



NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 10193

Austin, Texas 78766-0193

FALL 1993

**OPEN
BOARD
MEETING
TO
BE
IN
AUSTIN
SUNDAY
OCT. 3**

The second Open Board Meeting of the year will be held on Sunday morning, October 3, 1993 in Austin at the Austin North Hilton Hotel. The meeting will start at 9:00 AM. Lunch will be served at a cost of around \$12.

ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME! We hope to have a good sized crowd.

Please make a reservation by calling Merilee Weiner at (713) 668-9191 or writing her at 4106 Leeshire, Houston, Texas 77025.

1993 ESSAY CONTEST WINNER

AN IMMIGRANT OF IMMIGRANTS: RABBI CHARLES BLUMENTHAL

by Joey Gottlieb (seventh grade student at Dallas Akiba Academy)

I am doing a report on my great-great-grandfather, Rabbi Charles Blumenthal, who came to the United States around 1890. He was born some time around 1871, and he came to the United States when he was the age of nineteen.

My great-great-grandfather was born in Lithuania. He came to the United States with his three brothers. I am not sure if he came with his parents. He left Lithuania with his brothers to escape having to join the Russian Army.

When he and his three brothers arrived from Lithuania, their names were changed. So he and his brothers all had different last names. My great-great-grandfather's last name was originally Pesachovitz. The people who worked at Ellis Island in New York gave him the name Charles Blumenthal.

My grandmother described him as very bright and understanding of Jewish history. Rabbi Blumenthal was my grandfather's grandfather. My grandmother is Sephardic, and she told me that Rabbi Blumenthal, who was not Sephardic, understood what an important role the Sephardic Jews played in Jewish history. She said she had never seen a man like that before.

Rabbi Blumenthal settled in Detroit and taught in the local Hebrew school there until 1901. He then went to To-

ledo, Ohio where he taught in the local Hebrew school from 1901 to 1904. Then Rabbi Blumenthal went to the Buffalo, New York Hebrew school where he was principal from 1904 to 1907. From there he went to Fort Worth, Texas where he was the Rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Shalom from 1908 to 1914.

Congregation Ahavath Shalom was an orthodox synagogue, founded in 1892 by a non-English speaking Polish immigrant named I.F. Sheinblum. The original membership consisted of thirty-five families. By the end of the first year of existence the number of congregants had dropped to eleven families. But the congregation was still able to collect a thousand dollars and buy a little piece of land in 1893. With only fourteen dollars left in the treasury, the congregation's trustees decided to build a synagogue. They collected six hundred dollars, and built a twenty by forty-foot frame building in which to conduct their services. In 1902 the congregation bought some more land, and by 1906 the synagogue had been completed. By 1914 the Hebrew Institute was fully in operation. My great-great-grandfather was the first Rabbi to lead the congregation, and when he was 83, he went back to

(continued on page 6)

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT...

by Don Teter (Baytown)

Interesting Note:

Life is lived forward,
someone said,
but can only be
understood
backward.

Our June 13 Board Meeting hosted by Peggy Samet in Houston was attended by seventeen of our fifty-four board members, which isn't too bad an attendance, considering the size of our state. The encouraging fact is that about twenty-five non-board members also attended and, hopefully, gained some insights into what we are doing and where we are going. Peggy served a delicious brunch, and we are most grateful to her for inviting us and sharing her beautiful home with us.

The next board meeting will be on October 3, 9:00 AM, in Austin at the Austin North Hilton. By having our board meetings in different cities around the state, we hope that many members will have the opportunity to attend at least one of the meetings during the year.

The best thing that has happened since the last Newsletter is that Dr. Charles C. Nathan has volunteered to be the Editor of our Newsletter. I know of his capabilities and am certain he will do a great job. However, the membership must support him with material. So send him pictures, articles, stories, etc., to 7520 Brompton #740, Houston, Texas 77025, or call him at (713) 669-1948.

