



# NEWSLETTER

P.O. BOX 50501, AUSTIN, TEXAS 78763

SPRING, 1987

## THE BROMBERGS OF CROCKETT, TEXAS

*Note: A rabbi who writes Midrash answers the question "What does it mean to be the Children of Israel?" If we look at the Hebrew word "Yisroel" backwards, it spells "lo rashai". "Lo rashai" in Hebrew means "you are not permitted." Because the very soul of the Children of Israel arises from the passage of the Torah from generation to generation, it is incumbent upon us to pass all of our history in all lands so that our heritage is preserved. It could then be said that "you are not permitted to forget." But in order to remember, we must first be aware of that history.*

*In this article, and in newsletters to come, we will look at Judaism in Texas from pioneer days to the present, through its personalities and organizations, and follow the commandment to "remember." Those that we remember may not be rich and famous, the politicians, powerbrokers, or war heroes. In this column, we will seek to examine the lives of those "ordinary" individuals and organizations who had impact on their children, their neighbors, those who left the mark of Judaism and Jewish ethics on all that touched their lives. As much as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachael, it is because of them that Judaism lives. -Ed.-*



**Mendel Bromberg (1845-1919)**

In 1861, a sixteen year old Mendel Bromberg left his Polish village of Jaskrow with his parents' blessing to leave the brutal tyranny of his home town to come to America. With meager family savings, Mendell bought passage in the steerage of a sailing vessel and traveled forty days to New York.

Mendel went to work as a day laborer and studied English by night. When he overcame the language barrier, he set out for Texas. Upon arrival, he chose the town of Crockett, named after a hero of the Alamo, to make his home. According to *Houston County History* by Eliza Bishop (Heritage Publishers, Tulsa, 1980), he "stayed in Crockett all of his quiet, industrious life. He helped the community grow and he aided his fellow men within his resources."

A boyhood friend of Mendel's was Harris Kempner, who came from the same village in Poland. Mendel and Harris remained friends for life and though Mendel never won the accolades and fame of Harris, he expressed pride in the accomplishments of his friend.

Mendel loved the land and was one of the first citizens of East Texas interested in soil conservation. He built roads at his own expense. One such road from the Camino Real (now Highway 21) to his Trinity River Bottom farm is captioned in historic maps as the "Bromberg Road".

Mendel was married to Etta Bromberg, and theirs was "the story book union of two pioneers." Mendel and Etta had six children, all of whom were educated in the primary and secondary schools of Crockett.

Mendel was a merchant, and started out with a wooden general store. Directly behind it was a four room cottage, with a barn between the store and their home. He kept a bountiful garden which he tilled himself.

The Bromberg home was one of the first in Crockett to have electricity and a telephone.

By 1911, the Bromberg store had prospered enough to build a brick building on the same site using brick from his own kiln. The building still stands and is owned by K. Wolens. The little cottage gave way in 1905 to a spacious home which was maintained by Leon Bromberg, a grandson, until his death.

The Bromberg children maintained their deep ties with Houston County. Mose Bromberg, the second son, remained in Crockett most of his adult life, maintaining the family store and farm interests. He is remembered as one of the most popular young men in Crockett, a student of many disciplines, southern gentleman of the old school, and civic activist (President of the

East Texas Chamber of Commerce).

He later moved to Galveston to join his oldest brother, Sol Bromberg, who was an attorney and executive of the Galveston Dry Goods Company. After the liquidation of that company, Sol became an executive officer of the Moody Cotton Company. He and his wife, Helen, had two children, the late Dr. Leon Bromberg and Mrs. Estelle Wieselberg of Connecticut.



**Mrs. Etta Bromberg (1849-1933)**

The youngest son, Perry Bromberg, became a renowned surgeon and professor at Vanderbilt

University in Nashville. Etta was known to sew and sell bonnets to put "the apple of her eye" through medical school.

Two of the Bromberg daughters married and moved away. Sara married Hyman Harrison and moved to Los Angeles and had one child, Fay Harrison Elias. Pauline married Harry Weis and moved to Mertzon, Texas where their only child, Gertrude, was born. They returned to Crockett to care for Etta in later years. Gertrude was educated in Crockett and married Dave Aron of Monroe, Louisiana.

The Bromberg's fifth child, Lena, is probably the best remembered and loved in Crockett. "Miss Lena" was educated at Sam Houston Normal in Huntsville, and dedicated her life and soul to teaching. Awarded the honor of Most Distinguished Alumni of her college, "Miss Lena" taught three generations of Crockett children Mathematics and inspired her students to read fine literature. Many interested students gathered voluntarily after school to listen to her read poetry and prose and to enjoy informal discussions.

Miss Lena was married to Henry H. Klein, an attorney in New York. They were only married a few years when he died, and she returned to Crockett. She was the founder of several study, social, and historic groups that still meet today.

There was never a Jewish congregation in Crockett and the extent of Judaism practiced by the Brombergs is not fully known. However, in a recent interview with Mrs. Bishop, she stated that the Brombergs traveled 35 miles to Palestine, Texas to worship. We have not received any information on the Jewish community of Palestine, but we surmise that there were enough Jews in the early days to make a minyan. The Brombergs were also members of Congregation B'nai Israel in Galveston, according to Mrs. Bishop.

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Dr. Leon Bromberg, Mendel and Etta's grandson, continued to be a member of B'nai Israel until his recent death.

*\*TJHS thanks Eliza Bishop of Crockett for allowing us to borrow liberally from her article on the Brombergs originally printed in Houston Co. History (1980).*

## JEWISH YOUTHS WRITE ON GROWING UP JEWISH IN TEXAS

In the fall of 1986, the Texas Jewish Historical Society sponsored a statewide essay contest for Jewish youth. The winning essays were published in the Winter Newsletter. What follows are excerpts from our runners-up.

