



NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 10193

Austin, Texas 78766-0193

SPRING 1994

— 1994 ANNUAL GATHERING — EL PASO APRIL 8-10

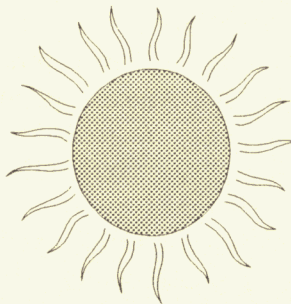
ANNUAL TJHS GATHERING UNIQUE IN DRAWING JEWS FROM SMALL TOWNS

Where can you meet fellow Jews from Texas towns like Abilene, Alice, Amarillo, Bastrop, Baytown, Beaumont, Brenham, Brownsville, Bryan, Carrollton, Corsicana, Cypress, Del Rio, Denison, Denton, El Campo, Fort Stockton, Garland, Hamilton, Killeen, Kingsville, La Grange, Laredo, Leander, Longview, Lubbock, Lufkin, Manchaca, Marshall, Midland, Montgomery, Navasota, New Braunfels, Overton, Plano, Round Rock, San Angelo, San Marcos, Seabrook, Seguin, Sherman, Spring, Stephenville, Sugar Land, Temple, Texarcana, Tyler, Victoria, and Wichita Falls? You guessed it—the Texas Jewish Historical Society!

Our Annual Gathering brings together Jews from towns some Texans don't even know about! Some of us live in places that formerly had larger Jewish populations; some are from places that never had large numbers of Jews but where the population formed a perception of Jews based on only one or two Jewish residents. However, we don't want to give the impression that we exclude anyone from big cities. You are certainly welcome if you hail from Dallas, Houston, Austin, or San Antonio, too! We all get together in the spring and swap stories and learn some fascinating facts about our

forebears who built this great state.

This year you can hear about some fascinating military heroes like Colonel Nathan Lapowski and Sam Dreben, meet a Hispanic family whose Jewish roots in Texas go back at least 300 years, learn about the Jewish Circus Giant with the soul of an artist and a poet, learn how to build a successful commercial dairy starting with one goat, hear about Jews who became elected officials against great odds, and visit one of the most interesting Holocaust museums in the country.



This year's convention city of El Paso is an area of contrast and paradox. Very comfortable lifestyles are possible in this mountainous, ruggedly beautiful desert land of Mexican and Anglo cultures. Once a frontier of banditos—Billy the Kid and Pancho Villa—now a new field of economic opportunity with the coming of the maquiladores and NAFTA.

If you ever learned Spanish in school, you might want to brush up on it now as we journey to El Paso and Juarez for the 14th Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. Please join your compadres and plan on having fun in El Paso. Ole!

News from the President

This has been a busy and eventful year for me and our Society. Our Archives have grown considerably, and our wonderful **Ruth Ginsburg** has spent many hours sorting and arranging the material so the Library staff can catalogue it. In her spare time she has transcribed much of the backlog of oral histories we had accumulated over the years and placed these in the archives.

Through our efforts and financial assistance, we now have the Houston Jewish Herald-Voice on microfilm at the Barker History Center. These films are available through inter-library loan and contain fascinating historical information from all over Texas from the paper's inception in 1908.

Charles Nathan and **Debbye Rice** have edited and produced the Newsletters. **Fay Brachman** has maintained the mailing labels and membership information and with her Fort Worth crew have made all the mailings.

I am indebted to these people and all the others who have contributed to our successes. **Merilee Weiner**, our Corresponding Secretary, **Barbara Rosenberg** and **Herb Given**, our VP's in charge of the Gathering, and **Peggy Samet** and **Helen Wilk**, who arranged those wonderful Board meetings, have all accepted responsibility and performed superbly.

There is much to be accomplished in the future. Some of the projects that have been suggested are sponsorship of a history of the Jewish

people in Texas, researched and written by a qualified historian, sponsorship of writers in various fields of Jewish achievement, a Texas Jewish Museum, and the establishment of a TJHS office.

What do you want? Please let us know!

At the Annual Business Meeting in El Paso on Sunday, April 10, 9:00 AM, the following addition to the constitution is to be considered: Board members must attend at least one meeting per year or they will be expected to resign from the Board. Business will include election of Officers and Trustees and any other items that may be presented.

