



NEWSLETTER

P.O. BOX 50501 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78763

JANUARY 1989

ROPE WALKER'S TOMBSTONE

(Source: Rabbi Ernest Joseph of Corsicana)

In the Hebrew Cemetery at Corsicana, Texas, there is a most unusual gravestone. Only two words are engraved on it: namely, "ROPE WALKER".

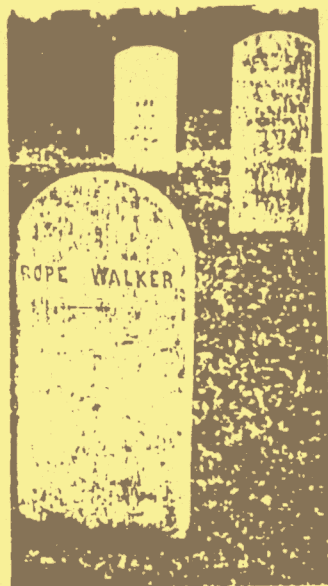
Several years ago Frank X. Tolbert of the Dallas Morning News wrote in his column, Tolbert's Texas, that as a service to history something should be done about the Rope Walker's memorial...a state historical marker might be put on the gravestone, telling in brief of the strange death of the Rope Walker.

This total stranger came to Corsicana on a "Trade's Day" in 1884. He may have been a stove salesman or a tight rope walker, or both. He did have a wooden peg leg. The stranger stretched a wire two stories up about Beaton Street from the southeast corner of Collins Street to the opposite northwest corner and proceeded to walk the tight rope on his one good leg with a cook stove strapped to his back and a long bar in his hands to balance himself.

When just about half way across, he lost his balance and fell to the street, badly crushed by the weight of the stove on his back. He was picked up and carried to a nearby hotel where Dr. J.T.Gulick, a pioneer physician, attended him.

The Rope Walker said that he was a Methodist and would like to see a preacher. Abe Mulkey, a famous evangelist, was called and he prayed for the injured man. When Reverend Mulkey asked the Rope Walker for his name, he was strangely silent; he turned his head and did not answer. He was asked about his home and family and again did not answer.

Finally, when the man realized that the end was near and that he soon would have to face his Maker, he looked at those around him and said to the doctor: "Doc, I wish to talk with a Jew; I am Jewish."



Walker's tombstone, Corsicana, Tex.

The strange story of the man who had denied his faith till death stared him in the eye soon spread all over town. A Jewish merchant was called to his bedside - there being no rabbi in Corsicana at the time.

The merchant requested that the dying man repeat a certain prayer, which the Rope Walker did IN EXCELLENT HEBREW! As soon as he finished the prayer, the Rope Walker died without ever giving his name or any other information about himself.

The Jewish people of Corsicana buried him and put only this simple inscription on his tombstone--"ROPE WALKER".

**TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1989 ANNUAL GATHERING SCHEDULE, MARCH 10-12
A JEWISH JOURNEY TO JEFFERSON**

This year our yearly "Gathering" will be in Jefferson March 10 - 12. Audrey and Louis Kariel, Jr. are doing a wonderful job of arranging what promises to be one of our most exciting Gatherings. Although notices have gone out, we remind you to get your registration and reservation in - if you have not already done so. Registration will begin on Friday afternoon, to be followed by dinner. Friday evening services will be held in the Old Jewish Synagogue with an Oneg Shabbat following the services.

Dr. Louis Schmier, Professor of History at Valdosta State College in Georgia, will be our Scholar-in-Residence for the weekend. His knowledge of South Jewish experience will add to our enjoyment of this year's meeting.

The subject of Saturday morning's session will be TEXAS JEWISH HISTORY IN THE MAKING. The topic of Jan Statman's address will be 'Raisins and Almonds and Oil, Jews of the East Texas Oil Boom'. She will be followed by by Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter discussing 'Discovering Texas Jewish History'.

There will be plenty of time in the afternoon to tour the town of Jefferson.

