



NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 10193

Austin, Texas 78766-0193

WINTER 1992

1992 ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

Three outstanding essays were winners of top prizes in the 1992 Essay Contest for Middle School students. This year's contest was chaired by Ellen Mack. The topic, "Growing Up in Texas," brought forth a large number of contest entries, all of which showed a sincere interest in the history and culture of the Jewish people who came to Texas.

In the three-way tie for first place are:

Alex Chausovsky for his essay "This is a True Story of Me and My Family Moving From Russia to America". Alex was in the 7th grade of Akiba Academy, Dallas.

Yaacov Cohen for his essay "From Europe to America God Bless Our Country, The Memoirs of Selma Shlachter". Yaacov was also in the 7th grade of Akiba Academy.

Terry Schuster for his essay and video tape "Memories of Jacob de Cordova". Terry was in the 5th grade at the Fort Worth Hebrew Day School.

Each first place winner received a \$50 check for

himself and one for his school and a copy of *DEEP IN THE HEART*, a TJHS publication.

The judges were delighted with the quality of all the contest entries, all of which showed a sincere interest in the history and culture of the Jewish people who came to Texas. The selection process was difficult as each entry showed ability and creativity. The ability of the essay writers demonstrates the talent of their teachers.

Runners up who received copies of *DEEP IN THE HEART* were Brent Buchine and Ben Tatham from B'rith Shalom in Houston for "Harris Kempner's Diary" and Yonatan Wolk from Akiba Academy for his historical fiction based on the life of Rabbi Emmich.

Because of the interest expressed by many of the contestants in their family's out-of-Texas roots, the selected topic for 1993 is "Gateway To Texas". Entries should describe the students', an ancestor's, or a friend's journey that culminated in their family's migration to Texas. It will be an opportunity to explore the many decades and the various roots that led to the present Texas Jewish community. Schools will receive information about the contest from 1993 chairman, Barbara Rubin of Fort Worth.

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR ANNUAL GATHERING

by Barbara Rosenberg

We are planning for our annual Gathering in San Antonio on March 12-14, 1993. This will be our Bar Mitzvah year, so it should be very special.

If you have some *new* history to present in the form of a paper, a video, pictorial exhibit, or any other creative media, we would love to hear from you! Current plans are to focus on the city of San Antonio and its surroundings, with pre-

sentations about people or organizations significant to San Antonio, particularly during the early days of Texas. Other ideas for presentations might include Jews in the Arts, Jews in the Political Arena, or the impact of the military bases on Jewish life in San Antonio. Please remember that our presentations run the gamut from personal anecdotes to scholarly presentations.

If you have a particular request or suggestion for the program (perhaps an interesting tour you know about), please let us know as soon as possible. Bill and Judy Munter are in charge of the local arrangements, and I am planning the program. *To request a place on the program, please write or call me at 219 Lombardy, Sugar Land, TX 77478, (713) 494-2668.* See you in San Antonio.

WACO MEETING

Ima Joy Gandler and Sam Harelik were the co-chairmen of the September meeting in Waco September 12 & 13. The meeting was held at the Hilton Hotel, which overlooks the beautiful 19th century Roebling-designed suspension bridge over the Brazos River and the historical marker to Jacob de Cordova.

A highlight of the weekend was the "Life in Old Waco" oral history session and Havdallah service at Congregation Agudath Jacob. In

front of a very full room Alvin L. Adelman, a TJHS member for only 10 days, presented a report on the life of Jacob de Cordova. Several older citizens of Waco: Ruth Englander Jacobs, Joe Ellis, Bessie Zoblotsky, and the unforgettable David Hoppenstein, told about their early lives in Waco. They answered many questions from the audience which included members of the society as well as many Waco residents. Vernon Woolf, a new mem-

ber, video taped and photographed the sessions.

On Sunday morning we settled down to business at an Open Board Meeting, which was held at the hotel. Many Wacoans attended. Reports on the major topics discussed are included in this newsletter.

We appreciate the time and effort given by Ima Joy Gandler and Sam Harelik in our behalf for a well organized and enjoyable weekend.

INFORMATION

By Don Teter

OLD JEWISH CEMETERY IN LAGRANGE RENOVATED

On Sunday, Sept. 13, 17 youths from Congregation Beth Israel in Houston and Congregation Beth Israel In Austin did a hard day's work in LaGrange. Accompanied by their youth directors and Rabbi and Mrs. Matthew Eisenberg of Houston Beth Israel, students met at the old Jewish cemetery located on the residential property of Dr. and Mrs. Mike McBroom in LaGrange. Brian Sergeant and David Vogel of La Grange furnished tools and refreshments. With strong bodies and enthusiasm the young people accomplished the complete cleanup of the cemetery. They removed roots, vines and much debris, replaced stones and raised and cleaned monuments.

Rabbi Eisenberg explained the significance of the Mitzvah of caring for graves and at the completion of the day's labors held a memorial

service reciting the Kaddish for those buried there. Mr. and Mrs. Vogel hosted everyone at their farm for lunch and recreation.

Family names in the cemetery are: Gans, Lewis, Zander, Hellman, Alexander, Sass, Szmiderski, Rosenthal and Ostrowski. Brian Sergeant is continuing the project by having a monument company level, repair and clean the damaged and leaning tombstones. *Funds to offset this cost of about \$500 would be greatly appreciated and can be sent to David Vogel, Rt. 3, Box 121E, LaGrange, TX 78945.*

The McBrooms purchased the property including the cemetery and built a beautiful home. They have kept the cemetery mowed. Their deed states that families and visitors are to be granted access to the cemetery. They have been very gracious, and we are most appreciative of their cooperation.

[Contact Gertrude and Don Teter at (713) 424-5829]

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter is a publication of The Texas Jewish Historical Society, P. O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193.

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ARCHIVES COMPLETELY CATALOGUED

Austin volunteer, Ruth Ginsburg, has completed the cataloguing of our archives at the Barker History Center at the University of Texas, Austin. Ruth has spent countless hours arranging and cataloguing the many items sent to the archives. We are grateful for her work.