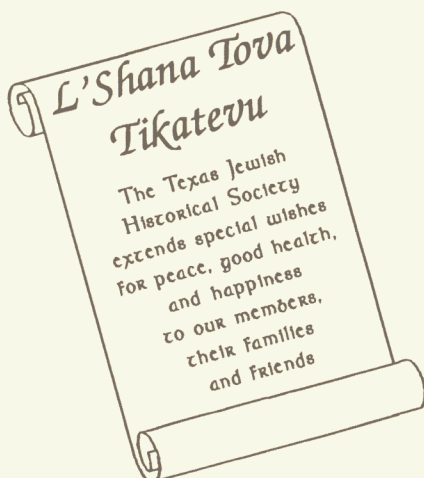
Speaking of volunteers, we still need a Chairperson for the Membership Committee. Fay Brachman is doing the mailings to new and renewed members, but we need a


committee to actively seek and enroll members from all over the state. Although membership has increased quite substantially over the past few years, we only have slightly over one percent of the Jewish population of Texas on our rolls.

Houston's *Jewish Herald-Voice* (1908-1989) is now on microfilm at the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas in Austin. The Society cooperated by helping fund the project, which has resulted in making a great amount of Texas Jewish history in this century available to everyone. *The Jewish Herald-Voice* for many years published Jewish news from many Texas communities. Reels may be borrowed through local libraries on the library interloan program, or they may be viewed at the Barker Center.

Chairman Howard Lackman is busily finalizing the material for our first Journal, which should be distributed in November. He reports that he already has some material for a second one, but still needs your contributions.

Just a reminder—our Annual Gathering will be in El Paso on April 8-10, 1994. Please mark your calendars, keep those days open and join us for a great event!



	<p>THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER is a publication of The Texas Jewish Historical Society P. O. Box 10193, Austin, Texas 78766-0193.</p> <p>Donald Teter (Baytown) ----- President Dr. Charles C. Nathan ----- Managing Editor Debbie Brachman Rice (Houston) ----- Designer Nell Hall (Fort Worth) ----- Distribution Fay Brachman (Fort Worth) ----- Distribution</p>
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Shortly before World War I, my father, Esidor Aron, who was born in Suwalk, immigrated to America and joined the Army. For that service he was granted citizenship and shortly thereafter married my mother, Orina Wilkenfeld, who was born in Austria and had immigrated with her parents to Houston.

In the early twenties they settled in Goose Creek, Texas which was experiencing an oil boom. My father was a tailor by profession. He did well making custom tailored suits for oil field roughnecks, and he eventually opened a men's clothing store at 124 Texas Avenue in Goose Creek. "E. Aron" is still engraved in the top of the building. He carried quality brands of merchandise and therefore was not in competition with his two other brothers, Sol and Abe, who operated general stores in Goose Creek and a third brother, Dave, who had a store in nearby Pelly. Mother's brother, Morris Wilkenfeld, was in the furniture business in Goose Creek and lived around the corner from us. His store is still operated by his family, is the oldest business in the city, now called Baytown.

My parents were active members of the Jewish community and were founders of Congregation K'nesseth Israel. Mother kept busy with rummage sales for the synagogue and worked for other charities as well. With five children she spent a great part of the day preparing lunches and other meals.

Hebrew School was a must, even though it meant importing teachers from Houston until the first permanent Rabbi was employed. He and I had a personality conflict, and I hated going to Cheder. However, something must have rubbed off, because I had a working knowledge of Hebrew when I studied for a formal Bat Mitzvah at Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston at the age of sixty-four.

During the Depression years a standing order was left at the People's Hotel for any Jewish transient down on his luck to receive a night's lodging and food, the bill to be sent to E. Aron. The word spread quickly in the hobo jungle, and the People's Hotel did well on my father's largesse.

The synagogue was the meeting place for the Jewish community, as well as serving the religious needs of its members. A community house was later added, with the area between being utilized as a succah. Uncle Dave Aron always sold the High Holiday Aliyahs from the Bima between morning and afternoon services. Sophie Keller rounded up all the children, willing or not, with or without voices, and she directed us as a choir. Her high-pitched "le cha do di" is forever etched in my memory. Families tended to occupy the same section of seats year after year, as if their names were engraved on them (which they were not).

A final memory is the old interurban depot. Its covered benches were the coolest places in town and the favorite resting place for evening strollers. Further up the street an ice cream parlor dispensed triple dip ice cream cones for five cents.

THE ARONS OF GOOSE CREEK

by Merilee Weiner (Houston)

"Sophie Keller rounded up all the children, willing or not, with or without voices, and she directed us as a choir. Her high-pitched 'le cha do di' is forever etched in my memory."

