



NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 10193 • Austin, Texas 78766-0193 • Winter 1992

Annual Gathering Focuses on Galveston

The 1992 Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society will be one of the most exciting events in the history of the Society. Members and the non-members alike will have the opportunity to spend three and a half days in Galveston learning about and participating in Texas Jewish History - Southern Texas style!

Galveston has been called the *Ellis Island of the South*, and deservedly so. During the years 1907 - 1914 over 10,000 Jews were among the other immigrants who came to the land of opportunity. By attending this year's Annual Gathering you will be participating in a number of events that will celebrate the Galveston Immigration Plan.

This year, attendees will have the chance to tailor their activities to fit their interests. Friday is an introductory day, with general sessions; a narrated bus tour of historic Galveston with a focus on Jewish sites; and an afternoon "how-to" session on doing oral histories. The Opening Dinner is planned at the Galvez Hotel at 6p.m. After dinner, all who want to will attend services at B'nai Israel. Services will be followed by Ladino music by Dr. Isabelle Ganz and a dessert reception.

Saturday features one of the major events of the Annual Gathering - the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain and the Sephardic Jews who made their way to Texas as a result. The speakers include Richard Santos; Dr. Leo Carillo, Corpus Christi State University; Sr. Rafael Gijon and a panel of speakers presenting "The Road to Texas: Family Histories of Sephardic Jews and Catholics."

After sundown on Saturday evening and on into Sunday, the at-

tendees will turn their attention to the *Galveston Plan of Immigration*. Sunday will include a reunion of the Galveston immigrants and their descendants.

Monday features an optional short-course on Texas Sephardic History: Conquistadores to Cowboys, conducted by Richard Santos, based on information he researched for a book that will be published.

With all of these exciting activities, it may be difficult to imagine, but

there will be a general business meeting of the TJHS which will include an election of officers for the 1992-93 year and a vote on proposed by-laws changes.

The Hotel Galvez will serve as the gathering headquarters. It is located at 2024 Seawall Blvd.

For further information contact Barbara Rosenberg, 219 Lombardy, Sugar Land, Tx. 77478, (713)494-2668. Pre-registrations are due Feb. 13, 1992.

Getting started in your community

Conducting Oral Histories

The Oral History Project is important to the work of the TJHS because it preserves the history of the people: individuals and families that weave together a quilt of "how it was." In the next few newsletters, we will deal with the methods, the process and the fun of conducting oral histories or your own or as a member of a community group. Once the interviews are conducted, they are transcribed. A copy of the tape will be kept at the Barker Library in Austin at the UT campus, available for research. We'll begin with the topic of interviewers and equipment.

In most cases, interviewers will want to use cassettes - both audio and video. The most important thing to remember is that the interviewer is comfortable with the equipment. Any brand of player is fine as long as it is dependable. Some tips:

- Test the microphone in advance for clarity, just so you will know how close it has to be to pick up clearly. Remember it should pick up both the interviewer and the interviewee without moving it back and forth.

- Put in fresh batteries and be sure to take plenty of extras along.

- Be sure to take extra tapes, too, as you never know how long an interview will take.

- Select tapes that have a narrower range of recording. You do not need to buy expensive tapes that record full ranges of music. Simpler, often

cheaper, tapes are fine for recording interviews.

- If you are using a video camera, be sure to check the light before you begin.

- If using video, it is probably best to have someone else operate the camera - asking questions while shooting is a little tricky.

- Be sure to test the equipment -- say a few words and have the interviewee speak and then play back this test to be sure everything is working properly.

The first prerequisite to conducting good oral history interviews is interest. The second is training. A truly interested, well-trained person will get a great interview every time. An interviewer must be willing to attend a training session and spend a

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News and Notes

Second La Grange Cemetery Found

In the large city cemetery in La Grange, there are 21 Jewish persons buried in well-maintained plots. Until just recently, these were thought to be the only burials of Jewish people in that city. However, it has just been discovered that there is an all-Jewish cemetery located on private property in a residential section of the city. A local doctor bought some acreage and built a beautiful home five years ago. About 100 feet from his house are twenty-eight burials, dating from 1868 to 1933.