Members are requested to continue sending ORIGINAL material to me at: 5013 Glenhaven, Baytown, TX 77521. These materials will be sorted and forwarded to the Barker Library in Austin. Materials most desired are family histories, documents, articles of accomplishment by Jewish people, pictures with identifications, and anything else that illustrates Jewish life and accomplishment in Texas, both past and present. We need to preserve current events!

All Jewish organizations such as synagogues, historical societies, Hadassah, B'nai B'rith, ORT, etc. which maintain their own archives are requested to send a list of their holdings and their location to me. This information will be available at the Barker Center so that researchers will know what is available. This also will help to prevent duplication.

ORAL HISTORY CHAIRMAN REPORT

by Helen K. Wilk

One of the most important projects of TJHS is recording oral histories. I would like to see every community have a team of people who are trained to do this. But I do not know whom to contact in each city to begin the process. Will you help by providing me by telephone or by letter with the name of someone in

your city who would be interested? I will contact them and set up a time to conduct a training session in their community.

The elements of the project are: cassette taping interviews, transcribing tapes into written documents, and providing copies of tapes and transcriptions to the Barker History Center in Austin,

and also creating local archives in each community.

Please contact me by telephone or mail if you can help in any way.

Helen Wilk, 260 Cape Aron, Corpus Christi, TX 78412 (512) 853-0237 (work) or (512) 991-1118 (home).

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON DOING ORAL HISTORIES

by Helen K. Wilk

Here are a few details I have learned from my oral history taping experiences. I hope they will make the task easier and more enjoyable for you.

Use a clip-on microphone for your subject and for yourself. You can buy these mikes and the "Y" connector that allows you to use two mikes at the same time at Radio Shack. This provides the best voice reproduction possible.

Use 60 minute tapes. Longer tapes are thinner and tend to break.

Before you begin a tape session explain some simple hand signals to be used by you or your subject, i.e. hold up hand in stop gesture to pause tape.

Warn subject not to tap the mike as it will interfere with the sound.

Let your subject choose where to sit so he/she will be comfort-

able, then place yourself close by with good eye and hearing contact.

Being friendly, warm and relaxed, will help your subject respond in the same way.

If your subject wants to tell you something "off the record" honor the request. Turn off the recorder and after you hear what they want to say privately if the information seems important ask them to add it to the tape in an edited version.

Always respect the subject's choice and do not press them to record anything about which they feel uncomfortable.

Try to keep a sense of chronology, occasionally inquire about the date of an event that the person is describing, and proceed in order whenever possible.

Descriptions of places and events, as they remember them, are important. Ask questions like: what did your village look like? What was

Waco, Brenham, etc. like when you arrived? Were streets paved, what street did you live on, what school did you attend and where was it located? Where was the synagogue and was there a religious school? Who taught?

After the taping always make copies of the tapes so there are more than just the originals. (TJHS will help cover the cost of all these tapes.)

Work with one subject alone so the only voices heard are yours and the subject's.

We have guidelines, questions to ask and formats to use. I will be glad to organize a training session in your community if there are volunteers who want to join this fascinating and important project.

Oral histories continue to be our top priority. Without them, our unique Jewish history will be lost and gone forever.

Report from the President...

Happy New Year! It is my hope that this New Year will be filled with good health, happiness, and peace for you and your loved ones.

Recently, Ellen Kurtzman, Mildred Klimist and I have been involved in a 'labor of love'. Our congregation, Ahavath Sholom, is celebrating its 100th Anniversary this fall. It was decided by the congregation that such an event should be made known to the community – that we should have a historical marker placed

at the synagogue and cemetery of the congregation.

In order to apply for the marker, we had to write a history of the congregation. We were able to find the first old ledger book that contained the minutes of the meeting that formed the congregation. The yellowed, frayed pages told the story. It listed the names of the 'members' present, told where the meeting was held, listed the officers who were duly elected, and even included the dues

structure – \$6.00 per family/per year. (This sum of money could be paid out monthly!).

That first record of the congregation, the minutes of that first meeting – was written and signed by the appointed secretary for the occasion – my grandfather, Ben Levenson.

What a thrill to see his writing even though it was in Yiddish (which I cannot read)! It was a thrill that I will long remember.

Fay

The Handbook of Texas

by Douglas Barnett

The Texas Jewish Historical Society is participating in the revision of the HANDBOOK OF TEXAS, a three volume encyclopedia of Texas history and biographical directory. Originally published in 1952 by the Texas State Historical Association, the HANDBOOK is the primary reference work on Texas history. It has been under revision since 1982, with a six volume revised edition planned for publication in the fall of 1995. Among important improvements in the new HANDBOOK will be greatly expanded coverage of Texas Jewish History.

The TJHS board and members of the society heard from Douglas Barnett, managing editor of the HANDBOOK OF TEXAS, at the September 13 board meeting in Waco. He reported that work on the revision is progressing well and that the project is on schedule for publication in the fall of 1995. As of

September 1, 1992 approximately 80% of the articles anticipated in the revised edition had been written and almost 70% of them had been edited. The next three years will be devoted to completing the entries and preparing the text for publication. In addition to an expanded number and range of entries, the new HANDBOOK will include illustrations and an analytical index.

The TJHS has been an active participant in the HANDBOOK project members, a number of entries have already been prepared for the new edition, and a large number of additional topics have been suggested to the project's editors for consideration. Barnett reported that these topics have been forwarded to the project's advisory editor for Jewish history, Rabbi Jimmy Kessler of Temple B'nai Israel in

Galveston, for evaluation and that he expects to receive recommendation from Rabbi Kessler in the near future.

As soon as the topics have been approved, Barnett will send a copy to the TJHS along with information on submitting entries for anyone that would be interested in writing articles for the revised HANDBOOK.