—MERILEE WEINER

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EL PASO

SITE OF 1994 TJHS GATHERING

by Herbert M. Given (El Paso)

El Paso will host the annual Texas Jewish Historical Society Gathering next April 8, 9, and 10. You will find El Paso to be an interesting cosmopolitan city of over half a million people. Its sister city of Juarez, Mexico is just across the Rio Grande and has a population of over a million people. This border center of diverse cultures including American, Indian, Spanish and Mexican makes a colorful and truly interesting atmosphere for visitors.

To relate a brief history of El Paso, we must start in the sixteenth century as several expeditions came up from Mexico City with varied purposes: to colonize the vast areas of Texas and New Mexico, to convert the native Indians to Christianity, and to search for the fabulous Cities of Gold described by earlier travelers. After a shipwreck near the mouth of the Rio Grande in 1510 or thereabouts, Cabeza de Vaca traveled up the river close to El Paso. About 1570 Francisco Chamuscado along with Fray Augustin Rodriguez came through the El Paso Valley and gave the name "El Rio del Norte" to the river. Then in 1598 Juan de Oñate headed an expedition of a large number of colonists towards present day New Mexico. On reaching the Rio Grande he formally took possession of the lands of "El Rio del Norte" in the name of the King of Spain. Where he forded the river, he named "Paso del Norte", and this village became an important way station between Mexico City and Santa Fe. Many more expeditions followed in the 17th and 18th centuries, and along with them came many colonists among whom were a number of Conversos or Crypto Jews, hiding their Judaism under the

guise of Christianity. They were fleeing the terrible inquisitions.

In 1827, Juan Maria Ponce de Leon, a prominent resident of Paso del Norte (now Juarez) was granted title to 500 acres north of the Rio Grande, and there built his home, which was the first building in what is now El Paso. Later Magoffinsville and Stephensonville were established. This all became the core of the town of Franklin, which was to become El Paso when Paso del Norte, south of the river, became Juarez.

The military played a large role in this far western outpost. The Spanish established *presidios* (forts) along the river to protect the settlers against the hostile Indians. Later the Texans established garrisons to protect themselves against the Indians and the Mexicans. After Texas became a state, the United States Army manned these garrisons and later built a fort alongside the north bank of the river. This was to become Ft. Bliss and after several moves it was established in its present site.

The railroads arrived almost all at the same time. The Southern Pacific came from the west in early 1881 followed within weeks by the Santa Fe from the north. The Texas and Pacific reached El Paso in 1882, the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio followed in 1883, and last to arrive was the Mexican National from Mexico City in 1884.

There were a few adventurous Jews who arrived early in the nineteenth century and then a goodly number came prior to 1880. Much of the Jewish population of the El Paso area was engaged in retail and wholesale trade with Mexico. El Paso was so small that it could not support many merchants. Ready-to-wear, shoes, fur-

niture, groceries, and other household necessities were sold to Mexican nationals who came to El Paso to shop from Chihuahua, Durango, Mexico City, and many other towns. Later automobiles, farm implements, iron, steel and other hardware played a large part in this international trade.

In the twenties, the garment manufacturing industry came into being in El Paso and developed into a major part of its economy. Many pioneer Jews were associated with this industry and the twin plant concept of manufacturing which followed later. Many Jewish entrepreneurs are among the top management of these plants which manufacture vacuum cleaners, electronics, drugs, etc.

The Jewish community consists of two large congregations: B'nai Zion, a conservative-orthodox congregation founded in 1900, and Mount Sinai, a reform congregation founded in 1898. A third small group is the Chabad Lubavitcher. A very active Jewish Community Center flourishes. The Jewish Community Council operates a Senior Citizen apartment complex. A Hebrew Day School is jointly supported by the Jewish Community Council, B'nai Zion and Mount Sinai. The newest project is the beautiful Holocaust Museum which is attracting a lot of attention.

The El Paso Jewish Community cordially invites you to come to El Paso for the TJHS Gathering next April and hopes you will enjoy this part of the West.