Dues notices were sent out in January. Everyone joining prior to September, 1993 owes dues for 1994 in January.

Failure to remit dues by June may result in removal from membership. Please continue to support the Society with your membership.

Any cities wishing to hold the 1995 Gathering, please make it known at the El Paso Gathering, as we need to select the site at that time. Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth have not held Gatherings in recent years.

The Society welcomes contributions in honor or in memory of friends and loved ones. Donors and recipients will be acknowledged with appropriate cards. All contributions to the Society are tax deductible. The address is TJHS, P.O. Box 10193, Austin TX 78766.



THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

is a publication of The Texas Jewish Historical Society

P. O. Box 10193, Austin Texas 78766-0193.

Donald Teter (Baytown) ----- President
Dr. Charles C. Nathan (Houston) ----- Managing Editor
Debbye Brachman Rice (Houston) ----- Designer
Nell Hall (Fort Worth) ----- Copy Editor
Fay Brachman (Fort Worth) ----- Distribution

THE PFEFFER FAMILY OF HOUSTON

by Joseph B. Pfeffer (Houston)

Many old time Houstonians may know the Pfeffer family who settled in this city's Fifth Ward area during the 1880's. Peretz and Gertrude Pfeffer settled in this area when they came to this country from Europe. A sizeable Jewish community had begun to put down their roots in this part of Houston.

My father Ben Pfeffer was the eldest of six children. He is listed in the Houston 1900 census as "an apprentice blacksmith".

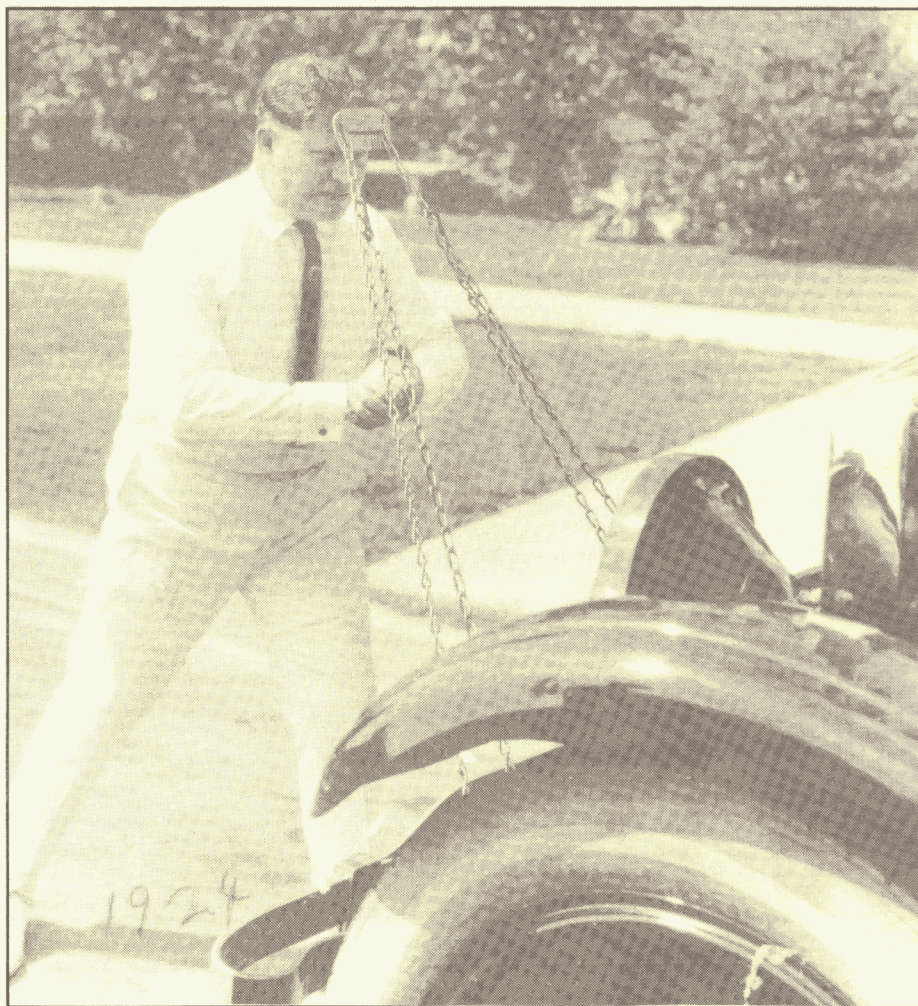
As a young man, he performed as a "Strong Man", both in Houston and on the New York stage. He was renowned for his strong man stunt

of pulling cars by his hair. In the May 25, 1924 edition of *The Houston Post*, he is pictured pulling a Studebaker, with five passengers inside, by a comb entwined in his hair. (This picture is captured below.) He did other stunts including bending iron bars.