Deed records obtained at the Fayette County Courthouse indicate that the cemetery was established in 1868 when one Gabriel Friedberger, president of the La Grange Hebrew Benevolent Society purchased the land. By 1957, the name of the organization had been changed to the Ladies Hebrew Cemetery Association. In that year the president and sole surviving officer and member of the association, Essie Alexander, sold the property to Hart Brown, who agreed to repair and maintain the cemetery in a reasonable manner. This was apparently not done

too well. He and succeeding owners agreed to allow friends and family to enter the cemetery at all reasonable hours. The present owners are most cooperative. They have made some improvements and have kept the area mowed on a regular basis.

The family names of the burials are Gans, Lewis, Zander, Hellman, Alexander, Sass, Szmiderski (Yes!), Rosenthal and Ostrowski. If any of their descendents are interested in knowing more or desire to contribute to the upkeep and improvement needed they may contact Gertrude or Don Teter, 5013 Glenhaven, Baytown, Tx. 77521 (713) 424-5829.

Society Presents Book in Sugar Land

The Texas Jewish Historical Society presented a copy of the book *Oleander Odyssey: The Kempners of Galveston, Texas, 1854-1980s* to the students of Kempner High School in Sugar Land, Texas in December.

Fay Brachman, president of the society presented the book and introduced the author, Dr. Harold Hyman, history professor at Rice University who discussed his research and writing.

Dr. Hyman told the students that he had researched the book for ten years prior to its publication in 1990. He also related the story of the Kempners and their influence in changing the "Hell-Hole of the Brazos" into a model small town, which became Sugar Land.

The book contains information about the Kempner family and about I.H. Kempner, the namesake of the school, who was the son of Polish-Russian immigrants and the founder of the Imperial Sugar Company, located in Sugar Land, near Houston.

Curriculum Guide Praised

Rabbi Jonathan Rosenbaum, Scholar in residence at Temple Beth El in Fort Worth requested that a curriculum guide be sent to him in Hartford, Ct. where he is the Maurice Greenberg Professor and Director of the University of Hartford.

He responded to Society President Fay Brachman, "I ... wanted you to know how much I appreciate your sending me the Curriculum Guide...I have enjoyed the opportunity to pursue it at leisure. I am convinced that no other Jewish Historical society has so successfully incorporated the excitement of our history into the religious school curriculum."

Report from the President

by Fay Brachman

1991 has ended. It has been a very good year for the TJHS. Our membership now stands at 530 plus! The Curriculum Guide was mailed to Sunday schools, Hebrew schools, and Day schools throughout the state in August. An essay contest has been announced - based on the Curriculum Guide.

The Cemetery project has made some interesting "finds" - discovering small, untended, Old Jewish cemeteries in the state.

Interest in Oral Histories has grown. Our archival material continues to increase.

The By-Laws Revision Chairman has submitted changes to make our By-Laws current. These changes have been discussed by the Board at several sessions and will be voted upon at the Gathering's general membership meeting.

And now our plans for 1992 are already being formulated.

The Gathering in Galveston is a much discussed subject by both the committee and the membership. The program looks super - stressing the Galveston Plan of Immigration culminating in our visit to the New Seaport Museum with their computer holding the information about the immigrants

who passed through the port of Galveston. And, a whole day of education and discussion about the Crypto Jews is planned, too. The Galvez Hotel will be teeming with our members and their friends gleaning knowledge and understanding.

You will be receiving more information about the Galveston Gathering in the mail. Do not put it aside. Send in your reservation form...make your hotel reservations. MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW TO BE A PART OF THE GATHERING IN GALVESTON - MARCH 6-7, 1992.