VIGNETTES (MEMORIES OF OUR FAMILIES)

Written by Charles Carb Nathan
(Houston)

Recently I drove to New Braunfels and stopped off at Eagle Lake to visit the home of Great Uncle and Aunt Julius and Annie Nathan. He was the older brother of my Grandfather Meyer Jonah Nathan (1856-1935). She was the sister of my Grandmother Sara Kleinsmith Nathan (1860-1946). They came to Ellis Island in 1876 with other members of their family from Lithuania. Several of my grandfather's sisters stayed in New York, the rest went to Iowa. In 1879 some members of the family including my grandparents and Julius and Annie Nathan went to Texas. My grandparents had six children. The oldest was born in Iowa, the rest in Texas—San Antonio, Gonzales, and my father, the youngest, was born in Luling in 1894. In 1902, the family moved to Houston, where my father lived until his death in 1979.

My early childhood memories include family trips to San Antonio with stop-offs on the way in Eagle Lake. In 1925 and 1926 there was no bridge across the Brazos River but a ferry between Rosenberg and Richmond.

My Aunt Annie Nathan was the last survivor of the family in her generation and my parents and I attended her funeral in 1952 at the Jewish Cemetery in Hallettsville.

I noticed on a recent visit to the cemetery that it appears to be well kept due to the efforts of the small but alert and caring Jewish communities of Hallettsville, Schulenberg and other nearby small communities. To our landsmen of these communities, I say, "Mazel Tov! Glick! Gesund! und Lange Jahre!"

Written by Clara Schulman
(Silver Springs, Maryland)

A favorite anecdote of our father, Avraham Parkansky, (he was 19 upon arrival in Galveston in 1911) was to recall how his 17 year old kid sister, who accompanied him on their journey from Russia, insisted on buying a new hat that caught her eye on a sight-seeing tour of Galveston. Our father tried to point out that they needed the money to start a life upon reaching their destination of Kansas City. Nevertheless, he finally had to concede and "shell out" \$5.00 (quite a sum in 1911) for this glamorous hat that our aunt had her heart set on.

Of course, as we girls grew older, we realized why our young auntie, although still a teen-ager in years (however, in those days considered an adult) needed that beautiful first American hat from the fascinating American Galveston. She knew that when they reached Kansas City, their handsome, tall, dark-complexioned "landsman" (and distant cousin) who had already arrived a couple years earlier, awaited them. She wanted to make an impression, which she truly did! Within the first year of their arrival, this auntie and the young "landsman" were married.

Whenever our parents discussed their arrival in Galveston, they never ceased to speak in loving, admiring terms of that dear Rabbi Cohen, who greeted them upon their arrival in Galveston, the "Goldenah Medinah" (the "Golden Land").

Written by Miriam Chodorow
(Waco) 1988*

I was Miriam Borschow before I married my husband, Nate Chodorow, on January 8, 1928, and since he was Orthodox, we were members of Agudah Jacob Synagogue on Seventh and Columbus Avenue.

In that synagogue the women did not sit with the men, but sat in seats upstairs. I was not used to that, so I sat downstairs with my husband, and did the old men give me the dirty looks! I remember the old man Sam Levy and his brother Lazer, also Hym Hoffman and the present President Frank Israel's father.

Then one by one the young wives joined their husbands and later even the older wives did, as the synagogue changed to conservative.

**Miriam Chodorow is the mother of Ima Joy Gandler of Waco.*

WINNING CONTEST ESSAY

(continued from p. 1)

Fort Worth to teach at the Hebrew Institute. The synagogue has grown rapidly since then.

Rabbi Blumenthal next went to Savannah, Georgia for a few years, and was the Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob from 1913-1916. He was like the "pied piper" in Savannah because about fifty to sixty children would walk down the streets with him because they liked him so much. He returned to Fort Worth from 1916-1919. From 1922-25 he served as a Rabbi in El Paso, Texas. Then, Rabbi Blumenthal went to Shreveport, Louisiana. He served his longest time as a congregational Rabbi for Congregation Agudath Jacob in Waco, Texas from 1926-45. Then, he returned to Fort Worth from 1945-1956, where he retired from teaching in 1956.

My great-great-grandfather was a small man, who had a van Dyke beard and who wore a big, "ten-gallon" Texas hat. People had nothing but good things to say about him. He had four children: Sam Blumenthal of Dallas, Dorothy Hornstein, Lilly Gottlieb and Leo Blumenthal of Savannah, Georgia. He founded the Zionist Organization of America in Texas. He also founded Young Judaea in Texas, and used to speak regularly to students at Texas A & M and the University of Texas. Although he was an orthodox Rabbi, the organizations he founded and worked for were not very orthodox, because there were not very many orthodox Jews in that area.