Ben was also a champion "Bag Puncher" beginning in 1906. He put his talents to good use during World War II when he toured military establishments entertaining the troops with his bag punching shows. His professional name was **Ben Darwin**.

My father Ben Pfeffer died in 1949 at the age of 65.

Pictured at right: **BEN PFEFFER** pulling a Studebaker, with five passengers inside, by a comb entwined in his hair. Picture from the May 25, 1924 edition of *The Houston Post*.



THE NATCHEZ JEWISH HOMECOMING! 1994

Friday, April 29th — Sunday, May 1st

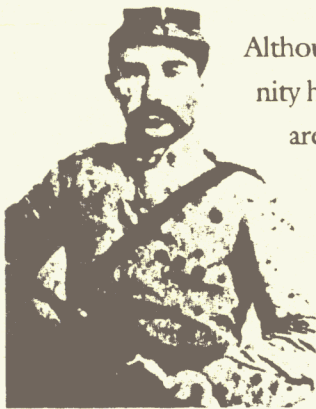
Natchez, Mississippi

Temple B'nai Israel

and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience

For more information: contact Don Teter (713) 424-5829

The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience and Temple B'nai Israel are hosting a weekend of celebration, "The Natchez Jewish Homecoming," April 29 through May 1, 1994 and you're invited. This gala weekend explores the Jewish community of Natchez whose history dates back to the late 1700s. Well-known for its beautiful antebellum homes and Civil War history, Natchez is the home of Temple B'nai Israel, located in the elegant "Natchez-on-Top-of-the-Hill" National Historic District.



Although the Jewish community has dwindled in most rural areas, in Natchez the story of the southern Jewish experience survives as more than just a cherished memory. In 1992, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience

and Temple B'nai Israel signed a preservation agreement to ensure that the Jewish heritage of Natchez is preserved and valued by future generations and the visiting public. Financial support and contributions for the Natchez Jewish Homecoming enable important renovation and preservation efforts to begin immediately at Temple B'nai Israel.

The weekend festivities open with a reception at one of Natchez's historic homes, followed

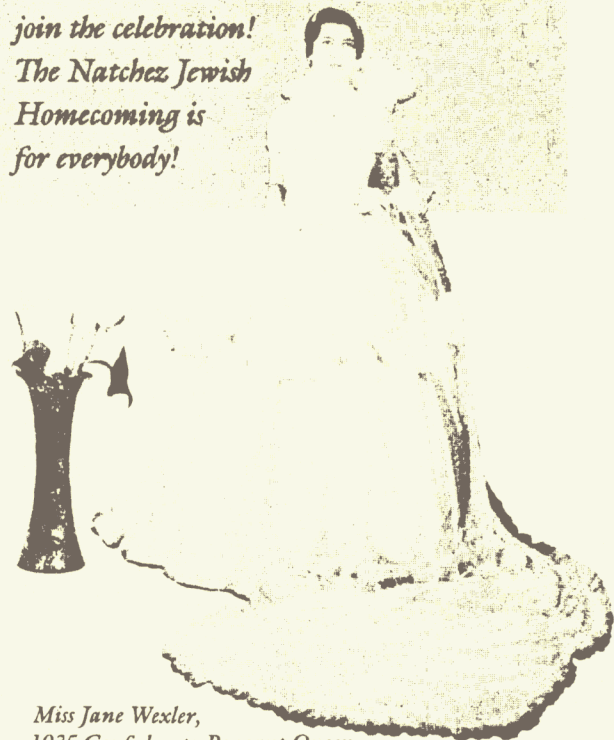


by a community Sabbath service at Temple B'nai Israel.

Saturday is full of events ranging from opening ceremonies to driving tours of Jewish Natchez, followed by an evening banquet.

The weekend concludes with a tour of the beautiful Natchez Jewish Cemetery or a visit to the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience at the UAHC Henry S. Jacobs Institute in Utica, MS, for tours and a "bagel and grits" brunch.