Saturday evening's activities will begin with a reception at the Galley Pub followed by a Banquet. The speaker will be Dr Louis Schmier, Professor of History at Valdosta State College, Valdosta, Georgia. His topic: 'Yes, Virginia, There Are Jews in the South'. (Copies of Dr. Schmier's book, REFLECTIONS OF SOUTHERN JEWRY, will be available to be purchased - and autographed.

Sunday's session starts with a Continental Breakfast followed by a session entitled A CHALLENGE, JEFFERSON'S JEWISH COMMUNITY. This session will be chaired by Louis Kariel, Jr. Dr. Louis Schmier will discuss 'Pitfalls of Writing Community History'. A panel discussion will follow with participants being descendants of Jefferson's Jewish Community.

PARTICIPANTS ARE TO MAKE THEIR OWN HOTEL ARRANGEMENTS. Registration which includes Friday dinner, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast is \$80.00 per person. Individual meals will be:

Friday evening - \$25.00
Saturday banquet - \$30.00
Sunday breakfast - \$5.00

Registration without meals is \$50.00 per person. For more information please contact Audry or Louis Kariel Jr., 503 Lansdowne, Marshall, Texas 75670. Phone: 214) 935-5387

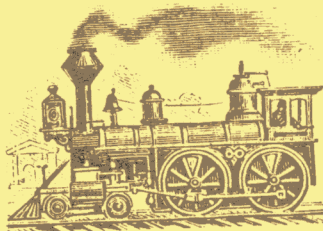
IF YOU NEED KOSHER MEALS - OR ANY SPECIAL DIET PLEASE NOTIFY AUDREY KARIEL BEFORE MARCH 1ST.

Registration for Gathering:

Name
Address
City
Phone #

I will arrive about _____ (time). I have/will make reservations at (name of hotel or bed and breakfast).

Check enclosed.



JEWISH COMMUNITY IN FRONTIER JEFFERSON

(The following items are from an essay by Carol Tefteller, a former student at Jefferson High School. It was the first place winner in the State Junior Historian Essay Contest in 1974.)

...Wherever the Jew settled the community was prosperous. This was the case in Jefferson, a thriving commercial center at a crossroads of steamboat and wagon routes to early Texas, allowed the Jewish merchant to reestablish his business. His participations in the local economy symbolized an era of rise, then decline. Israel Leavitt, the town's first Jewish businessman, operated a tavern in 1845 only one year after the formal establishment of Jefferson...

...Records from the Cass County Commissioners Court in 1847 state that Leavitt's tavern served as a temporary courthouses...

...United States Census, Cass County, Texas in 1850 records...twenty seven entries in Jefferson. Of these a total of 8% were Jews including August May, Abram Kohn, August Lampracht, Charles Shad, and A. G. Snider...

...(Mayer) Dopplemayer's "new house in Jefferson" was used for Cass County district court meetings. A brother, Dan, arrived in town and became part of a confectionary business. The Jewish influx continued and Jacob Sterne from Prussia and Isaac Pinski arrived in the steamboat town before 1860...

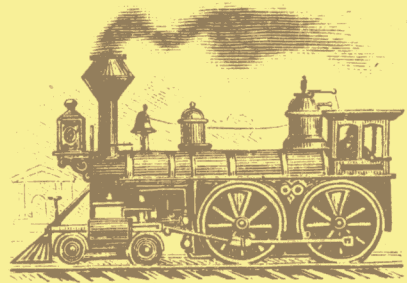
...By May 1862, a Hebrew Benevolent Association functioned in Jefferson. Under the leadership of Jacob Sterne, they founded the Mount Sinai Cemetery, the fourth oldest Jewish cemetery in Texas. Under the auspices of the Hebrew Benevolent Society, "the Jewish congregation in Jefferson ranks second in age throughout the state, following Houston (1854) and its synagogue...

...By 1880 the town's population had decreased from its 1873 peak of about 8,000 to a total of 1,331...only twenty-six Jewish households remained in Jefferson...Jefferson's final Jewish legacy was the Goldberg family. On June 21, 1923, 81 businesses were closed for the funeral of J. L. Goldberg. Only F. Eldridge, I. Lipman, J. Moss and Stutz Bakery participated in the Jewish rites...