The TJHS has established a HANDBOOK subcommittee to assist in locating authors for the articles on Texas Jewish history that remain to be prepared. Mr. Sam Harelik will chair the committee and coordinate the Society's efforts on this project. ***Individuals interested in writing entries for the new HANDBOOK or in learning more about the project are encouraged to contact Mr. Harelik at 2517 North 42nd Street, Waco, Texas 76710.***

First Place 1992 Winning Essays

“TRIP TO A NEW HOME”

This is a true story of me and my family moving to America from Russia!!

by Alex Chausovsky

Dear Diary:

November 6, 1989

Today we had to go to the ticket office to get coupons for food, but anyway there isn't any food in the stores. Oh! How long I haven't had a nice sausage with ketchup or a piece of fish. Even a piece of cheese would be very nice.

November 7, 1989

Today I found some fine, juicy chicken in the store. They were selling it for five rubles (Russian money) a pound, and the seller had to keep the last one for himself and his family. It gets me so mad! After standing in line for two hours you don't get anything.

November 11, 1989

Mama said that she can't take it any longer and that we have to leave this unhappy country. When Papa came home he agreed with her. Today he received his paycheck, and after working as hard as a cow for a month he only got five hundred rubles.

November 15, 1989

We haven't decided where to go yet, but I know that it is going to be Israel, Canada, or the U.S.A. I know I'm a little selfish but I hope it's Canada because Uncle Alex and our little cousins Dima and Yana live there. I and Eugene (my younger brother) always play with them.

November 26, 1989

We just got an answer from the Russian government in Moskow that we are allowed to leave the country! Mama and Papa got so happy they started dancing with each other, but when Grandma heard she started crying because she didn't want us to leave.

December 1, 1989

My Papa talked to me and said "Son, I am going to tell you why we are leaving this country. We are doing it for you. So you can go to a better school, a better college and get a good job. We do not want you to have such a hard time like us," and tears started to show in his eyes. "But that is not the most important reason why we brought you here," he said. "The main reason is because I want you to be a good Jew," and he started crying. "Here you cannot attend a service, you cannot pray, you cannot even sing Jewish songs," and he walked out of the room.

December 10, 1989

We got our train tickets to Austria today! I'm so excited! This is going to be the longest train "ride" I have ever been to. The tickets are scheduled on the 12th of February of 1990, but I'm very afraid because there has been a saying that there will be a pogrom on the 10th of February.

December 24, 1989

We got a letter from the government saying that we are only allowed to take two suitcases and one bag per person. My Papa was very mad at the government for that, but Mama just said that we will have to leave most of our belongings.

February 12, 1990

Today we got all good news. First the saying of the pogrom was all a lie and so nobody got hurt, and second, our train for Austria leaves today!! I am very happy but I promised not to get anyone tired with my excitement. I am excited but I am also very sad because I do not want to leave my grandparents, my friends, and this country after the ten years that we have lived here.

February 14, 1990

Just arrived in Austria. When we went out of the train we saw the real capitalist life; so much food! I wanted to buy everything that my eyes could see, but right now we only have enough money for necessary things, like food, shelter and clothing.

April 29, 1990

After staying in Austria for two and a half months I got a little more used to the capitalist life. Now I don't scream when I go into a store, I don't faint when I see fifty different flavors of ice cream, and I don't even get goose bumps when I see five different kinds of bubble gum.

April 30, 1990

We will be leaving for Italy in a few days, where they will decide what country we are going to. Right now I have two different feelings. One is that I'm just getting used to the German language and I don't want to leave Austria, but the other tells me "Go, find out, explore!"

May 6, 1990

We're on a train to Italy, and my G-d, I have not seen a train so beautiful in all my life of ten years. On the outside it's just like a Russian train but on the inside it is much more prettier. It has leather seats and pictures; it even has an air conditioner.

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May 18, 1990

After staying in Italy for a few days and looking around, I am thinking to myself that Italy is the most beautiful country I have ever seen: it is sunny, it is surrounded by water, and I just got a bike which I ride everyday.

July 15, 1990

After a month in Italy we decided to start saving up some money because we heard many times that life without a car in America is nothing, so we decided that all of us except my brother Eugene will do a little working. I decided to wash cars like most of my other friends did, Mama was going to sell pictures which Papa was going to draw. We decided to start the next day.

August 3, 1990

Today the Italians are celebrating some kind of a holiday, and both me and Mama earned about twenty milia (dollars) each. My papa was very happy about that so he took us out for ice cream in the evening.

August 31, 1990

Today we started to go to "exogna" (gathering) where they call out people's names and tell them what country they are going to. They only called out a few people at a time and we

know that we are not going to get it but the weather is beautiful and it is nice walking outside.

October 25, 1990

Finally! After five months, seven days, forty-two minutes and seventeen seconds (but who's counting?), at the gathering our name got called out and we were told that we are going to Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.

November 1, 1990

It's 11:00 o'clock at night, we just arrived at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. We were greeted very warmly and were taken to our apartment.

November 2, 1990

When I woke up we found a mountain of presents for me and Eugene. In the afternoon we were met by the family that was going to support us and in the evening they took us out to dinner.

April 4, 1992

Right now I'm twelve years old, I go to a Jewish school, I go to Shul and pray, and I think that it's amazing that all of this happened because G-d and some good people wanted us to come to America.

"FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA - G-D BLESS OUR COUNTRY"

The Memoirs Of Selma Shlachter

by Yaacov Cohen

October 25, 1920

Dear Diary,

I am so cold, and my feet hurt so. Today is Monday, and it is raining so hard. It looks as if the skies have opened up. My Mama took the train to Warsaw again, and it looks as if we are never going to America. My Mama is a jobber. She buys men's, children's and women's clothing, and then brings it back and sells it. That is how we can support ourselves. Since Papa left to go to America, we have not received any money from him. It is very hard here. I am alone in the house with my sister, Hannah, and my brother, Yisroel. I am the baby of the family. My name is Selma. They are much older than I, and they try to take care of me when my Mama is not home. I can't wait for Mama to come home so she can tell me stories. I don't like to be bored. It is getting dark now. I think I'll go to sleep.