**Feliks Schwartz**, Age 13, San Antonio wrote:

"I am happy now that I'm older than I am Jewish. Now I appreciate the religion, I am glad that I am Jewish. I feel this way because my family migrated from Russia about 10 years ago in the hope that I, the only boy in the family, will grow up in a good Jewish area where you can be Jewish in public and able to have a Bar Mitzvah without studying in secret.

Since we came to Texas, I have been involved in Hebrew studies at the synagogue and in USY. I also attend services every other week. . . The Jewish holidays in Texas are great. On the holidays we have large dinners at my grandparents house. Chanukah is my favorite. . ."

**Grant Pector**, a 14-year old from San Antonio, wrote an essay that told about his pride in his father, who was a lay leader for the small congregation at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines while he was stationed there. When Grant's family returned to Texas:

"I immediately returned to learn at Agudas Achim. It had been five years and I was ready to learn. The first person I met who greatly influenced me Jewishly would have to be Nina Uzick. She began working with the Hebrew vowels and alphabet with me. I was put in a class one grade lower than me because the regular class ment (sic), for me was a little complex. I'm glad I chose the lower class because it gave me a chance to catch up. Now at age 14 I'm in Hebrew High as a freshman. I have accomplished many things in my life including my Bar Mitzvah which was fantastic because of the Chinese side of the family and my Jewish American side."

**Abby Lauterstein**, 13, of San Antonio, talked with her relatives to find out how her family came to Texas. Here is what she found:

"My ancestors of my greatgrandmother Elsa Oberdofer are from Black Forest, Germany. Another ancestor is from Alsace Lorain, France. Her name was Madelaine Aaron. My greatgrandfather lived in Llano, Texas. He was an immigrant from Lithuania. His occupation was a peddler until he got married. Lizzie Frueger came to Texas with her father to earn money. Shortly after she came she changed her last name from Frueger to Rosenstein. They lived in Taft, Texas. Max Lauterstein, my greatgrandfather, proposed and got married. He was from Germany and moved to Nauboo, Illinois. There he was a Mormon until he moved to Texas. My greatgrandfather came to Texas in the 1800s and settled in Llano, Texas. My grandmother Lauterstein went to New Orleans for my cousin's wedding, she was a bridesmaid. The best man was Louis C. Lauterstein. They met and got married and moved to Llano, Texas. My grandfather and grandmother lived in Austin where my father and two aunts were born. Later, they moved to San Antonio, Texas.

Now I would like to share with you my mother's side on how her family came to Texas. My greatgrandfather Abe Dubick came to Cleveland, Ohio from Russia. My greatgrandfather from my grandfather's side was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. My greatgrandmother was born in Budapest, Hungary. She came to the United States when she was seven years old. My grandmother and grandfather were both born in Cleveland, Ohio. My grandfather got sick and had to move to a warmer climate during the winter, so in 1952 my grandfather, grandmother, mother and uncle went to California, then to Tulsa and later to San Antonio.

This is all the information I could gather from my relatives on how my family came to Texas."

We would say Abby did a great job of searching!

**Monique Roy**, a fifth grader from Solomon Schechter in Dallas, wrote a fictional account of a young woman escaping the Holocaust and coming to Texas. Even though it is not a "true" story, we think Monique showed that she had a good understanding of how things might have happened to those who fled the Holocaust, immigrants, and happy endings in the land of Texas.

**Upon his death, Dr. Leon Bromberg bequeathed a valuable book collection to the John H. Wooters Crockett Public Library. According to librarian Sally Woodward, Mrs. Weiselberg, Dr. Bromberg's sister, has now donated a book room in his memory, which is currently under construction. The dedication of the Bromberg room will be on June 28, 1987 at the Crockett library with Rabbi Martin Levy officiating. All members of the Texas Jewish Historical society are invited to attend the dedication.**

## HOW MY FAMILY CAME TO TEXAS

*By Monique Roy*

My name is Toni Zweig. I was born in Cracow, Poland. My story of how we came to be living in Dallas, Texas, happened to so many of our people. All our stories are sadly similar in where we came to make our new homes.

For many years we all lived happily in Cracow, but oneday something very bad happened. Polish soldiers started to intimidate the Jews in the streets. They were wearing all kinds of medals on their brown jackets. Things started getting bad for us Jews, life was miserable when they started rounding individuals into trucks, and we heard rumors that we were being taken to different camps and being tortured. That night Papa and I decided to leave with our two boys. Our dreams was to go to America were we were told that the streets were paved with gold. We counted our money and all we had together was two hundred dollars. The next day we started packing our wagons and secretly saying, "goodbye" to our friends. Our trip through the nights to the harbor north of Cracow was dangerous and tiring. Tears blinded my eyes as I thought of everyone and my beloved home in our shtetl that I have left behind.

When we got to the harbor there were hundreds in the same position who hoped to get on the boat. The captain a stern man was choosing the passengers who were to get on the boat. Papa, Charles, Isadore, and I were one of the lucky ones and after paying our fare we had fifty dollars left.

After a long journey I woke up one morning to see the Statue of Liberty in front of us. My heart was full of joy, but I was very scared about all the tests we still had to go threw.

At Ellis Island we were taken to a big room full of immigrants. We were then told to line up for inspection. Our family was one of the last ones to be inspected. I was so nervous when it was my turn as I had heard all the stories about how they could send you back if you had lice, or any medical problems. I was taken into a room. He started saying all kinds of things which I didn't understand. I was really happy when a translator came in. The doctor checked me and I was passed and so was my dear family.

The boat ride to New York was not long. New York harbor was frightening. Standing on the peer was an old man offering cheap accomodation. We went to live in a small hot and crowded apartment with three other families. I found work in a sweat shop, Papa worked for a butcher, and the boys selling newspapers after school for extra money.