*It will be a weekend to remember —
join the celebration!
The Natchez Jewish
Homecoming is
for everybody!*



*Miss Jane Wexler,
1935 Confederate Pageant Queen*

KENDLETON COMMUNITY SEEKS INFORMATION

Information is being requested on **Mr. Fred Silverman**, a former resident of Fort Bend County, in the area currently known as Kendleton. Mr. Silverman was the owner of the General Store across from the Kendleton Mercantile Company and was also the Postmaster there. The store was later purchased by a man named Ben Guess.

Kendleton is a former Freedman's Colony located about 45 minutes southwest of Houston. Members of the community are currently conducting research for the town's designation on the National Register of Historic Places, because it is one of the largest and last

examples of a rural pre- and post-Reconstruction community of African Americans in Texas.

The General Store owned by Mr. Silverman is in danger of being demolished because the current owner cannot pay back taxes. Any information about Mr. Silverman or his descendents would be greatly appreciated.

Please contact Marjorie Adams, Rt. 1- Box 88, Beasley, Texas 77417 (409-532-0725) or Barbara Rosenberg, 219 Lombardy, Sugar Land, Texas 77478 (713-494-2668).

Natchez Jewish Homecoming

Apr. 29-May 1, 1994
Natchez, Mississippi

\$150.00 per person

Registration Fee includes:

Fri., Apr. 29 Cocktail Buffet;

Sat., Apr. 30 Lunch and Evening Banquet;

Sun., May 1 Brunch;

receptions and entire weekend festivities.

Number of Participants _____

X \$150.00

TOTAL: \$ _____



Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Daytime Phone # _____

(if registering others)

Spouse _____

Guest _____

Guest _____

Guest _____

Make checks payable to: Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) and send completed form with payment to: Natchez Jewish Homecoming, Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, P.O. Box 16528, Jackson, MS 39236-0528.

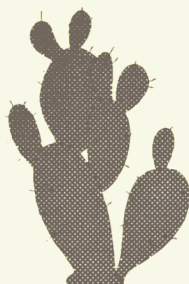
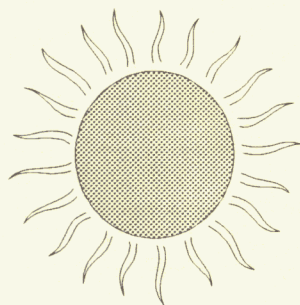
For information, call: (601) 362-6357.

\$100.00 of the registration fee is fully tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Agenda

Friday, April 8

- 11 AM-2 PM **Registration**
Poster Sessions
(on Mezzanine Level)
- 11:30 AM-1:30 PM
Open Board Meeting & LUNCH*
- 2-4 PM **Bus Tour of Downtown El Paso & Juarez** with points of Jewish interest
- 5:30 PM **Bus departs** for Dinner/Banquet at Synagogue
- 6 PM **DINNER/BANQUET*** at B'nai Zion Synagogue
President's Welcome
Introduction of Guests
Video Presentation: "Abe Chanin-Southwest Jewish Archives, Univ. of Arizona"
Award Presentation
- 8 PM **Shabbat Services**
- 9:30 PM **Bus departs** for return to hotel



Saturday, April 9

- 9-10 AM **Shabbat Services** at our hotel
- 10:15-11:15 AM
The First Jewish Conquistadores in Paso del Norte
—Dr. Stan Hordes
- 11:15-11:30 AM —BREAK—
- 11:30-12 NOON
From a Goat to Wholesome Dairy
—Blanche Brown
- 12-1:30 PM **LUNCH***
Skit: Searching for a Frontier Rabbi
—Mary Freed, et al.
Remarks by Justin Wyner
—American Jewish Historical Society
- 1:45-2:30 PM
The Gentle Jewish Circus Giant: Jack Earl from El Paso
—Mr. & Mrs. Myer Erlich
- 2:30-2:45 PM —BREAK—
- 2:45-3:15 PM **The Lapowski Family of West Texas**
—Emily Lapowski & Jean Schechter
- 3:15-4 PM **Tracing Your Jewish Roots with the Help of the Mormon Church**
—Pat Fish
- 6:15 PM **Bus departs for the Enriquez Hacienda** (300-year-old home established by a Conquistador family believed to be Jewish)
Havdallah, DINNER*, & Tour
- 9:30 PM **Bus departs** for return to hotel