See you in Galveston. Fondly,
Fay

ANNOUNCING TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

TeJHaS 1992 Essay Contest :

Open to all Middle and High School students.

Based on the Curriculum Guide to Deep in the Heart

**Middle School
6th - 9th Grades**

A diary entry (or entries) of approximately 1000 words, in the first person of a Jew coming to Texas for the first time in the last century or the beginning of this one. The entry can be based on the life of a real person, either known or a family member - or an appropriate imaginary personality. The entry should include:

- What life was like.
 - What were the hardships?
 - What was exciting about life.
 - A Jewish component of life (attending a service, life cycle event or organization meeting.)
- Photographs or drawing may accompany the entry.
(For more information, see Unit II in the curriculum guide.)

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• A good source to learn procedures for oral histories :
• Fletcher, William, Recording Your Family History: A Guide for Preserving Oral History With Video Tape, Audio Tape: Suggested Topics and Questions, Interview Techniques.
• Publisher: Dodd, Mead Co. (N.Y.) c. 1983.
• ISBN 0-396-08886-4
.....

TJHS NEWSLETTER

Newsletter Co-Editors:

Ellen B. Kurtzman,
4801 Willow Run Ct.
Fort Worth, TX 76132-1518
(817) 292-3491
Elisa Kaplan Miller,
203 Spruce Street
Middletown, PA 17057
(717) 944-2813

**High School
10 - 12 grades**

An essay, play or poem of 1000-1500 words based on Jimmy Kessler's quote:

"The history of Jews in Texas is important. We know of our Jewish heritage only because our religious ancestors thought enough of their posterity to record their life experiences. We can do no less."

Jimmy Kessler

Forward Deep in the Heart

The issues addressed should be:

- Why is it important to remember?
- The importance of History.
- Why do Jews value History?
- Anecdotes illustrating the point are suggested.
- What lessons can we learn (including examples)?

(See page 37 in the Curriculum Guide for more information.)

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES :

APRIL 15, 1992

PRIZES

First Prize in each category \$50.00 and a copy of Deep in the Heart for the winner.

\$50.00 for the institution that the winner attends.

Four Runner up prizes in each category of \$15.00 and a copy of Deep in the Heart.

Publication of the prizewinners' entries.

For more information, or to submit entries, contact: Ellen Mack, RJE
Beth-El Congregation
P.O. Box 2232
Fort Worth, Texas 76113

Reflections of Southern Jewry

The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky (1878-1979)

These remarkable letters, written on a journey through the South and Southwest in 1878-1879, present a detailed record of the residents of the Jewish communities visited by Wessolowsky on his two-year odyssey.

Southwest communities visited and described include: Galveston, Brenham, Hempstead, Houston, Columbus, Luling, San Antonio, Navasota, Giddings, Austin, Rockdale, Round Rock, Palestine, Hearn, Calvert, Marlin, Waco, Corsicana, Mexia, Ennis, Dallas, Fort Worth, Sherman, Dennison and Paris. In each city, he tells about the people he met there.

<i>Reflections of Southern Jewry</i>	\$10.00
<i>The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky</i>	
Edited by Louis Schmier	
postage and handling	2.00
Tx sales tax	.80
total	\$12.80

send your orders to:

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P.O. Box 10193
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Frost Bros. Department Stores: A Texas Family-oriented Retailer

J.W. Frost, Jr. spoke to the Texas Jewish Historical Society about his family at the board meeting in San Antonio. At that time, he spoke of the members of his family in great detail. Here he relates the details of the Frost Bros. department store chain - a chain of stores that is certainly missed.

In 1917, W.C. Frost, an employee of Joske's Department Store, contacted his bother J.M. (Joe) in Memphis, suggesting they open a store in San Antonio. After due consideration, Joe, whose liquor business was being threatened by WWI prohibition, decided to follow Will's suggestions. They opened Frost Bros. ladies ready to wear store at 221 E. Houston Street in Sept. 1917.