October 26, 1920

Dear Diary,

Today is Tuesday. I had a good day today! The sun came out, and it got a little warm outside. Biala is a beautiful town. A lot of nice people live here. Everyone around us is Jewish. I was born here. My Mama tells me that I was

delivered by a midwife. I really do not know how old I am. Mama says that I am maybe eight or nine years old. Biala is a town in Poland, and it is around 40 minutes by train to Warsaw - that's where Mama goes two or three times a week. Later this afternoon, my brother, Yisroel, came running in. He was very scared. He said that the Pogroms were coming. I asked him what that was, and he said that the Pogroms were a bunch of bad people that wanted to kill all the Jews. Sometimes they were Polish soldiers or Germans or Russians. We had to be careful not to get caught by them. That made me very scared. How I wish we could go to America and not have to be scared of anyone or anything.

October 28, 1920

Dear Diary,

So much happened yesterday that I did not have time to write. The Pogroms came to Biala yesterday. My brother and two of his friends were very scared, because they are old enough to go to the army. They don't want to go. We were scared that they would be found. We have an attic underneath our house, so they hid there. I, being the smallest one, was able to get in and out to bring them food. Today is Thursday. It is snowing outside. The snow is so thick and beautiful that it looks like a white cloud has been spread out.

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I am cold and hungry. Mama is not back yet. She went to Warsaw. She said that we need as much money as she can make, because we were going to go to America very soon. I stayed underneath with my brother and his friends. I was very scared all alone in the empty room that I called my house. I looked around and I saw the two cots and the double bed. I also saw the wooden table and chairs, the wooden tub where we wash our clothes and bodies, and our clay oven, where we baked and cooked. We have no wood or paper to burn today for heat. It is so cold. The snow outside is so beautiful and peaceful. It is so hard to believe that one minute things are so beautiful, and then things can be so ugly. My brother and his friends saw today in the square, a woman being cut to pieces, while still alive, by soldiers. No wonder people are hiding. I am tired now. I will close my eyes and dream of how wonderful it will be when we go to America. America: The Golden Medina.

October 31, 1920

Dear Diary,

Today is Sunday. I could not write on Friday or Saturday. It was a very busy few days for me. Friday it was an unusually warm winter day. Mama was getting ready for Shabbat. Mama is truly a Rebbitzin - a Yiddishe Mama. Mama's name is Rehume. Mama wears a sheitle - a wig to cover her hair. How she manages to take care of us! Mama is worried. Papa went to America to work, and to make money to send for us. We have not heard from him. Mama said it has been maybe seven or eight years. She is very scared I can tell. But what do I know? I am only a little girl. As I was saying, Friday was an unusually hot winter day. The snow was melting, and even though I was not allowed to go outside during the winter days, because my feet were always frozen, I wanted to go out to feel the sun on my face. I think the sun does something to me. I think I'm like a wild buck. I want to see and do everything. I got dressed early, while my Mama prepared for the Shabbat with my sister Hannah. I went to play with my friends. It was a beautiful day. When I returned, Mama had the table ready. The candles looked so beautiful. They made our house glow. I saw Mama's face which was so beautiful and full of life. As she blessed the candles, she looked at us and told us, "Soon my kinder, we will be in America." Saturday morning I woke up and together with my Mama, we walked to the synagogue - hand-in-hand. It took us about 50 minutes to walk. Mama went to synagogue every Saturday. If it was nice, I would go with her, and we would talk and have a good time. I love the Shabbat. Everything is so quiet and beautiful. It seems like the world stands still and nothing moves or changes. I feel sad when the Shabbat is over.

Today is Sunday and Mama told us that we are going to America! We are all very excited and when we asked her when, she looked at us and told us that we were to leave tomorrow to Warsaw, and then we were on our way. Oh dear diary, I am so happy. I am blowing out the candle, and I am closing my eyes, and I will dream of America.

Monday, November 1, 1920

Dear Diary,

Mama is very sad. My brother, Yisroel, can't come with us. The government will not let him leave. When Hannah, Mama and I boarded the train to Warsaw, Mama cried the whole time. Our aunt and uncle live in Warsaw. We came to their apartment, and it is very beautiful. They have a lot of money. They have a manufacturing company, which makes paper. I never met anyone so rich. They asked Mama if they could adopt me; I did not know what it meant. All I know is that I want to go to America with Mama. Today I went into this room. I did not know that it was a bathroom. Back in Biala we had an outhouse. I was scared to go all the way out to the outhouse all the time. Well, I flushed the commode many times - I did not know where the water was coming from. I think I spent almost the whole day in there. There is even electricity here. We had to burn candles in Biala. I don't have to worry about using too many candles any more. Good night.

Tuesday, November 2, 1920

Dear Diary,

It has been a horrible and tiresome journey. We left Warsaw on Tuesday evening, by train, to Antwerp, Belgium. Mama packed us food, and we were very excited. There were German soldiers with machine guns all around us. It was frightening. It was raining so much and the train ride was very uncomfortable. We had nothing to drink. I was so thirsty that I put my lips against the window of the train to moisten them. The train was full of people and soldiers - I was very scared of the soldiers. Tonight when we arrived at the train station, Mama bought me the biggest chocolate bar there was. I ate the whole thing. I thought to myself that heaven must have opened up - it was so good. We are going to stay here for about three or four weeks until we get papers to go to America.

Good night my friend.

Thursday, November 25, 1920

Dear Diary,

The day came and finally we boarded the ship that is taking us to America. We were sent to stay down below the deck. This is going to be our home until we reach America. There must be at least 150 people down here. We have cots to sleep on, and we are at least keeping warm. I am so excited. Mama does not look so good.