for the Gathering in El Paso

Sunday, April 10

- 8:30 AM **BREAKFAST***
- 9-10 AM **Business Meeting**
Open to all members
- 10-10:20 AM **Holocaust Museums: History & Conscience**
—Henry Kellen (on video)
- 10:20-11:30 AM **Oral History Session—Interview of a Survivor with a Unique History**
—Helen Wilk
- 11:30-12 PM **Bringing High Culture to the High Plains of Lubbock: Rabbi Alexander Klein**
—Hollace Weiner
- 12-12:30 PM **El Paso Jews in the Judiciary & Elected Officials**
—Judge Morris A. Galatzan
- 12:30 PM **ADJOURNMENT**
LUNCH on your own

In commemoration of Yom Hashoah, April 10, convention participants are invited to a reception and program presented by:

The El Paso Holocaust Museum & Study Center
405 Wallenberg Dr.
El Paso, Texas
Time to be announced

* All meals on this program must be prepaid with early registration.

* No meal tickets will be available at door.

Ole!

REGISTRATION

— Must be postmarked by March 14, 1994 —

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Advance Registration Fee for Members:

\$25 x _____ persons = _____
(\$50 at door)

Advance Registration Fee for Non-Members:

\$50 x _____ persons = _____
(\$75 at door)

Friday Open Board Meeting/Lunch:

\$12 x _____ persons = _____

Friday Afternoon Tour of Historic El Paso:
(Space is limited—reserve early!)

\$7 x _____ persons = _____

Friday Night Banquet (Kosher):

\$20 x _____ persons = _____

Bus: \$5 x _____ persons = _____

Saturday Luncheon:

\$15 x _____ persons = _____

Saturday Evening Hacienda Tour & Bus:
(Space is limited—reserve early!)

\$20 x _____ persons = _____

Sunday Continental Breakfast:

\$10 x _____ persons = _____

TOTAL: _____

Please make checks payable to: TJHS

Mail to: TJHS
c/o Mary Freed
760-A Espada Drive
El Paso, Texas 79912

Will you need transportation in El Paso?

Yes _____ No _____

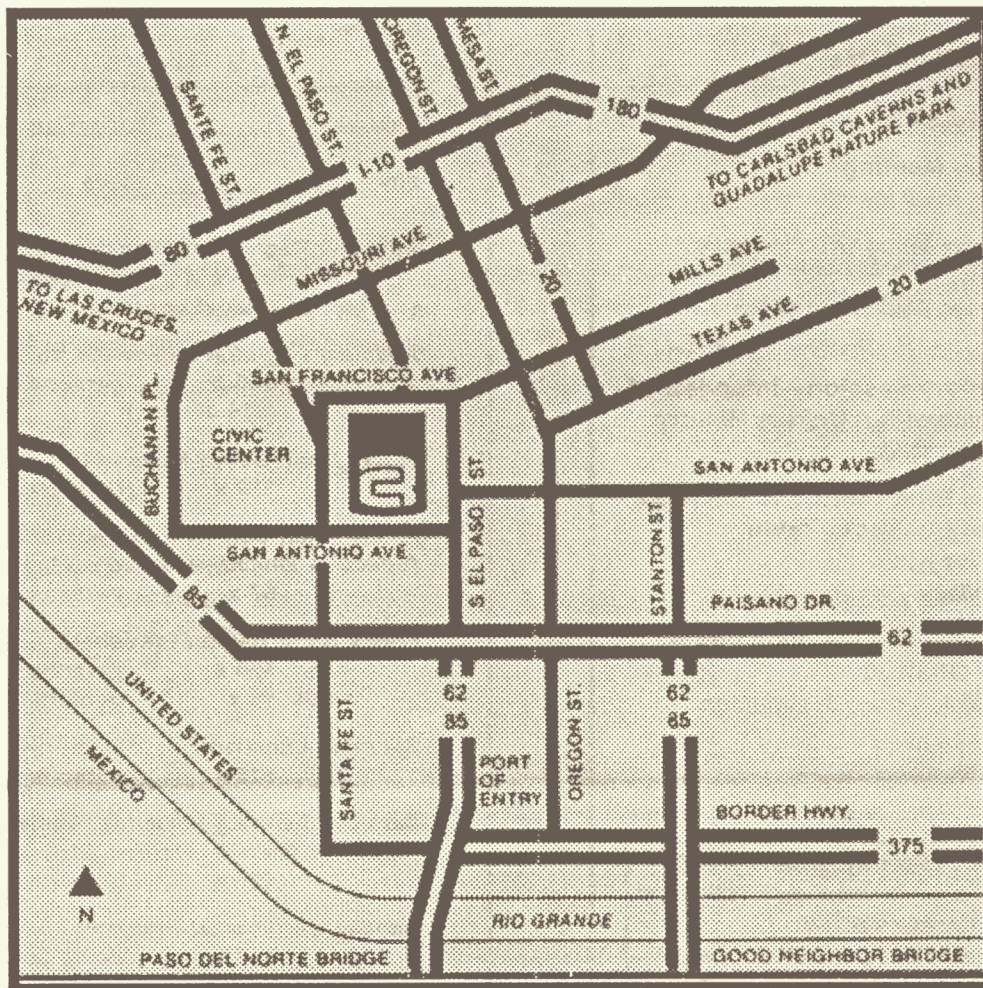
Will you have a car and be able to provide transportation?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you plan to attend the Yom Hashoah program?