With WWI still going on, Joe went into the army. Luckily, he never left San Antonio and was able to continue to continue participating in the management of the store.

In September 1921, a disastrous flood struck downtown San Antonio. All businesses along Houston Street were flooded, including Frost Bros. The first floor was completely under

water.

Between the two world wars, the business prospered and grew. A third floor was added to the small store in 1927. During the height of the depression, the Blum Department Store - just down the street at 215 E. Houston - closed. After much deliberation, Frost Bros decided to move into the Blum's location which was much bigger (it had four floors). At this time, air conditioning was added, which made Frost Bros. the first air conditioned store in the country. Another innovation was the establishment of a profit sharing program, one of the first in the country.

Just before the outbreak of WWII, plans were made to acquire the automobile garage just behind the store for future expansion, but this expansion was shelved until after the war. Unfortunately, Will and Joe did not live to see this happen. Will died of a heart attack just after the U.S. entered the war. Joe also died of a heart attack on Feb. 10, 1945.

Gilbert Lang, family friend and secretary-treasurer, long remembered

for his excellent style shows, bought out the Frost family interest in the store with his brother, Sylvan Lang. Part of the deal included the continued employment of Joe's widow, Pearl Frost who worked as a buyer for ten years.

After WWII ended, the previously envisioned expansions were gradually implemented. Eventually several stores were added in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Corpus Christi and Laredo, along with a Gucci shop in Boston. This expansion took place between 1949 and 1984.

The entire group of stores was sold to Manhattan Industries in 1970, with the current management retained, which now included Irving Matthews (son-in law of Sylvan Lang). In 1986 the chain was sold to Wylie Associates, who installed new management. Due to poor management and difficult financial times in Texas in the 1980s all of the stores were gradually closed. The original downtown store in San Antonio was closed in 1987 and the final stores were closed in 1989, marking the end of a prestigious era.



Photo/Bio: Dallas Philanthropist:

Mildred Sack

Mother of a blind child, Mildred Sack and Frances Kallison (through the National Council of Jewish Women) lobbied the legislature in the 1940's to have a state law passed requiring school districts with at least five blind students to establish special classes, instead of sending them off to the state school.

In San Antonio, they got the ISD to hold classes in the Agnes Cotton School and also in the Landa pre-school where they prepared blind children for the public schools.

Mildred and her husband Alfred N. Sack of Dallas founded the Dallas School for the Blind in 1950.

Was President Lyndon Baines Johnson a Righteous Gentile?

As we enter into the Presidential primary season, it is a nice idea to take a look back. In a recently published biography of LBJ, author Robert Dallek (professor of history at UCLA) sheds some light on a little-known aspect of the Texas politician.. Much of this information was taken from a review and report by Tom Tugend, a reporter of the Texas Jewish Post who also made contact with Professor Louis Gomolak at SWTS.

As a provincial Texas politician the 1930s, Lyndon Baines Johnson clearly foresaw the danger facing European Jewry and, ignoring regulations, clandestinely arranged for the entry of hundreds of Jewish refugees in the United States.

Louis S. Gomolak, a former journalist and now a professor of diplomatic and Middle East history at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, wrote his PhD dissertation on LBJ's early foreign affairs background, and in doing so, shed some astonishing light on Johnson's relationships with Jews.

Why did Johnson, a highly pragmatic and often ruthless politician, take such an early interest in the fate of the Jews (evidenced by a book that he gave Lady Bird as an engagement gift - *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization* - published just one year after Hitler assumed power. The book contained chapters by 18 authors and uncannily predicted the eventual gassing of the Jews and that Germany would attack Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, USSR and the USA in that order.)?

Historian Dallek says that something in Johnson made him sympathize with the underdog. Gomolak said that it may have had something to do with his grandfather who: "...drilled it into his grandson that to bring about the Second Coming of Christ, the Jews had to return to Israel, that Jerusalem must be their capital and that the boy must always help the Jews."