Life in New York was no dream. Oneday as I was clocking in at work a tall gentleman with a cowboy hat attracted my attention. He was so big that he looked like a movie star. Suddenly he came up to me and asked me in Yiddish all about my family. I told him my story and what healthy boys I had. He in turn told me about his ranch in Dallas, Texas. His wife had just died and he was looking for a house keeper and manager for his ranch. He offered Papa and me the job.

It was a dream as he paid for us to get to Dallas and even gave us a little house of our very own. Papa and I worked hard for Mr. Shapiro and Charles and Isadore went school and still managed to help Mr. Shapiro in the afternoon. We all became one happy family. It was then I thought, "the streets are really paved with gold!"



## PHINEAS DE CORDOVA: PIONEER, JOURNALIST, & LAND DEVELOPER

by Frances Kallison

The year was 1848, Texas had become a state of the United States two years previously.<sup>1</sup> Her troubles with Mexico had been permanently settled by the United States victory in the Mexican War of 1846 and the lower Rio Grande had been established as her international boundary by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.<sup>2</sup> Hopefully, peace was in the future. Texas, with her vast uninhabited lands offered great opportunities to enterprising, ambitious young men. One of these, Phineas de Cordova, joined his older half-brother, Jacob, who had settled in Galveston ten years earlier.

The de Cordova family had immigrated from Amsterdam to Curacao in 1749 when Phineas' grandfather, Joshua Hezekiah de Cordova, was called to serve Congregation Mikveh Israel as a teacher at a salary of 240 pesos per year. In June, 1755, he accepted the invitation of the Kingston, Jamaica Jewish community to be their rabbi. He also served Congregation Neve Shalom in Spanish Town, Jamaica at the same time.

Presumably, the family had fled to Turkey after the infamous Decree of Expulsion in 1492. There was even a possibility that the family's original name had been Kuzin or Cusin, fairly common Sephardic names in Venice and Salonica.

The de Cordova family seems to have supported themselves as printers in Holland from 1641 to 1726, so the family's connection with printing and publishing had ancient roots.<sup>3</sup>

Phineas' father, Raphael de Cordova, left Jamaica in 1816, with his sons Jacob and Joshua, for Philadelphia after his wife's death in childbirth. There, he remarried. Phineas was born in Philadelphia in 1819.<sup>4</sup>

Phineas had a good secular and Jewish education in Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup> He went to Jamaica in 1835 and remained until 1848 when he married Jemima Delgado, afterwards taking his bride to Galveston. He remained only briefly in Galveston, joining his half-brother Jacob de Cordova of Houston in his enterprises, a general land agency and publication of a newspaper. *De Cordova's Herald and Immigrant Guide*<sup>6</sup> was published monthly and was mostly devoted to advertising de Cordova lands for sale.<sup>7</sup>

At the solicitation of Governor P. H. Bell, the brothers moved their printing office to the state capital, Austin, in 1850. There, they jointly published a weekly newspaper, *The Southwestern American*. Phineas was editor and Jacob wrote many articles. The newspaper carried numerous sales notices for the de Cordova Land Agency.<sup>8</sup> They printed and published the newspaper until they sold it in 1852 to John Salmon Ford.

Their Land Agency prospered and grew to such an extent that it required all of their time. Phineas became heavily involved in the Texas Democratic Party while Jacob's vast land holdings had become so extensive that he was forced to appoint agents in various localities. Phineas had Jacob's power of attorney with authority to transact any and all of Jacob's business throughout the state.

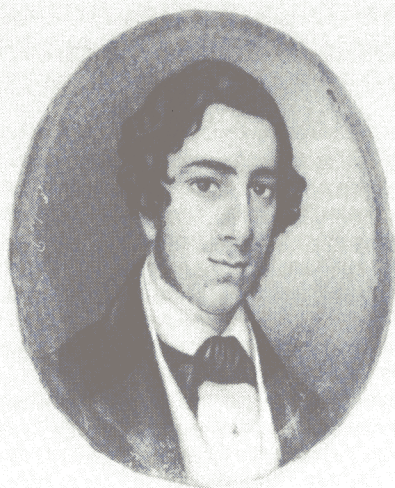
While Jacob traveled about the state selling and acquiring land, Phineas kept his brother informed on the various land laws.<sup>9</sup> In 1872, Phineas published a topographical map of the city of Austin.<sup>10</sup> Together, the brothers wrote a one page broadside, *Instructions to Heirs Claiming Estates Under the Laws of the Republic of Texas*.<sup>11</sup>

Phineas also became involved in Austin civic affairs and in meetings held to discuss ways and means of bringing railroads to Texas. He was a member of the Ways and Means committee of eight which finally worked out and unanimously adopted the plans to finance railroad construction in Texas.<sup>12</sup>

Phineas' involvement in the Texas Democratic Party included attending and taking a great part in the state conventions, drawing up resolutions and serving as secretary to the meetings on many occasions. He was a member of the state Democratic Executive committee for many years.<sup>13</sup>

Phineas was appointed a Notary Public for Travis County by Governor Bell in 1851 and was reappointed by every other governor of Texas until 1893.<sup>14</sup> He was also elected Justice of the Peace for Precinct #2, Travis Co. in 1858, serving until 1860.<sup>15</sup> He was elected to the 10th Legislature in 1863,<sup>16</sup> where he was unanimously elected secretary.<sup>17</sup> During the Civil War, he served as secretary of the Texas Military Board, which was responsible for the protection of the civilian population of the state during those dark years.<sup>18</sup>

Phineas worked for the election of Governor E. M. Pease and when



Phineas de Cordova

the Pease family moved to Austin, the Governor appointed him to manage his business affairs. His intimate friendship with the Pease family continued from 1853 to 1898. After Pease's death, he continued to manage the affairs of his widow and daughter, Miss Julia Pease.<sup>19</sup>