...Listings in the Occupation Tax Ledger for late 1865 include Wolf and Rosenberg, F. Stutz, and Ney and Brothers. The "dry goods merchant" soon became identified as the "Jew store; and included Morris Cohn, M. J. Frankenthal, and N.A. Jacobs. H. Mays operated a confectionary shop and Frederick Stutz and Morris Cohn were taxed as dealers in "liquors vinairens." New Jewish peddlers during late 1865 included Edward Wrighs, A. Ludwigs, and James Coyle...

...During this three-year (1870-72) growth period the percentage of Jewish merchants in the town reached 26%...

...On June 2, 1873, a group of Jewish leaders organized and were "elected as a body corporate of the Hebrew Sinai Congregation" in Jefferson...On November 11, 1875, the Hebrew Congregation of Jefferson called a meeting to ...purchase property owned by the Catholic Sisters...



TEXAS JEWS, A PICTORIAL HISTORY

By Ruthe Winegarten

The Texas Jewish Historical Society is sponsoring a major book whose working title is 'Texas Jews, a Pictorial History'. It is scheduled for publication by Eakin Press of Austin in the fall of 1990. Co-authors include Dr. (and Rabbi) Jimmy Kessler, Cathy Schechter, and myself. The book is handsomely designed in a 9x12 coffee table format and will contain over 500 photographs. We are pleased to report that Jews from dozens of communities all across the state (and nationally) have submitted photographs, biographical and family information, and histories of their congregations and towns.

All information and photographs collected will ultimately be deposited in the Society's Archives at the Barker Center, The University of Texas at Austin. One of the major features of the book includes a section of movers and shakers from the Post-World War II period: approximately 100 Texas Jews will be highlighted from all walks of life - business, the arts, politics, civic and volunteer activities, and education. In addition, a special section on "Rituals and Celebrations", including weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, seders of years past, etc. will be of special interest.

During 1988, I have made dozens of trips to museums, libraries, and archives, and have visited with many individuals to discuss their personal and family histories. I have had the pleasure of speaking in communities before groups as diverse as the Longview Friends of the Public Library, Waco Hadassah, the 75th anniversary of Wharton's Shearith Israel, Ahavath Achim in Tyler, the JCC and Hadassah in Corpus Christi, Temple AAUW, and the Shabbat afternoon group at the Goldberg Towers in Houston. I have visited Brownsville and Harlingen. I have been to Baylor University,

the Houston Public Library, Houston Beth Israel, San Antonio's Institute of Texan Cultures, Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, and Fort Worth's Beth El, among others. Kay Goldman and I visited the Luling Jewish Cemetery and their local library. I have written to several hundred correspondents both in Texas and around the country whose descendants are Texan, and our files are bulging with their letters and photographs. The response has been tremendous, and one and all have been most cooperative.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

by Ruthe Winegarten

The National Museum in Philadelphia, excited about the work of the Society, has scheduled an exhibit on Texas Jews, to open in May, 1990 and run through October, 1990. The exhibit will be available to tour the nation (and of course Texas). If your community or institution would be interested in booking the exhibit, please contact Ruthe Winegarten, Box 49084, Austin Tx, 78765. Tel: 512)453-7919

JEWISH HISTORY PRESERVED IN TULSA

Inside the softly lit museum, people speak in hushed tones. It's not that they aren't allowed to speak louder, but somehow it doesn't seem right. The museum's collection of artifacts demands respect - some items have survived thousands of years.

At the Gershon & Rebecca Fenster Museum of Jewish Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, resides a collection of about 1,500 objects - from clay oil lamps dating back to 1300 B.C. to modern handwoven wool tapestries made by Jewish artist Reuven Ruben.