Johnson's father served in the Texas legislature and was a bitter opponent of the Ku Klux Klan, at a time when such stands took a great deal of courage. The pro-Semitism of his grandfather and the anti-racist stand of his father did much to mold his outlook, Gomolak believes.

After the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938, Johnson, a freshman senator, helped a visiting 25-year-old Austrian Jewish musician gain permanent residence in the United States.

Some years earlier, Johnson had become friends with Jim and Louis Novy, two Jewish brothers who, in 1913, had arrived in Austin from a small town in what was then Czarist Russia. In July 1938, LBJ learned that Jim Novy was planning a trip to Poland and Germany and, according to Gomolak, the congressman phoned Jim, the scrap dealer and told him, "I want you to get out as many Jews as possible, because they are going to be

killed."

Johnson, using his later legendary pressure and persuasion tactics, was able to provide Novy with 40 pre-approved but nameless visa blanks, a totally illegal procedure.

His largest and most complex of the Johnson-Novy projects, dubbed Operation Texas, was undertaken between 1939 and 1943, when several hundred Jewish refugees were routed - by questionable legal means - via Cuba, Mexico and other Latin American countries to the port of Galveston.

This is hardly the end of the story. Both Dallek and Gomolak are preparing separate books on Johnson's career for the period spanning his vice-presidency and presidency, including his actions during the Six Day War in 1967. Although each man is loath to reveal his research at this point, Gomolak predicts that many new details of President Johnson's role in aiding Israel will be made public.

Conducting Oral Histories: First Part in a Series

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little time on research as well. Training sessions are often offered locally and there will be a session at the Annual Gathering in Galveston.

Once the interviewer sets an appointment with the interviewee, he or she should get as much information as possible about the subject's background. This yields better questions and tells the subject that you are interested. A good interviewer will be able to take notes or jot down thoughts or ideas while taping the interview, noting contradictions or discrepancies and trying to tactfully clear them up while getting as many facts as possible.

Facts alone are not enough and the interviewer needs to draw the subject out and get the feelings and reactions to the events of the past as well

as the dates and places.

On the other hand, the interviewer should not give opinions or be an *active participant* in the interview. A good interviewer brings out the subject while remaining apart from the information.

Interviewers must also be dependable, making calls to set up appointments and being on time for them. A good measure of understanding and patience will stand the interviewer in good stead, too, in this demanding but very rewarding work.

In upcoming issues, we will discuss the specifics of organizing an oral history project in your community; developing questions and conducting background research; and beginning and conducting good oral history interviews.

Karen R. Kaplan, Oral History Chair

Jewish Genealogy Information Bank Developed

Inauguration of the Jewish Genealogical People Finder (JGPF), a plan for disseminating Jewish Family tree information worldwide, was announced by Gary Mokotoff, president of the Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, at the closing banquet of the Third International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy in Salt Lake City in July.

The system calls for Jewish Genealogists from all over the world to submit their computerized family trees to a common data base that will eventually permit easy access to the family trees containing millions of names. In a brief ten minutes, at the banquet which concluded the Seminar, more than 250,000 names were pledged by members of the various Societies to seed the project. It is expected that by the end of next year, this number will grow to 1,000,000!

Mokotoff described the new system as the logical extension of his Jewish Genealogical Family Finder, which has been a research tool for Jewish genealogists for more than a decade. Rather than collecting sur-

names and towns, as it is with the Family Finder, the *People Finder* will collect data about individual members of family trees.

Ideally, each entry will include the person's name, sex, date of birth, place of birth, date of death, place of death, father's name, mother's name, and spouse(s)'s name.

The entire listing will be arranged in soundex order by surname using the Daitch-Motokof Soundex System to allow spelling variants of identical surnames to appear together. As is true of the Family Finder, the original submitter's name and address will be available. This will allow persons finding matches between their trees and others to contact the submitters.