De Cordova took an active part in organizing the Milam Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in Austin, January 6, 1852. In November, 1852, he was elected Grand Master.<sup>20</sup>

On September 24, 1876, the Israelites of Austin met and organized Congregation Beth Israel. Henry Hirschfeld was elected president and Phineas de Cordova vice-president.<sup>21</sup>

*The Official Register of the United States* editions for 1879, 1881, 1883, and 1885 list Phineas de Cordova as United States Commissioner for the Western District of Texas.<sup>22</sup>

Phineas' awareness of the importance of railroad transportation for the growth and development of Texas led him to make an unwise investment which stripped him of the prosperity accumulated by his land and real estate business. He invested heavily in the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway Co. and was one of its founders and one of the nine signers of its articles of incorporation in October, 1880.<sup>23</sup> He was elected to the Board of Directors. Unfortunately, the originator of the railway, Count Joseph Telfener, was incompetent and abandoned the work after only 91 miles of track had been laid. Apparently, the investors lost everything.<sup>24</sup>

Phineas died in 1903 after a painful illness, probably rheumatoid arthritis. He was buried in the Temple Beth Israel Cemetery in Austin.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rupert Norval Richardson, *Texas, The Lone Star State*, (New York, 1955), pp. 165-167.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Bertram W. Korn, "The Rabbi Haham de Cordova of Jamaica", *The American Jewish Archives*, (Cincinnati) XVIII, 2 (Nov., 1966), pp. 148-153.

<sup>4</sup>Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia—From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson*, (Philadelphia, 1926), p. 488, fn. 54.

<sup>5</sup>Phineas de Cordova to Congregation Rodeph Shalom, January 13, 1890 in Edward Davis, *The History of Rodeph Shalom*, (Philadelphia, 1926), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>Frank Brown, *The Annals of Travis County and of the City of Austin*, typescript in the Archives Division of the Texas State Library, Austin, TX (no date), p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>James M. Day, *Jacob de Cordova, Land Merchant of Texas*, (Waco, 1962), pp.132-133.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43 and pp. 133-134.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 45 and 47.

<sup>10</sup>"Notes and Documents", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXVI (July, 1962), p. 112.

<sup>11</sup>E. W. Winkler, ed., "Check List of Texas Imprints", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLVII (July, 1943), p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>*The Texas Gazette*, September 11, 1852.

<sup>13</sup>The Clarksville, *Texas Standard*, July 7, 1855, December 1, 1855, January 30, 1858, August 14, 1858, May 14, 1859, June 25, 1859; The Dallas *Herald*, August 14, 1858, May 11, 1859; *Political Platforms in Texas*, pp. 64, 74, 75.

<sup>14</sup>Frank Brown, *Annals of Travis County*, Chapter XV, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>*Register of State and County Offices*, Vol. 259 (1854-1861), p. 440.

<sup>16</sup>Doris Connerly, *Members of the Texas Legislature, 1846-1962*, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>*Senate Journal—9th Legislature, 1861-1862*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup>Charles M. Ramsdell, "The Texas Military Board, 1862-1865", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXVII, 4, (April, 1924), p. 269, fn. #35.

<sup>19</sup>Letter from Phineas de Cordova to E. M. Pease, Esq., from 1853-1899.

<sup>20</sup>Brown, *The Annals of Travis County*, Chapter XV, pp. 31 and 47.

<sup>21</sup>Rabbi and Mrs. Bertram Klausner, *The History of Congregation Beth Israel, 1876-1951*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Letters from W. Neil Franklin, Chief, Diplomatic, Legal, and Fiscal Branch of the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., to Mrs. Perry Kallison, April 2, 1965.

<sup>23</sup>State Department Book, Railroad Chapters, A., p. 250.

<sup>24</sup>John C. Rayburn, "Count Joseph Telfener and the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway Co.," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXVIII, 1 (July 1964), pp. 30-31 and 41.

<sup>25</sup>C. W. Raines, *Year Book of Texas*, II, p. 45.

\*Frances Kallison is a charter member and former president of TJHS.



## DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH HANDBOOK OF TEXAS PROJECT UPDATE

by *Cathy Schechter*

The answers to our survey questionnaire, mailed statewide in January, have provided a wealth of fascinating slices of Jewish Texana. Traces of Jewish families long gone from a number of small towns have been remembered by their gentile neighbors. The Weksler family of Panhandle, the Bromberg family of Crockett, the Fingers of Coldspring, and dozens of other families inhabited and helped build small towns across Texas before either dying or moving to larger communities. Some families, such as the Lautersteins of Fayette County and Hirschfelds of Austin, left family papers to local libraries and those will certainly provide insight to the pioneer families who helped to build Jewish communities.

Likewise, names of a number of outstanding individuals in small towns have resurfaced. Goldalie Frank Balsom, the daughter of a Jacksonville merchant, moved to New York and started an advertising agency. However, she and her husband, Pulitzer Prize winner Solomon Balsom, returned to Jacksonville to retire and Goldalie founded a ladies handbag manufacturing firm. She remained prominent in local affairs until her death last year.

In Texarkana, Joseph Deutschmann was part owner of the first mule-drawn streetcar lines and an important stockholder in the first water plant and artificial gas company. Known for putting many newcomers into business, Deutschmann Canal is named for him.

Some of our members have valuable unpublished family manuscripts that provide insight into family and local history. Cynthia Skibell Winston described her grandfather, Archie Skibell, as the classic "Horatio Alger" of Lubbock. And Marguerite Meyer Marks of Dallas has provided us with a copy of "Memoirs of My Family", a jewel that tells the story of her family.