Friday, November 26, 1920

Dear Diary,

Mama was sick all day yesterday - sea sick. Before the Sabbath I stood guard to make sure that no one will see my Mama light the Shabbat candles. Somehow I think that I was scared in Biala, but now it is different. No one is going to hurt us on the way to America. I was very busy helping around. I will pick up the buckets for food, and carry them to the people. Everyday we get the same food - herring, boiled

potatoes, and pumpernickel bread. The week went by very fast. We had to stand in line with our own assigned buckets to get our food. I am a tomboy, and manage to keep busy by helping others.

Week of December 1 - December 7, 1920

Dear Diary,

I have been very busy. I had to see how the other people lived. The passengers on the upper deck - I mean. I managed to get to the upper deck and see. It is a world that I would only see in my dreams. People were dressed in gorgeous clothes. My mouth began to water as I got a glimpse of the food that they were eating. I heard the music of the orchestra. The sound was so beautiful - if only Mama could come up and hear it. Those were my thoughts while I sat on the steps. I let my dreams take over. How would it be when we came to America? A new place. It has to be good, since so many people are going there.

December 24, 1920

Dear Diary,

I sit here and I don't believe my eyes. The Statue of Liberty! We have finally arrived in New York Harbor, and we can't even leave the ship. I am so disappointed. I want so much to go out and walk the streets of America. We have to wait, because we are under quarantine. Someone on board the ship had typhoid. We will have to remain here for some time, until further notice. Well, at least we are here, and it should not be too much longer.

December 25, 1920

Dear Diary,

It is Hannukah. The Hadassah women sent us

Hannukah goodies. I enjoy the change. I ate different foods - chocolate and cookies. There are really nice women in America. How I wish they would let us out soon.

New Years 1921

Dear Diary,

One more week and they will let us out! They are lifting the quarantine. We were told today that we are going to be disembarking and going to port. Oh, please let the time go fast!

January 5, 1921

Dear Diary,

Today is a very happy day for all of us. We were picked up and taken through clearance to Ellis Island. Papa had paid the \$600 for us, and he was waiting for us in Dallas, Texas, his home. I was very disappointed. I asked Mama why we couldn't live in New York. Why did we have to go to Dallas, Texas? I am now sitting on a bench in Grand Central Station. We are going to take the train to Dallas. It is raining and storming. It is also very cold. I am very tired.

January 8, 1921

Dear Diary,

It was midnight on January sixth, when we boarded the train that was to bring us to Union Station in Dallas, Texas. It was a hard train ride - two days and two nights. I look back and remember someone asking me how I would recognize my Papa. I told him that my Papa is going to have a big tummy. To me, a big tummy meant a rich man. It turns out, that Papa is six feet tall, and is as skinny as a bone. The train arrived, as we waited for Mama to get off first. My sister followed and then I. Papa picked us up and took us home on Colby Street in his Model T Ford, which was shiny black.

“MEMORIES OF JACOB DE CORDOVA”

by Terry Schuster

Rebecca, Rebecca. You'll never guess what happened at work today. You are right, I never would guess, you do so many crazy things. We published a new weekly magazine. What is it about? It's about immigrants coming to Texas. What is it called? It's called *De Cordova's Herald and Immigration Guide*. Is that all you wanted to tell me? No, no, there's more. Phineas and I are going to move our business to Austin, the capital of Texas. We got special permission from Governor P.H. Bell. We've already decided that we are going to start a new weekly magazine. It's called *Southwestern America*. The first edition will be about the expulsion from Spain and how so many of them immigrated to the Southwestern states. It will be wonderful. I just know it will. Oh, I'm so happy for you.

Dear diary, just the other day I heard my husband talking. As usual he wasn't talking to me, but to the tax collectors. Mr.

De Cordova you own one million acres of land and you owe almost one million dollars. I told you already I have no money, I spent it all on my half-brother Phineas's very, very, very expensive funeral. I never want to die, it costs too much. There is no excuse for owning so many acres of land and not even paying a penny of taxes. You can be thrown in jail for doing such a thing. As a matter of fact, you have a choice: you can pay right now or you can go to jail. But, but. No buts about it.

That wasn't the only time I heard him talking to someone about problems. Why just last month I heard him talking to his grandfather, may he rest in peace.

I'm really sorry, Gramps. I let you down, didn't I? I've got a crummy life and a crummy job, and I've got no money. I should have followed your example. You had a good job, a

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teacher. I could have been a teacher like you. You always told me I could be whatever I wanted, but I had to be the best at it. No, I wouldn't be a good teacher. I hate school. How could I possibly teach it?

Not too long ago Jacobe published three significant books that stimulated immigration to Texas. One thing led to another and before you knew it he promoted the state of Texas on lecture tours to London, New York, Brooklyn, Newark, and Philadelphia. Everything was paid for so Jacobe didn't need to travel to so many places. The kids didn't come with us. I sat through an hour and a half of Jacobe talking five times in a row, I practically memorized it.

Now think, if you were an immigrant coming to Texas, what

would be some things that you would say when you got here? I came here as a pioneer and these are some things I said when I got here. This is the hottest place I've ever been in. It's also very humid. For some reason, I guess to make fun of my wife and me because we are from another country, they call us *y'all*. I remember the day after I got here I was walking in the street and I came upon three little girls. They looked about eight or nine. They were probably going to school. They looked at me, then poked at each other and laughed. I've always wondered what their little joke was, maybe one of them had a crush on me. I've always thought I was attractive.

And here I will say good-bye diary at 7:00 P.M. on Monday night, March 28, 1851.

Runner Up 1992 Winning Essays

"Harris Kempner's Diary"

by Brent Buchine, Ben Tatham

January 2, 1844

I know that I must leave my home now. Today I received orders to appear at the Russian Army Headquarters in 60 days to enlist. If I go I'm sure I'll die. The conditions are terrible and so many already hate Jews anyway. I have never lived anywhere except for Krzepitz, but things in Poland having to do with Jews get worse everyday. What choice do I have, the Russian Army or a pogrom? My life is always in danger. Friends tell me that America is excellent. I think I'll get tickets tomorrow.