Yes _____ No _____

DIRECTIONS TO OUR HOTEL IN EL PASO



HOTEL CAMINO REAL PASO DEL NORTE

101 S. EL PASO STREET
EL PASO, TEXAS 79901

(915) 534-3000
FAX (915) 534-3024

CONVENTION RATES: Single/double occupancy

\$70 — Classic Room

\$80 — Premier Room

\$105 — Master Suite

HOTEL RESERVATION DEADLINE: March 8, 1994

Free shuttle from airport — departing every ½ hour

A VISIT TO BRECKENRIDGE

by Don Teter (Baytown)

On a Tuesday in December Gertrude and I were in Ft. Worth and needed to be in Austin (190 miles south of Ft. Worth) by Thursday evening. I had heard that there were Jewish persons buried in Breckenridge (100 miles west of Ft. Worth), so we made a little side trip through a light and beautiful snowfall to Breckenridge on Wednesday morning. We never located any Jewish burials, but we learned a lot about Breckenridge Jewry in our search.

The Jewish story in Breckenridge is typical of that of so many Texas towns. Breckenridge was an oil boom town in 1919. One of the first Jewish families was that of Charles Bender, who started a small mercantile business. It prospered and was enlarged several times, until in 1921 it became Bender's Department Store. When he retired in 1953, the store was sold. Shortly afterwards it burned and was never reopened. Two of their four children were born in Breckenridge, and all graduated from Breckenridge High School.

The Popular Store began in 1923 as "Sheinberg and Prager". It was started by Israel Sheinberg and his wife. After his death in 1931 she ran the store while raising two sons, and later married Jake Socol. In 1946 the name was changed to "The Popular Store", and it continued to be operated by the family until 1987.

Ben and Bertha Arlosoroff arrived in Breckenridge in the early 20's with their four daughters, and opened a small grocery store. All of the girls graduated Breckenridge High School (1925-1929). Dora married Simon Fram, who had come from Dallas and operated the Alhambra Confectionery. They lived in the same house for

all of their married life where they raised three children. Simon and his partner, Ben Karelitz sold the confectionery in the early 40's and went into the clothing business.

There were many other Jewish families in Breckenridge over the years. In 1929, through the efforts of Charles Bender and others, Temple Beth Israel was constructed. Prior to this the families met in private homes to conduct religious services. The names of those who were involved in the fund raising and construction were: Charles Bender, Sam Letwin, Louis Daiches, B. Arlosoroff, Israel Sheinberg, Ben Karelitz, N. Winkler, M. Rosenblatt, I. A. Wolf, H. Baum and I. Baron. The temple was dedicated April 21, 1929, and served people from the surrounding region including Eastland, Cisco, Ranger, Graham, and Abilene. Normal Friday night services were conducted by various members who took turns. As the years passed, the Jewish population dwindled. The young people turned toward the larger cities as did their parents upon retirement. In 1974 the temple was sold and is now used as a church, but the Stars of David are still on the two towers. The cornerstone was removed and now reposes in the city museum.

We learned all this in our short visit at the library and museum. There are no Jews now known to be residing in Breckenridge. This is so typical of what has happened to our small town Jewish communities. That is why our Society must ever strive to record and preserve everything *now*.