With projects like this one, privacy can be an issue. However, prior to submitting family trees, submitters should consider whether any information included would meet with objection from family members. Is there a marriage or birth that is a sensitive family issue? If so, consider removing it from the data base prior to submitting it. Any person included in

the tree can submit in writing that they want their information removed from the JGPF. If such a request is received, the person, as well as all descendants will be deleted.

Several organizations, such as Jewish museums, have expressed interest in acquiring the database of the JGPF. The data submitted is considered the property of the submitter. Consequently, if JGPF is approached by any organization who can provide a useful service by using the JGPF data base, the submitter will be notified that JGPF has an organization interested in the data. Each submitter's data will be supplied to this group only with the submitter's written permission. Thus, the submitter alone will have complete control over how family tree data is used and will decide which organizations will be authorized to acquire data provided.

At any time, a submitter can update previous information by completely resubmitting the new information with an indication that it is an update. There is no charge to submit family trees to JGPF. The data base will be financed by charging for the purchase of copies of the JGPF. It will be available on microfiche at a cost of \$1.50 per fiche plus shipping and handling. Each fiche contains approximately 15,000 entries. Therefore the cost to buy a copy of the data base containing 250,000 entries would be \$25.50.

Because it is prohibitively time consuming to enter family tree information manually into JGPF for persons who do not have access to a computer, or who feel they have difficulty using computers will need to find alternate means of computerizing their data. At Israeli labor prices, the genealogy center at Beth Hatefutsoth charges \$1 per name to manually enter data. This means the simplest family tree can cost hundreds of dollars.

The JGPF concept is not new, Mokotoff stated. There are many existing family tree data bases. Two of the best known are the Mormon "Ancestral File" and the Dorot Center at Beth Hatefutsoth (Museum of the

continued on p. 7

Deep in the Heart:

The Lives & Legends of Texas Jews
A Photographic History

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	Shipping	\$3.00

TOTAL Check or money order enclosed \$ _____

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Organization _____

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AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP OFFER

To celebrate the American Jewish Historical Society's 100th Anniversary, they are offering a special membership opportunity. TJHS members can join the national organization and help the Texas society, too. During 1992, for every TJHS member who joins the American organization, paying the \$40 membership fee, the AJHS will send the Texas society a \$20 reward. Belonging to the national organization will help further the cause of Jewish history in the United States. Please complete and send in the form below as a way to support research and discovery of Jewish history in Texas and in the U.S.

Please enroll me as a new member of the American Jewish Historical Society. My check for \$40.00 is enclosed. I understand that, to celebrate its 100th Anniversary, the AJHS will give my local Jewish historical or genealogical society one-half of this fee to directly support the local group's work.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: (____) _____

I am a member of the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Please mail this form and a check for \$40.00 to:

American Jewish Historical Society
2 Thornton Road
Waltham, MA. 02154

Genealogy Bank Introduced

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Diaspora) in Israel. Many Jews object to participating in the Ancestral file project because the members of the Mormon religion use the information for religious purposes. The Dorot Center at Beth Hatefutsoth has been slow to grow, said Mokotoff. In the seven years of its existence, it has acquired only 107,000 records. Even if it contained a large data base, there is no method for genealogical researchers to retrieve information except by going to the museum in Tel Aviv. In addition, it costs \$50 to submit a family tree and there are additional charges for the updates.

Data for the JGPF must be submitted on IBM-compatible 5.25" or 3.50" diskettes in GEDCOM format. GEDCOM is a standard interface between genealogical software systems which was developed by the LDS (Mormon) Family History Library. Most modern genealogical software systems support this interface. As an acknowledgement that your data has been added to the Jewish Genealogical People Finder, you will receive a computer printout of all the entries you submitted to the system.

ACT NOW! Send in your family trees. *Let's build a Family Tree of the Jewish People together!* Jewish Genealogical People Finder 1485 Teaneck Road, Teaneck, N.J. 07666

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**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 for our archives.

Clip and send to address below

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

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Texas Jewish Historical Society

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