Libraries around the state have made us aware of unusual collections pertaining to Jewish families or individuals. The Special Collections at the University of Texas at Arlington have the Bernard Rapoport Papers, 1950-1975. Mr. Rapoport is a prominent Wacoan, Democratic activist, and president of American Income Life Insurance Company. The Moody Medical Library at the UTMB campus in Galveston has the papers of Drs. Meyer Bodansky and Ludwig Anigstein. The Bodansky papers contain files relating to the Boston Committee on Medical Emigres and Texas Committee for Medical Emigres. Baylor College of Denistry Library has the Lyle Sellers memorial collection which includes Dr. Sellers' Torah.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has now received 130 responses to the survey questionnaires. The surveys pertain to the availability of source materials, and community and organizational histories relating to the Jews of Texas. Ruthe Winegarten, project consultant, has culled over 250 potential topics for inclusion in the *Handbook of Texas* which will be presented as possibilities to Tom Cutrer, editor of the *Handbook*. Ms. Winegarten has also developed a preliminary bibliography of source materials based on answers to the questionnaires.

The *Handbook of Texas* is the encyclopedia of the state of Texas and is widely used by scholars, historians, and authors as a guide to Texas history. In the first edition, published in 1952 by the Texas State Historical Association, the Jews of Texas were largely omitted.

The Texas State Historical Association is currently working on updating and expanding the *Handbook* to include all ethnic groups in Texas. The Texas Jewish Historical Society *Handbook* project seeks to ensure that there is a Jewish presence to correspond with the significant contributions made by Jews to the development of Texas.

To my friends in the Texas Jewish Historical Society:

I want to thank you individually and collectively for the many heart-warming ways you have honored the memory of my beloved husband, Edwin Lax. The dedication of the Winter 1987 "Newsletter" in his memory was particularly significant. Ed's keen interest in Jewish history and his devotion to Jewish survival prepared him well for active participation in the budding Texas Jewish Historical Society. He loved the challenge and developed a special relationship with those of you who shared his enthusiasm. May you all enjoy the fruits of your labor. Thank you again.

Ruth E. Lax

## BUT IF A STRANGER WERE TO VISIT, WOULD HE WANT SWISS CHEESE?

If a stranger were to review our survey questionnaires and then try to tell the story of the Jews in Texas, the story would have enormous holes.

In this story, there would be chapters of the National Council of Jewish Women only in Austin and Sherman; an ORT chapter only in San Antonio; Na'amat (Pioneer Women) only in Dallas. There would be no B'nai B'rith, for either men or women, no Anti-Defamation League, no Hebrew Free Loan, and only a few Jewish day schools. It would appear that a Jew in Bryan would have to travel all the way to Houston for religious services, and then, he or she would have only two congregations to choose from! There would be no Jewish sororities or fraternities, no Jewish youth groups, and very little Zionist activity.

Texas would, in other words, appear to be a desert wasteland in terms of Jewish activity.

In fact, we know that the opposite is true!

The majority of survey responses came from our non-Jewish friends, even though we sent over 700 surveys to Jewish individuals, congregations, federations, and organizations. The Jewish response to our search for Jewish Texana was extraordinarily low.

Perhaps you assume that we already know about your organization and its roots. Or maybe you think we know about your family photographs and those old business records stored in your attic. Or maybe you depend on your local TJHS activist to tell your story. The truth is that we only know what you share with us.

We need your help! Please take the time to answer our surveys. If you have misplaced the one you received or if you have the names of people who didn't receive a survey and should have, please contact the Texas Jewish Historical Society at P. O. Box 50501, Austin, Texas 78763.

We can't, afterall, have our story looking like a piece of Swiss cheese.

*The following tale of Jewish life in Cleburne, Texas was written by Gussie Weinberg Lehman in response to a community survey.*

My father, Max Frank Weinberg, moved with my mother Jennie and brother Sam to Cleburne, a small town 30 miles south of Ft. Worth about 1905. I was born August 27, 1906 and my parents sent for their four older children, Morris, Gina, Passie and Abe, who arrived in Galveston when I was one week old. There was only one other Jewish family living in Cleburne at the time who must have been there for some years. They were the Cohens, who were in the cotton buying business.

In later years, the Santa Fe Railroad Co. established their business and employed alot of immigrants. As a result, a few more Jewish people arrived, mostly single men.

My father, who was a fine men's tailor by trade, gave up this profession and engaged in the fruit and vegetable business. As his business grew he began to employ men to go out in horse and wagon to the neighboring small towns to peddle fruit at the various trade days. All of a sudden, there was an influx of Jewish immigrants who began arriving with my father's name. Since these young men could not speak English, they were picked up by the sheriff, who then got in touch with my father. After conversing with them, it was discovered that they had been paid by someone in Galveston upon their arrival to go to Cleburne. These con men said they would get work as a peddler from my father.

Of course, my father hired five or six of them. He could not use all of them so he got in touch with Galveston authorities to investigate and put a stop to this.

All I can remember of the men who worked for us were Sam Robock, Louis Freed (still alive), Sam Silber. Since I was so young at the time, those are the only three I can remember.

Other Jewish families were Bodzykowski (later changed to Bodzy), Marcus, Ballas, and H. Shurka, who married my oldest sister Gina.



## TJHS 7TH ANNUAL GATHERING A SUCCESS

The Seventh Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society was held in Ft. Worth, March 6-8 at the Worthington Hotel. About 50 individuals from all parts of the state gathered to hear speakers and view exhibits.

Friday evening services were held at Temple Beth El with Rabbi Ralph Mecklenberger officiating. Saturday services were held at Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Rabbi Jacob Izakson officiating.

Throughout the gathering, exhibits provided by the Ft. Worth Jewish Community's Sesquicentennial Committee and Dallas Jewish Archives were on display. The Ft. Worth exhibit showed photos and documents capsulizing Jewish history in that city from its early days to the present. The Dallas Jewish Archives provided its exhibit entitled "Jewish Heroes in the Battle for Independence", which included a number of panels outlining the lives and accomplishments of such men as Dr. Albert Moses Levy, Joseph Chimene, Herman Ehrenberg, Anthony Wolff and others.