Some of the best Jewish artisans have come out of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem, founded by Booris Schatz in 1906. A brass cabinet made at the school and signed by Schatz is on display. Director Annette Fromm explains, "Bezalel is the biblical artist credited with creating the Ark of the Covenant. You see the ark on the cabinet door as well as the seven-branched lamp, or menorah. Around the sides are different scenes from Jewish ritual life".

The cabinet was the first piece that the museum acquired after it was founded in 1966. Named after Gershon Fenster, an immigrant from Lithuania who supported Tulsa arts and Jewish culture, the museum attracts both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors.

In order to preserve the history of the Jewish

experience in Oklahoma, the museum has begun the Oklahoma Jewish Archives Project. Along with documents and photographs, this collection includes such historical items as a prayer book printed in Poland around 1795 and brought to Tulsa in 1938, brass lampstands from a synagogue in Muskogee, and a dowry chest that a Jewish family brought to Oklahoma from Germany in the 1930's.

Another tradition revolves around the ketubah, or marriage contract. Pointing at the beautifully decorated paper, Fromm says, "It lays out what property the woman brings to the wedding, and it also states what the responsibility of the husband is to her".

Also on display at the museum are wedding dresses, including a 19 century one made in Morocco of velvet stitched with goldleaf thread. "She not only wore the dress on her wedding day but for the rest of her life on festive days", says Fromm. "This is unlike our white dresses that we hang up afterward and let turn yellow. They just didn't have the money to keep buying fancy clothes."

Rituals such as wedding are an important part of the Jewish culture, and often the symbolic objects used in ceremonies become treasured works of art. The museum has many examples of such works - ornate brass and silver Hanukkah lamps, unique spice boxes employed in a ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath, and Torah scrolls containing the five books of Moses.

The museum is open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m., or by appointment. For details write the museum at 1223 East 17th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74120.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In our last issue we published a story about the poetry of Rabbi H. Schwartz from Navasota and how his decedent finally saw some of his poetry. As the happy ending of the story was missing, we are now able to reveal it. In summary:

An unidentified German document was on display at the Barker Center during our viewing while at the Gathering in March, 1988. On seeing the document, Barbara Rubin and Shirley Shuster (of Fort Worth) took a copy to be translated by their friend, Alex Magnus. The document was a commentary on Talmud written as poetry by Rabbi H. Schwartz (from Navasota) who had apparently sent his poetry to Rabbi Cohen of Galveston. Ruthe Winegarten, while visiting with Barbara Rubin, saw the document. She realized that its author, Rabbi Schwartz, was Cathy Schechter's great, great, great uncle. Ruthe therefore took a copy of the translation back to Cathy. Cathy had heard about her "great, great, great poet uncle", but had never seen his work. Now, thanks to our members, Barbara, Shirley and Alix, Cathy has a copy of this treasured document in her possession. Our heartfelt thanks to our members and associate for their efforts.

ONLY YOU CAN DELIVER THE 'GOODS'

The 'goods' are names of potential members that may be interested in being a part of the ongoing discovery of our Jewish Texas Roots.

You can help by sending 'good' leads for the membership committee to contact.

If you're too busy to write out names, addresses, and phone numbers, just send a membership roster from a local community organization with hot prospects starred.

Does any organization in your community need a speaker? A member of the membership committee would visit in your community. Someone could host a koffee klatch for at least a dozen prospects. Let the membership committee acquaint your friends with the interesting work that we are all doing to rediscover the Texas Jewish past.

Volunteer - or send your list to:

Fay Brachman
3720 Autumn Drive
Fort Worth, Texas 76109
Tel: 817) 924 9207

1989 ESSAY CONTEST ANNOUNCEMENT

The Texas Jewish Historical Society will sponsor its annual essay contest this spring. The contest is open to elementary, junior high school, day school and religious school students.

This year's topics will be GROWING UP JEWISH IN TEXAS or CELEBRATIONS AND HOLIDAYS - TEXAS STYLE.

The prizes are \$50.00 first place and \$25.00 second place - in each category. (No posters, please.)

Your entries must be in by May 1, 1989. Prizes will be announced by the end of the school year.