Feb. 28, 1844

I lived in Poland for 17 years and will probably never see it again. The ship left dock 6 days ago. I hate this ship! We have to ride in the bottom in steerage. There are too many people, terrible food, hardly any water, and it stinks! Many people are sick—one died yesterday. We are allowed outside on deck at night. I spend every night on the top of the ship.

March 20, 1844

At last! America! Everybody on the ship is very excited. I can't wait to pack my things and get off the ship.

March 27, 1844

The journey was very hard, but I made it and I am now in New York. I found a small room to live in and a job as a carpenter. I don't make much money now, but in the future I will work harder and try to make a better living. Life in America is not as easy as I had thought.

June 3, 1847

I have been working very hard. I have saved \$500 dollars and want to move to Texas. Many people are going

there to start a new life on land that is their own. I will travel with a wagon train in two weeks. I have to sell everything I have to pay the leader of the train and buy my supplies.

November 2, 1847

This trip is very hard. Some people turned around and went back to New York because they gave up. I will not give up! I want to own my own business someday and be rich. There are not very many Jews on this wagon train but there are three families. They are from Poland too. Sometimes on Friday night we light the Shabbat candles and have dinner together and sing Jewish songs. It is getting cold outside now. The summer was so hard and hot. Two children died because of the heat and we didn't have enough water. The next town is Cold Springs, Texas. Maybe I'll stop and live there.

June 17, 1848

Cold Springs is a great place to live! I was so tired of the trip on the wagon train. When I arrived I noticed that they needed a general store. I took some of my money and built the store. I have many customers and am making a lot of money. I will probably stay here for a very long time.

May 23, 1861

War has started! The North is fighting the South. Everyone here will fight for the Confederacy, too, but I don't like slavery. I hope I'll come back alive. At least this will be better than the Russian Army. My friends will run my store while I'm gone.

May 14, 1865

The war is over and we lost. The South is a mess and my store was burned down while I was away. The war was so terrible and I'm lucky I was not killed. Many people I know

(continued on page 10)

did not come back. Since my store is gone I will move again. I think I'll go to Galveston, Texas. It is a port city and I think I can build a bigger store since it's a port and I will be able to buy more things for my store from other parts of the country and the world. I also heard that there are many Jews there.

October 7, 1868

I have been in Galveston for almost 3 years now, and it's wonderful. I have a very big wholesale grocery business, and it is now the largest wholesale grocery in the whole South! I am becoming a very rich man. The Jewish community is growing and growing in Galveston. We built a synagogue and have Shabbat services every Friday night and Saturday. I gave a lot of my money to help build the synagogue.

December 1, 1872

I have finally fallen in love! I am going to marry a beautiful girl named Elizabeth Seinsheimer. She is also from Poland and came here 6 months ago. We are going to get married in the synagogue in 2 weeks. I hope we'll have many children!

May 15, 1882

I have been so busy with my business and my wonderful family. I have 11 children. I am lucky to be a rich man and I want to use my money for good things. Especially to help the Jewish community. I have been investing a lot of my money in the railroads and the banks. I now own parts of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroads. I think one of the best things would be for the Topeka and the Santa Fe Railroads to merge and become one company.

January 7, 1883

The Jewish community is growing into the civil and religious center of the whole South! Many Jews are moving here because of it. Here are some of the things we are doing in the Jewish community:

1. Building a Jewish school

2. Building another synagogue
3. Hiring Hebrew teachers
4. Donating books of Jewish interest to the city library
5. More Jews are working in city government
6. Holding group meetings with Jews and Christians
7. Synagogues are helping raise money to build a better Galveston
8. Putting on Yiddish plays for the community

April 10, 1885

My children are growing healthy and strong. The eldest boy, I.H., has been asking many questions about my business – I think he has a real interest in it. How proud I would be to have him take over when I am gone someday. I am now the president of Island Savings Bank. Several other banks in Texas have been writing to me for help and advice. Our Jewish community continues to grow. We will soon need more synagogue space for classrooms.

July 29 1889

The cotton brokerage founded three years ago is someday going to become the largest in the land! G-d has blessed me with a wonderful family and life.

September 8, 1892

I am 65 years old and I have to slow down. I.H. is working very hard and controlling the business well. I am becoming ill and the doctors expect me to die in a year or two. The Jewish community is growing strong and healthy. I am happy for all I've done to help the Jewish community, so I will die a happy man.

1894 –

I am dying. I have called in my children and my wife one by one. I talked to each one of them, especially I.H. I talked to him about what will happen and what he will have to do to keep the business going strong. I love each and every one of them and am so proud of my family.

"HISTORICAL FICTION ON LIFE OF ROBBIE EMMICH"

by Yonatan Wolk

Dear Diary,
February 22, 1862

Today is my birthday. I can not believe I am nine years old. What's even more unbelievable is that my family has been in America for five years. It seems that it was only yesterday that we arrived on a big, filthy boat. I think it's a good idea to look back in my diary and see how the events occurred. My family has lived through a lot since living in Minsk, Poland.

February 22, 1857

My father is a rabbi, with a long, dark, black beard, and thick glasses. He is so tall that on Simhat Torah, when he puts me on his shoulders, I can touch the ceiling. My mother is a matchmaker, with a long list of names. She wears a red sheitel. My older sister, who is thirteen, bothers me all the time. My younger brother, who is one month old, spends most of his time in our sand box.

My father is a rabbi of a yeshiva of young men from all over Minsk. The boys in my father's yeshiva are the

(continued on page 11)

smartest boys, because they have to take a special test to get into the yeshiva. I pass the door of the Bell Midrash every day, and hear the mumbling Hebrew words. Some boys are arguing in loud voices. I sneak into the room, and sit on the floor next to my father's large, dark wooden chair. There are always five or six boys sitting around my father.