Dr. Archie McDonald of Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches addressed the gathering Saturday evening. He spoke about Adolphus Sterne, whose diaries he edited. Adolphus Sterne was a mover and a shaker in the Republic days, helping finance the Texas revolution and later serving in both upper and lower houses of the Congress of the Republic. Through his gracious home moved many of the leaders of the day, including Sam Houston and David Kaufman, a Jew who served in the United States Congress. His diaries have provided an insightful look at the life and times of the Republic of Texas.

Other programs during the Gathering included Ron Stocker on oral histories; Barbara Rubin, Chair of the Ft. Worth Sesquicentennial Committee on the nuts and bolts of organizing community history; Natalie Ornish on Jewish heroes in the Battle of Independence; and Ellen Mack on Hell's Half Acre. (An area of Ft. Worth known for prostitution, there were a number of Jewish women who lived in Hell's Half Acre.)

A brief seminar was also led by Ruthe Winegarten on potential topics for inclusion in the *Handbook of Texas*.

During a meeting of the general membership, officers for 1987-88 were elected. They are: Ginger Jacobs, Dallas, President; Jimmy Kessler, Austin, Acting Vice President; Kay Goldman, San Marcos, Treasurer; Doris Glasser, Houston, Recording Secretary; and Allen Mondell, Dallas, Archivist. Members of the executive board for 1987-88 are: A. Robert Beer, Dallas; Fay Brachman, Ft. Worth; Louis Ralph Cohen, Dallas; Martin Davidson, Dallas; Ima Joy Gandler, Waco; Stanley Glasser, Houston; Frances Kallison, San Antonio; Karen Kaplan, Ft. Worth; Audrey and Louis Kariel, Jr, of Marshall; David Lack, Victoria; Jane Manaster, Austin; Cynthia Mondell, Dallas; Natalie Ornish, Dallas; Rabbi Ken Roseman, Dallas; Lionel Schooler, Houston; Milton Smith, Austin; and Selma Weiner, San Antonio.

The eighth annual gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society will be held in conjunction with the Texas State Historical Commission in March, 1988, in Austin.

The next regional board meeting of the Texas Jewish Historical Society will be held Sunday, September 20, 1987 in Houston at the home of Lionel and Marsha Schooler. Board meetings are open to the general membership. Those interested in attending are urged to do so. Please contact the Society at P.O. Box 50501, Austin, Texas 78763 so that we can plan for your presence.

**When you make a contribution to the Texas Jewish Historical Society's collection at the Barker Texas History Center, you are making a contribution to students, writers, and scholars of Jewish and Texas history now and in the future. It is a contribution that endures for as long as the library stands.**

**If you have manuscripts, family papers or photographs, organizational minutes, business records, or books pertaining to the settlement of the Jews in Texas and/or the Jewish contribution to the State of Texas, please consider donating them to the Barker Texas History Center TJHS Collection. Or, if you can't let go of what you have, copies are perfectly acceptable and welcome.**

**Your contribution to the TJHS Collection is tax deductible within the limits of the law and a wise investment in the future.**

## SARAH & HARRY SCHNEIDER MEMORIAL FUND PLEDGED FOR EDUCATION

Stanley Schneider of Austin and Martin Schneider of Atlanta have initiated a fund through the Texas Jewish Historical Society for the purpose of developing curricula for teaching Jewish youth Texas and American Jewish history. The fund was established in memory of their parents, the late Sarah and Harry Schneider of Dallas.

"My parents highly valued education," said Schneider, who is himself an educator. "My mother's biggest regret was that she had to stop going to school when she was 14. We felt that this was the best way to honor their memory."

Preliminary results of a survey sent to religious school and Jewish Day school administrators around Texas indicates a lack of substantive materials for teaching Texas Jewish history. And interest in such a curriculum is high.

An ad hoc committee has been formed in Austin to begin work. This year's goal is to create units for 4th and 7th grade in Texas Jewish history. Those grades have been chosen for a pilot program because those ages are taught Texas history in public schools. Bill Bronstein, education director of Temple Beth Israel in Austin, Jane Manaster, TJHS board member, and Cathy Schechter, director of TJHS, form the committee.

The committee is now calling for interested educators statewide to become part of this important project. Curriculum developers will begin work over the summer and teacher in-service will be provided sometime in 1987 or 1988 in an as yet undetermined forum.

Queries and suggestions are welcome. Please correspond with Cathy Schechter, P. O. Box 50501, Austin, TX 78763.

The Sarah and Harry Schneider Memorial Education Fund of TJHS is open to donations and memorial contributions for those interested in education projects. Please send monetary contributions to Kay Goldman, Treasurer TJHS, P. O. Box 1508, San Marcos, TX 78666.

## NEW ACQUISITIONS FOR TJHS COLLECTION

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has received a number of new materials to be added to its collection at the Barker Texas History Center. They are:

*Memoirs of My Family*, written and donated by Marguerite Meyer Marks.

Temple Rodef Sholom of Waco Dedication Book, 1961, donated by Ima Joy Gandler.

*Centennial Journal of Mt. Sinai Congregation (Texarkana)*, donated by Jeannette Gilden.

*Zale Corporation from the Beginning*, written by Tommy Stringer and donated by the Zale Foundation.

*A Half Century of the Houston Jewish Federation, 1936-1986*, the Golden Jubilee Celebration publication, donated by the Houston Jewish Federation.

Copies of "Zachor!", a series of articles on Texas Jewry written and donated by Juliet George Dees. The series was published in 1979 in the *Marshall News Messenger*.

*Centennial Book*, Congregation Shearith Israel, Dallas, donated by Congregation Shearith Israel.

*Pioneer Jews of Waco*, written and donated by Rabbi Mordecai Podet of Congregation Rodef Sholom, Waco.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society is grateful to all who made these valuable contributions to the collection.