Rabbi Blumenthal did not have very much money, and struggled all his life financially. Many of his congregants did not pay their dues to him because they were not that wealthy either. He had to go around

collecting some of his checks. In his old age he was the Rabbi at Golden Acres in Dallas.

In 1957 he died at the age of eighty-six on Shmini Atzeret. He had been ill in the hospital, but he never became confused. He died a peaceful death. While he was dying, he said he had an appointment with G-d, but had not been called yet. And then he died. Over his lifetime, he influenced three generations of students.

My Dad has a very old notebook of Rabbi Blumenthal's. I was looking through it, and found speeches he made at synagogues, a lot of newspaper articles about Jewish stories, and a lot of articles he himself wrote in the newspaper. I also saw some letters asking him to speak to the Jewish students at Texas A & M University. Most of his notes were in Hebrew, so I did not understand most of them.

One newspaper article praised him for being the "Man of the Year", for how smart he was, and how he found great joy in working with youth. Another article talked about how he had gone through very hard times, and how most people would be bitter and depressed after what he had gone through. Nonetheless, the newspaper reporter described Rabbi Blumenthal as "one of the most cheerful and optimistic people this reporter ever met". The reporter also expressed how smart and aware Rabbi Blumenthal was. At the Jewish Community Center of Dallas library there is a framed picture of my great-great-grandfather, Rabbi Charles Blumenthal.

1993 ESSAY CONTEST WINNER ANNOUNCED

by Barbara Rubin (Fort Worth)

The winning essay from the "Gateway to Texas" Essay Contest has been announced to be Joey Gottlieb's "An Immigrant of Immigrants: Rabbi Charles Blumenthal"*. Joey is a seventh grade student at Akiba Academy in Dallas. There were fourteen entries in the contest, all from Akiba Academy.

Other essays that received honorable mention were (in alphabetical order) Rotem Bracha, Ari Daina, Alex Radunsky, Yanki Ribald and Zev Shulkin. First prize is \$50 and a copy of *Deep in the Heart* plus \$50 to Akiba Academy. Each of the honorable mentions will receive a copy of *Deep in the Heart*.

*The winning essay is printed in full beginning on page 1 of this issue.

OPEN BOARD MEETING

Sunday - October 3, 1993 - 9:00 AM

Austin North Hilton Hotel
Austin, Texas

Call: (713) 668-9191 for R.S.V.P.

ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME!

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Mrs. Sarah Aaronson ----- El Paso
Mrs. Barbara Baruch ----- Houston
Mr. Louis Berkie ----- San Antonio
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham I. Blum ----- Corpus Christi
Mrs. Ruth N. Braun ----- El Paso
Dr. and Dr. Lazard S. Brener ----- Houston
Dr. and Mrs. Gary Bronfman ----- Victoria
Mr. and Mrs. Sam Joachim ----- Bellaire
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Marcus ----- El Paso
Mr. and Mrs. Hyman D. Massin ----- Houston
Mr. and Mrs. Rusty Milstein ----- Longview
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Rapoport ----- Waco
Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Ratner ----- El Paso
Mrs. Beulah M. Schnadig ----- El Paso
Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Schwarz ----- Fort Worth
Mr. Jerard Seligson ----- Missouri City
Mrs. Beatrice Shapiro ----- Dallas

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Issue Month: Deadline:

December 1993 ----- November 1, 1993

March 1994 ----- February 1, 1994

July 1994 ----- June 1, 1994

REQUEST FROM THE EDITOR

SEND IN YOUR FAMILY HISTORY!

by Charles C. Nathan (Houston)

All of us have interesting family histories, but few of us have gotten down on paper the stories and memories of our parents, grandparents and our *mishpocha*. It is not that much trouble and it gives a lot of satisfaction to get the *megilah* in writing for our children and grandchildren and share memories with friends.

Don Teter requests all our members to "Go thou and do likewise." We really want to hear from you.

Please send your news and/or articles to our editor, Dr. Charles C. Nathan at 7520 Brompton #740, Houston, Texas 77025 or you may fax them direct to Debbye Rice at (713) 493-4275.

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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