March 18, 1857

A soldier came into the yeshiva. I couldn't understand the writing on his uniform. People started yelling, "Russian, Russian, Russian" and ran out of the yeshiva. My father's face turned as white as milk, and he quickly picked me up and ran home. I really didn't understand what was happening. I remember my father telling me we have to leave or else he would have to fight in the Russian army. All my mother could do was cry, and my sister too.

March 19, 1857

We packed all of our clothing into suitcases and boxes. There were bags of food everywhere. Tonight Papa woke me up and told me to get into the buggy. It was very cold and very rainy, but I climbed in and sat next to my big sister; she looked very scared. Mama was holding my baby brother wrapped in blankets. Papa climbed into the buggy, and we left. No one spoke or cried, but you could tell that everybody was sad and frightened.

April 10, 1857

Every day of our trip was the same thing. We traveled at night, and we hid in the damp, cold forest during the day. Papa sat and learned the Talmud. Mama cooked and fed the baby all day. My older sister gathered wood for the fire. I would crawl through the wet leaves looking for frogs to play with. I never went far because I thought something bad might happen. One night I had just fallen asleep in the buggy when Papa suddenly stopped the horses. I pecked out the window of the buggy and saw many soldiers with long, shiny rifles. Papa was explaining to them that we needed to get to the next small town to find a doctor. After that I heard a lot of yelling between Papa and the soldiers both in Russian and Polish. I began to say the Shema, because I thought I was going to be killed. As soon as I said the last word, a lightning bolt hit a tall, strong tree a few feet away. I heard a large crack, and the tree fell right next to our buggy. Papa made a blessing loud and clear, "Baruch atah adoshem elokaynu melach ha-olam oseh maaseh bereshit." The soldiers thought that the blessing was a curse, so they ran away. My sister and I

cheered. Mama cried tears of joy. The baby just cried. Papa mumbled something under his breath, and shook the horses to trot.

April 11, 1857

Today I climbed into a very large ship with many other people. It is cold, so everyone is bundled in blankets, and old dirty paper is under everyone's feet. I have many layers of clothing on. Mama told me not to get my clothing dirty, because it is hard to wash laundry on the ship. The ship does a lot of rocking because of the storm.

May 7, 1857

I know that we have been on the ship for more than a month because I said Hallel for Rosh Chodesh with Papa when he davened. Mama and Papa didn't talk about time, days, weeks, or months. They just tried to smile even though I knew things were bad for them.

May 19, 1857

We finally landed in a place called Galveston. Rabbi Nathan met us at the port. Rabbi Nathan was the first rabbi in Texas. He came to Texas in 1852 to take care of the first Jewish cemetery. I remember him telling my father how they had Yom Kippur services in someone's home, but there was no shul or building. I had a wonderful time playing with his children, but I still felt different. Even the Jewish children looked and acted different than the children in my old country. One thing they did do is teach me English, brought me toys, and a lot of clothes. Mama and my big sister couldn't believe all the presents that we had. Papa was also happy because he had some men to study with again.

February 19, 1860 (Three years have passed)

We didn't stay in Galveston. My family came to Houston. We heard that there were over 100 Jews there. Most of the Jews spoke German, but we could all speak English. Papa was so excited to give his first speech in a shul where men and women are separated just like when they davened in the Polish Minhag. In 1860 our new wooden building was finished in downtown Houston. In the back, which was a meeting room, my sister, my younger brother and I play and learn with 35 children. The front of the building is where the adults daven. But still I worry about tomorrow when I tell my teacher in public school about staying out of school for Purim. We Jews are made fun of when we celebrate our holidays, and do mitzvot. Non-Jewish people think we are going out of our way to annoy the rest of the community.

***Note: Don't forget to mark your calendars for
Dec. 6, 1992 at the D-FW Airport Sheraton Grand Hotel
for our next TJHS Open Board Meeting.***

Do you recognize anyone in this picture?



*The year is about 1912.
The place is Fort Worth or Dallas.
Identification or information would be appreciated. Please help!*

**Please plan to attend the next TJHS Annual GATHERING
in San Antonio on March 12-14, 1993!**

**It should be terrific,
and we're hoping everyone will attend.
See y'all in San Antonio.**

Alexander Aaron Brown

by his son Philip Pfeiffer Brown of Denver, Colorado

Alexander Aaron Brown was born March 3, 1881 on a farm outside but near the town of Elizabethgrad in the Ukraine. He was named for Czar Alexander II, known as the 'good czar'. On March 13, 1881 that czar was assassinated. Russian Christians immediately claimed Jews murdered him. According to Abba Eban's *Civilization and the Jews* as well as Cecil Roth's *History of the Jews*, the first pogrom against the Jews was in the town of Elizabethgrad. My father, his parents and two sisters survived because they lived on a small farm and hid in the haystacks in their field. The pogromists found an empty house and went on.

My grandfather, Ephraim Brown, and my grandmother, Catherine Lemonoff Brown, immediately gave up their farm, traveled to Odessa and boarded a ship going to the U.S. They arrived at New Orleans in that same year, 1881. They rented a farm in Louisiana and farmed there for a while, but got malaria and went on to St. Louis, Missouri. My grandfather was a sec-

ond hand clothing peddler in St. Louis for several years until the family moved to San Antonio, Texas. My grandfather continued in that same business for a number of years.

My father, Alexander Aaron Brown, was educated in a military academy in San Antonio, and attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville for one year before obtaining a medical degree from Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia. In 1904 he returned to San Antonio to practice medicine. He volunteered for army service and was inducted May 2, 1917. He served in the field artillery and the medical corps until after the great flu epidemic of 1919 nearly cost his life. He returned to San Antonio where he practiced medicine until he retired shortly after World War II.

On June 10, 1908 he married my mother, Carrie Pfeiffer, who was born in 1886 in Carrizo Springs in the Texas brush country. I was born in 1912 in an old house about a mile from the Alamo (likely a site of an

encampment of some of Santa Ana's troops). My parents had two more children, Alexander Alan Brown and Betty Brown, who married M. D. Cohen in 1941.