The Barker Texas History Center is on the University of Texas at Austin campus adjacent to the LBJ Library. The items in the Texas Jewish Historical Society collection are open to the public upon request.



## THE REDEDICATION OF TEMPLE BETH-EL, CORSICANA, TEXAS

by Audrey Daniels Kariel

Imagine a small Texas town with a Temple and Shul! I grew up in Corsicana, where we had both. Many of our families were members of both congregations. In my youth, the two congregations even shared a Rabbi!

My mother, Madelyn Daniels, was president of the Women's Auxiliary at Temple Beth-El for many, many years. My dad, George, loved the Temple, and rarely missed Friday night services. I have wonderful memories of Temple Beth-El: Sunday School, holidays, suppers, plays, all of the people and where they sat in the sanctuary, and the appearance of Rabbi Gus Falk who, with his fine intellect, helped me discover my Jewish identity when I was a teenager. But my fondest memory of Temple Beth-El is of my marriage there in 1950.

March 29, 1987 was the date selected at random for the restored Temple Beth-El to be presented as a gift to the citizens of the City of Corsicana. March 29th just happened to be my dad's birthday. He always liked coincidences, so for his sake, as well as my own, I attended.

We sat, surrounded by freshly painted walls, deep forest green plush carpeting, gleaming furniture and fixtures, and above all, a strong sense of brotherhood. The original chairs were on the pulpit. The old altar stands and the two candelabra were there. The huge brass chandelier overhead was shining. I remember counting the bulbs in that chandelier when I was a child. These were definitely the same pews! I was sitting where my family always sat, on the second row near the center. Above the Ark, light was coming through the beautiful, colorful stained glass window with the Ten Commandments written in Hebrew. Everything seemed the same, only more beautiful, yet there was a different cast of characters.

I expected Sidney Marks, Gabe Goldberg, Ivan Schwarts, Dave Levy, Sam Brooks, or my dad to turn up at any moment. Instead, I saw Gioia Keeney, Doris Gillen, Nelwyn Reagan, Robert Buske, Leah Jones, and Marjorie Cerf. Marjorie Cerf was the only member of our congregation who participated in the ceremony. While she gave the history of Temple Beth-El, I sensed deep inside that the old guard would feel the same pride in Corsicana's Save The Temple Committee as I felt.

According to Marjorie, Temple Beth-El was established in 1898, the year of my dad's birth. They dedicated the building as a house of worship in 1900. At that time, Corsicana's Jewish population was about 500 people. In 1913 the congregation had a reorganizational meeting with 44 members. The Women's Auxiliary always worked to make the building pretty. In 1921, they improved the Rabbi's study and purchased a pipe organ. Throughout the years there were constant pleas for money and a rabbi. In 1935, the first marriage was performed. (I asked why not until 1935 and was told that in those days weddings were performed in homes.) My heart swelled when Marjorie told me that my dad started a fund in memory of my mother to add a kitchen to the building. The kitchen was completed in 1965 for the total sum of \$3500. She also told of Max Rosenbloom's effort to get the building air conditioned in later years. From 1900 until about 1970, the congregation was an active one. Then, the congregation suffered a loss of membership through deaths and migration to larger communities. The building needed repairs. By 1981, the situation was critical. Too soon, the building and lot were offered for sale.



Temple Beth-El in Corsicana

A group of interested people who had seen Corsicana lose a hotel, a depot, and other historic sites, decided they would prevent the loss of another important landmark. The Save The Temple Committee, formed with the endorsement of the Navarro County Historical Society, purchased Temple Beth-El from the local Jewish congregation for \$30,000 in 1982. The Texas State Historical Commission, recognizing the value of the building, awarded the Committee a \$10,000 grant toward purchase of what is thought to be the only onion-domed structure in the state.

The advanced deterioration of the building was stopped as the first step toward restoration. Rayford Stripling, a well known restoration architect, agreed to work with this enthusiastic group. Every effort was made to be authentic in their restoration. They carefully "searched and researched". The Committee hoped that the domes would be gold, but after careful investigation, they were painted the original color, a deep forest green. As soon as they raised a little money, progress inched ahead. Members of the community did favors for the group when money was not readily available. The Save The Temple Committee raised money from local foundations, service clubs, and individuals, in addition to the grant from the Texas State Historical Commission. The Committee raised money locally in many innovative ways. They sold buttons, notepaper, and hosted

dinner to small groups to raise money to preserve our Temple.

The publicity surrounding the Temple Beth-El restoration has been spread. This project took time, dedication, cooperation, and over \$100,000 from a variety of sources. Through the efforts of the Save The Temple Committee, Temple Beth-El is now a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, and in February of this year, the building was entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

The dedication ceremony recognized the many donors to the Save The Temple effort by unveiling a plaque naming all major donors. A book listing all donors was presented to the city to be placed in the Temple. Each of the frosty white windows had a brass plaque recognizing the donations and honoring and memorializing individuals who loved Temple Beth-El. There were beautiful tributes to love and friendship crossing all religious lines.

The Temple Beth-El building will no longer be used as a Jewish house of worship, but the congregation will not be forgotten. The building is a gift to the City of Corsicana to be used as a community center for citizens of all races and creeds. The ceremony marked the end of six years of work by a small group of dedicated individuals who were far-sighted, imaginative, and optimistic about their goal of preserving an important historic landmark for Corsicana and for Texas.

In presenting their gift to the City of Corsicana the Save The Temple Committee stated that the people of a city make it what it is. I agree. The people of Corsicana have made it a very special place. I am honored that my roots are there.

*\*Audrey Daniels Kariel is a civic leader in Marshall, Texas, author, and board member of TJHS.*

## A PLEA

by Rabbi Jimmy Kessler

For seven years the Texas Jewish Historical Society has been in its beginning stage. From very simple beginnings with much enthusiasm, we have grown into a mature organization with well defined purposes and goals. Prior to this past year, our activities had been somewhat circumscribed and our membership quiescent.