Entry forms and further information will be sent to day school and religious schools throughout Texas. If you need further information, please send your requests - and entries - to:

Texas Jewish Historical Society Essay Contest
P O Box 50501
Austin, Texas 78763

IMPORTANT NOTICE

In keeping with our Bi-Laws, we have sent a copy of the proposed revisions to our membership. These revisions are to be voted on at our March Gathering in Jefferson. If you are a member in good standing and have not received a copy, please write to: President, Ginger Jacobs, 7060 Brookshire, Dallas, Tx. 75230, or to Membership Chairperson, Fay Brachman, 3720 Autumn Drive, Ft. Worth, Tx. 76109. YOU WILL RECEIVE A COPY. We may have missed you. We are now on a calendar year of Jan 1 to Jan 1 for membership. As we are early into the '89 year', we tried to include all paid up in '88' and trust those who need to renew for '89' will do so immediately. If we have overlooked you, we are sorry. Those who are unable to be at the Gathering are welcome to write us their vote prior to the Gathering.

NEWS ITEM

As we go to press, we are happy to announce that Herberg (Herb) and Phyllis Kadish of Austin have agreed to help with the administration of the TJHS at this time. Herb and Phyll, who are recent retirees, have a broad background in organizational work, and we are fortunate to have them.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE -- Some thoughts on our personal histories in relation to Texas history and the Society.

In organizing the Texas Jewish Historical Society, our intent is to support and participate in research, document and preserve the Jewish experience in Texas. This to me means we have all participated in Texas history. With this attitude, Texas history incorporates our personal stories as this is where we live. I have always found it fascinating that no matter where we Jews are, we are busy making a contribution to the life and lifestyle of the community at large. Be it the physical building, the political or cultural arena we Jews are well represented.

Through active participation in the TJHS we are telling and preserving our own stories which our children and grandchildren need to be aware of - and appreciate - if we are to have a future. I feel that we are the sum total of our collective history. Being proud of our heritage, it is our collective privilege to share our experiences



MEMBERSHIP DUES (RENEWAL)

Notices have been mailed for membership renewal. Our fiscal year is January 1 to January 1. If you have not sent in your membership renewal, please do so at this time. Fill out the form below, and mail to:

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

CLASSIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP: \$10 - Junior Historian (18 and under), \$25 - Member, \$50 Supporting Member, \$100 - Sponsor and organizations, \$250 - Sustaining, \$500 - Benefactor, \$1000 - Patron
Please make checks payable to Texas Jewish Historical Society. Contributions to the Texas Jewish Historical Society are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

FAMILY HISTORY IN TEXAS

Our family Texas History began _____ with my _____
year Relationship

_____ who first settled in _____
Name City or Town


with our decendants.

As a result of our survey of Jews in Texas towns, we are now publishing a book about Texas Jewry. Ruthe Winegarten, "author in residence" has had a wonderful response from the many people she has contacted. She reports that she now has enough material for three books. We are certainly encouraged by the support and response - but we also need the moral support of a broad membership and participation by that membership. Each and everyone of us is important to our survival and growth. Being Jewish is an exciting experience. We owe it to ourselves and to our future generations to record, share, and preserve our stories.

Be an ambassador for us - ask your friends to join.

All good wishes to all of you for a healthy and happy New Year!

Sincerely,


Ginger Jacobs

WHERE'S YOUR FAMILY?

Is your family's memorabilia in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection at the Barker Texas History Center in Austin? Send copies of birth, marriage, death, Bar/Bas Mitzvah, confirmation certificates, family histories, properly identified pictures, programs, newspaper articles, business records, etc. Be sure to itemize and describe the records. Send the mailing to:

Dr. Don Carleton
Barker Texas History Center
Texas Jewish Hist.Soc.Collection
Sid Richardson Hall 2.101
University of Texas
Austin, Texas 78713



"There he was, a lone man with a wooden leg on a tight wire, a cookstove on his back and a block to go. The crowd was stunned. Slowly the man came with a stride born of endless practice."

Texas Jewish Historical Society
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