My father told me that our family name was always "Brown" since 1799 when Jews had to take second names. That was because his male ancestor lived in England at that time. Presumably a male ancestor went to England after Rabbi Manassah ben Israel of Holland had gone to England and talked Oliver Cromwell into permitting Jews to settle in England.

I believe that my father had a male ancestor who lived in Spain and was forcibly converted to Christianity and possibly expelled by Queen Isabella in 1492. In any event, after getting the name "Brown" in England, one of my father's ancestors, who was a world trader, settled in the Ukraine because he liked the land and climate.

My father died in San Antonio in November 1965 at 84. He was a member of Temple Beth El there for about 57 years.

NEBRASKA JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

by Ellen Kurtzman

I had a wonderful visit at the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society in September. NJHS has its office in the Omaha JCC. NJHS's superb publications include a newsletter and a journal.

I toured "Memories of Jewish Life on North 24th St." The exhibit included furnishings & re-

ligious items from the oldest synagogue in Omaha. Display cases held merchandise from stores on North 24th St. which was a hub of Jewish life for decades. Dozens of identified photos showed the people and customs of the times. Although this exhibit may be closed now, the walls of the JCC always display historic

photos. Nebraska became home to many Galveston Plan immigrants.

I met Susan Silver, Archivist of NJHS and Dottie Rosenblum, office manager. **For membership or other information: Nebraska Jewish Historical Society, 333 S. 132nd St. Omaha, NE 68154. (402) 334-8200 Ext. 277.**

Newsletter Publication Schedule

Issue Month

February 1993
May 1993
August 1993
November 1993

Deadline

January 1, 1993
April 1, 1993
July 1, 1993
October 1, 1993

Please send materials to be considered for the Newsletter to:

Ellen Kurtzman (817) 292-3491
4801 Willow Run Court FAX (817) 870-9888
Fort Worth, TX 76132-1518

Unless specified in a cover letter and a return envelope with postage is included, all **original** materials submitted to TJHS Newsletter will be forwarded to the Barker Texas History Center and will become the property of that library. *If you wish to have original items donated to the Barker Library, please make arrangements with Don Teter (713) 424-5829.* For

the TJHS Newsletter, when items are valuable, one-of-a-kind, or fragile, **please submit copies only.** We cannot be responsible for items lost in shipment or slept upon by the Editor's cat.

Remember: do NOT send us your ONLY copy of a precious photograph.

Information Please!

Barbara Rosenberg, 219 Lombardy, Sugar Land, TX 77478, is doing research on the **Ku Klux Klan** in Texas.

Please send her copies of materials you may have to share and/or leads on where she may find research material. Thank you.

Members in the News...

Audrey Kariel was installed as the new President of the East Texas Historical Society at their fall meeting in Nacogdoches on September 19, 1992.

Jane Guzman chaired a session at the East Texas Historical Society Meeting in Nacogdoches for the TJHS.

B.J. Herz of Galveston presented a scholarly paper on the Galveston movement.

Karen Kaplan of Fort Worth serves as the current President of the Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library.

**We are interested in our member's activities. Please send us the information and we will publish it!*

Welcome New Members

Mr. and Mrs. A. Adelman, Waco
Mr. and Mrs. Royal H. Brin, Jr., Dallas
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Goldstein, Ft. Worth
Bennett Greenspan, Bellaire, TX
Dr. and Mrs. Stanley Hersh, Waco
Ms. Gloria B. Novak, Houston
Dr. Marc Orner, Abilene

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pfeffer, Houston
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rosenthal, Carrollton
Mr. and Mrs. Sherwin Rubin, Ft. Worth
Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Stein, Galveston
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Tann, Ft. Worth
Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Woolf, Waco

Remembrances from the Waco Meeting...



Photo by Vernon Woolf

(L to R) Sam Harelik, Fay Brachman, and Ima Joy Gandler.



Photo by Vernon Woolf

(L to R) Mike Jacobs, Ellen Kurtzman, Ginger Jacobs, and Bob Beer.



Photo by Vernon Woolf

(L to R) Barbara Rosenberg and Ima Joy Gandler.



Photo by Vernon Woolf

(L to R) Shirley Reiser, Raymond Reiser, and Sam Harelik.

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

I am enclosing my contribution of \$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000
to the Texas Jewish Historical Society for the 1992 membership year.

Classification of membership: \$25 - Annual Member; \$50 - Supporting Member;
\$100 - Sponsor and Organization; \$250 - Sustaining member;
\$500 - Benefactor; \$1,000 - Patron

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

My areas of interest are: _____

Please furnish us with a brief family history/or our archives.

Clip and send to address on reverse side.

Contributions to TJHS are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

D-FW AIRPORT BOARD MEETING

Sunday, December 6, 1992

10:00 A.M.

Our next Open Board Meeting will be held on December 6, 1992, at the Sheraton Grand Hotel, northeast of the Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport on Highway 114. The meeting will begin at 10:00 A.M. and should be over by 2:30 P.M. For those arriving by air at D-FW, the Sheraton Grand provides complimentary transfer service between the airport and the hotel. There is a telephone with a direct line to the hotel at each baggage claim area that you may use to notify the hotel that you are ready to be picked up.

There are, of course, rooms available in the hotel for those who will need overnight accommodations. *Either call the Sheraton reservations department at (800) 325-3535 or the hotel directly*

at (214) 909-8400. Be sure to mention that you are with TJHS as we have a special rate.

We will have a working lunch, and we need to make reservations in advance for the number of lunches that will be required. *Please call Fay Brachman at (817) 924-9207 or write to her at 3720 Autumn Dr., Ft. Worth, TX 76109 to make a lunch reservation by December 2, 1992.*

These Open Board Meetings are available to the entire membership and all members are welcome to attend. It is hoped that more members will become involved and interested in the planning of TJHS. Hope to see you there!

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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