)

What was your great-grandfather's name, his birth date, his birth place, and his burial place?

What was your great-grandmother's name, including her maiden name, her birth date, birth place, and burial place?

When and where were your great-grandparents married?

What were the names of their children — in order of birth — and what were their birth dates?

To whom were each of those children married (include maiden names when applicable), when were they married, where did they live, and where is each buried?

Written History

If you begin a scrapbook today, you are preserving written history for posterity. The scrapbook should be "in chronological order, containing newspaper articles with date and year, pictures, programs, documents, or anything pertaining to your family. Do not use tape. Use photo mounts to outline items. Put programs in manila envelopes and paste envelopes on page. You could also keep a diary listing things pertaining to you or members of your family on the day it happens.

T.J.H.S. members are welcome to forward to the editors additional questions which would add to the family history project. In the next issue, we will focus on questions regarding the first generation in America.

The Newsletter of the Texas Jewish Historical Society is published quarterly.

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