As 1987 marks the second Sabbath of years for the TJHS, an entirely new role is emerging for our organization. We have become *the* Texas Jewish presence in the American and Texas history fields. As a result of this stature, our Society is being regularly solicited for information on the Texas Jewish experience. More and more of our members are being sought out to provide community presentations or articles for publications. We are now known from coast to coast as the organization to contact if one is seeking information on Jewish life in Texas.

In addition, our organization has taken on two major projects that we insure for posterity a record of Jewry in Texas. The TJHS is preparing a bibliographical submission for consideration by the State *Handbook* Committee for inclusion in the publication of the new *Handbook*. This monumental task is being accomplished through the outstanding efforts of Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, assisted by a committee of devoted Society members. The second project is the preparation of a curriculum on Texas Jewish history for use in the Jewish day schools and religious schools.

All of these fine activities require financial support. During the first seven years, no solicitation was ever made for funds nor was any request made for higher dues from the members. In order to accomplish our goals, those requests must now be made and they are being made in three forms.

First, please consider raising your dues to the Texas Jewish Historical Society from the minimum of \$25 per year. As we seek to revitalize our membership, a modest increase in the dues structure would have a major impact upon our financial situation. Our classification of membership dues is \$25 Regular, \$50 Supporting, \$100 Sponsor, and \$250 Patron. As you enjoy this newsletter and recognize the effort behind it, please consider moving to a higher classification.

Secondly, we have established a mechanism for you to remember a significant event in your life and in that of your friends. A contribution to the TJHS will generate a nice letter of thanks to the designated recipient and a tax deduction to you, within the limits of the law. In this way, we hope you will permit us to participate in your remembering a happy and/or sad occasion. Not only will you benefit, but so will future Texas Jews.

Thirdly, we have submitted grant proposals to several private foundations soliciting support for our *Handbook* project. Some of you may know individuals involved with these foundations, and we need your help with them. Below is a partial list of them and the city of their location. (For a more complete list, please contact Cathy Schechter.) If you know someone in them, please call Jimmy Kessler (512-476-8215) or Cathy Schechter (512-479-6840), or write them care of P.O. Box 50501, Austin, Texas 78763, so they can take advantage of your assistance in obtaining these grants. Or, call the people that you know and urge them to favorably consider our grants.

The foundations which are interested in Jewish and historical affairs are: Ennar Foundation, Beaumont; Fair Stores Foundation, Beaumont; Schepps Foundation, Dallas; Katz Foundation, Corpus Christi; Greenspun Foundation, Dallas; Kahn Foundation, Dallas; Pollock Foundation, Dallas; Kempner Foundation, Galveston; Frankel Foundation; Weiner Foundation, Houston; Weingarten Foundation, Houston; Davidson Foundation, Lake Charles, LA; and the First National Foundation, Waco.

The *talmud* teaches us "*im ain kemach, ain torah*", "if there is no sustenance, there can be no Torah". Our religious ancestors knew that without support Judaism would not survive. Today, it is clear that without your support, the Texas Jewish Historical Society will not achieve the goals its very existence demands. Please be a part of your history and its preservation. Please share with others a bit of the blessings that have come to your life in Texas.

*\*Rabbi Kessler is the founder of TJHS.*

# PLEASE SUPPORT THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

If you read and enjoy our newsletter, please show your support by renewing or upgrading your membership to the Texas Jewish Historical Society. Contributions to TJHS are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

\_\_\_\_\_ New Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ Membership Renewal

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10 - Junior Historian (18 and under)

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Please make checks payable to Texas Jewish Historical Society and mail to:

Kay Goldman  
Treasurer, TJHS  
P.O. Box 1508  
San Marcos, Texas 78666



**BULLETIN BOARD. . .**

**FYI:** The American Jewish Historical Society archives in Waltham, Massachusetts has a wealth of materials. The largest repository in the world of materials relating to more than 300 years of Jewish life in the New World, the Society's Library houses more than 75,000 volumes, six million pages of manuscripts, thousands of newspapers and periodicals, and hundreds of paintings and artifacts. Among the vital records of interest are:

**Newspapers:** 1,000 titles of American Jewish newspapers beginning in the 1840s to the present; many contain information on births, marriages, and deaths.

**Jewish City Directories:** listings of Jewish residents in various cities.

**Mohel Books:** listings by several ritual circumcisers of infants they circumcised in various cities.

**Publications of Jewish Genealogical Societies:** a complete file of all publications and periodicals issued by American Jewish genealogical societies; also preserved are publications of American Jewish historical societies.

**Publication of AJHS:** Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, American Jewish Historical Quarterly, and American Jewish History.

**Ellis Island Booklet:** A how-to guide for locating immigrant ancestors, written by Loretto Dennis Szucs, is now available. Send \$1.00 to Ellis Island Ancestry, Inc., P.O. Box 476, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110.

**U.S. Government Pamphlets Available:** The following pamphlets are available from the Consumer Information Center:

**Family Folklore** - How to record family stories and traditions to supplement genealogical research. 7 pages (Order #164P-\$1.00).

**Federal Depository Libraries** - Addresses for approximately 14,000 libraries in the U.S. that maintain or have access to documents produced by the federal government. (Order #590P-Free, Limit one per order).

**Where to Write for Vital Records** - How to obtain certified copies of birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates. (Order #159P-\$1.50).

For ordering free booklets only, address your request to S. James. If your order any sales booklets, send your order to R. Woods at Consumer Information Center - Z, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, Colorado 81002.

**American Jewish Historical Society National Conference** will be held June 13-14, 1987 at Boston Park Plaza Hotel in Boston, MA. For further information and/or registration material, write to TJHS, P.O. Box 50501, Austin, TX 78763.

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