Next year may be too late.

Incidentally, we didn't make it to Austin that day—spent the night in Lampasas.

(Pictures follow on next page)

PICTURES FROM BRECKENRIDGE, TEXAS



Photo by Don Teter

Pictured above: *Cornerstone of Temple Beth Israel, Breckenridge, TX, in museum downtown.*



Photo by Don Teter

Pictured above: *Structure of the former Temple Beth Israel, Breckenridge, TX. At present is being used by a church.*



Pictured above: *Opening of the Jewish Synagogue Temple Beth Israel erected through the efforts of C.M. Bender and the Jewish Community of Breckenridge, TX. Dated: April, 1929.*



Pictured above: *Dedication of Temple Beth Israel, Breckenridge, TX. Dated: April 21, 1929.*

LITTLE BLANCHE DESEMBERG OF MEXIA, TEXAS

by Ruth Ginsburg (Austin)

On September 2, 1902, *The Evening News* of Mexia, Texas carried this story:

DIED

Little Blanche Desenberg died about three o'clock Monday afternoon after a brief attack of typhoid fever. Medical skill and tender nursing were of no avail, and after a noble struggle with the grim monster, the frail little form released the soul to return to its maker (sic.), while the body returns to Mother Earth. Blanche was a sweet little child, loved by all who knew her, and being taken away in the first flush of sweet girlhood is a sad blow to the parents, and in their hour of sorrow they have the sincere sympathy of a large circle of friends.

Mr. Ed Katten of Waco sent this account to the TJHS archives in answer to my request for information about Mexia. Included were the condolence letters written to the Desenberg family. Since the families of both Mr. and Mrs. Desenberg lived outside the state, the messages from Texas friends are of particular importance to the study of the social history of the statewide Jewish com-

munity. They came from many different Texas cities and towns, and indicate the network of relationships of which the Desenbergs were part.

Gertie Marx (Mrs. M.), Mrs. Alphonse Levy, Nettie and Nat Jacob, Herman and Estelle Meyer wrote from Galveston, and Abe Josie wired from Galveston, as did Julia M. Marx and Gertie Frankel and Nat and Nettie Jacob. Other letters of sympathy came from Charles Sanger, Waco; Mrs. B. Bloom, who was the proprietress of a hotel in Buffalo, Texas; Alexander Efron, a cotton broker from Ennis; Mrs. A. Wormser, Dallas; Nora Wormser, Dallas; Jake and Eva Tannenbaum, Jacksonville, Texas; Gussie Oscar, Ennis; and Mrs. Sam Katzenstein, Bremond, Texas.

The Society thanks Mr. Katten for his donation of these papers. We would be very interested in hearing more about any of the people mentioned and about Buffalo, Jacksonville, and Bremond.

Please address any correspondence to TJHS % Barker Center for Texas History, University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78713.

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 1993-1994 membership year.

Membership Classification: \$25-Annual Member; \$50-Supporting Member; \$100-Sponsor;
\$250-Sustaining Member; \$500-Benefactor; \$1,000-Patron.

Name: _____
(PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY IN INK)

Name of Spouse: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Tel #: _____ Office Tel #: _____ Fax #: _____

My areas of interest are: _____

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

*Clip and send to address on reverse side.

**WELCOME
NEW MEMBERS!**

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Biskin ----- *San Antonio, TX*
Mr. Sam Eneman ----- *Charlotte, NC*
Mrs. Jessie L. Foss ----- *Lafayette, LA*
Mrs. Joan R. Johnson ----- *El Paso, TX*
Dr. and Mrs. Dave Kaminsky ----- *Houston, TX*
Mr. and Mrs. Georges Levy ----- *Mexico City, Mexico*
Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Whitehill ----- *Maitland, FL*

**DATES TO
REMEMBER**

Friday, April 8
thru
Sunday, April 10

1994 ANNUAL GATHERING

El Paso
Hotel Camino Real Paso del Norte

For more INFO: 713/494-2668

**PLEASE COME
TO THE ANNUAL GATHERING
IN EL PASO!**

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 10193
Austin, Texas 78766-0193

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FT. WORTH, TX
PERMIT NO. 1440

Dated Material

3627 6584
Mr. and Mrs. Ruben Linares
5019 Glenhaven
Baytown, TX 77521

