

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Established 1980



June 2000

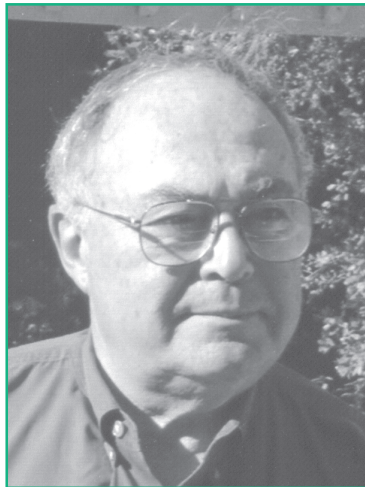
Newsletter

From the New TJHS President

Now that we have entered the new millennium, I am extremely excited to have the confidence of the Board of Directors and the membership who have elected me to head the Texas Jewish Historical Society as it's President. The past presidents and board members have done a most outstanding job in bringing our society to it's present status as one of the largest and most prestigious historical societies in the U.S. I know that we are the envy of other historical societies with our archives housed at the Barker American History Center in Austin and the Jewish exhibit area we co-sponsored at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio. Many thanks to all the people who have come prior to this administration.

The new Board and Officers who were elected at our Annual Gathering in Laredo pledge to the general membership that we will carry the torch to further preserve Jewish history in Texas for future generations, so that our children and grandchildren will never forget what we did, and what our heritage has done to shape the history of Texas.

Speaking of Laredo and our Annual Gathering in March, close to 100 members attended the meeting and I can only say, if you weren't there you missed a thrilling meeting with the Laredo Jewish community making us feel like brothers and sisters. They were most hospitable, friendly, and went out of their way to make us feel at home. I especially wanted to thank Doris Epstein for doing all the legwork in making all the arrangements for us and putting together the Monterrey tour prior to the Gathering. Also, let's not forget Helen Wilk, who



kept everybody focused and, as usual, did a marvelous job. If you have ever had the opportunity to put together a meeting of this magnitude, you'll understand.

We heard about the history of the Laredo Jewish community, attended their synagogue, and local panelists told us about growing up as a minority. If you haven't been to one of our Gatherings, all the speeches and testimonies are recorded and placed in our archives, as are the minutes that reflect the business conducted at each meeting. As a result of our meeting, the local Laredoans were so impressed with our mission that 18

new members joined our society. We dined in Nuevo Laredo, went to Friday night services, heard many stories and came away with another Jewish history lesson about our past contributions to Laredo history.

Our Jewish Historical Society is in great shape both enthusiastically and financially and we are at a point where another new publication is in the works. We now have funds available for grants to authors to do research into our history in areas of the state that may never have been documented.

Our next summer board meeting will be in Dallas on Sunday, July 16. Registration forms will be sent to everyone, as all Board meetings are open to the entire membership. So far, tentatively, the next Annual Gathering in spring of 2001 is planned to be held in Austin. We hope to visit our archives at the Barker Library and perhaps the fabulous new Dell Center JCC. Above all we will learn about the Jewish history of Austin. Please make plans to attend, as we need everyone's help!

Jack Henrich

Report on the TJHS Trip to Monterrey, Mexico

To: Your Royal Majesties Jack Gerrick and Helen Wilk
 From: Howard and Annette Lackman
 Subject: A Report on the TJHS Expeditionary Force to Monterrey, Mexico, from Monday, March 20, to Thursday, March 23, in the year 5760.

The purpose of this expedition was to gain insights into prior Jewish colonial settlement of Northern Mexico as well as to evaluate the current Jewish community regarding an amiable cultural exchange between the parties. (And to have a good time, as well.)

Preceding the actual departure, a scouting party led by Captain Barbara Rosenberg reported positively on suitable camping sites, knowledgeable and friendly natives, and provisions available from the local terrain. Transportation and other arrangements were secured through a nearby expert from Laredo, one Doris Epstein.

This is to report in summary to your majesties that the expedition was a success unrivaled in the international travel history of the Society.

Ensnconced on a promontory called the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza, the expeditionary party studied with one Ana Portnoy de Berner, a scholar of no small ability of the realm we visited. Also known affectionately as Channa, this charming lady discussed the biography and significance of Luis de Carvajal de Mozo, a “converso”

instrumental in the settlement of Monterrey. She detailed his family and descendants and the role of a weapon called the “Inquisition” in stifling Jewish colonization in the lands of Northern Mexico. Your representatives visited and paid respects at the Jewish cemetery in Monterrey, noting the unique custom of burying the women separate from the men.

Subsequently, the group visited museums depicting the cultural and artistic history of the area, industrial

each of their children attends the Hebrew Day School. They were most gracious in inviting all of us “gringos” for a delicious dairy supper at their club. Just before leaving Monterrey, we enjoyed a rare opportunity—a beautiful program put on by the seventh and eighth grade students and followed by a meaningful dialogue with them.

Our expedition was an informative, enlightening and thought-provoking experience. Thankfully, no



sites representing the economy of the region, and an ample number of restaurants reflecting Monterrey’s culinary charms.

Another feature of our extensive patrol into unknown land was our encounter with the Comunidad Israelita de Monterrey, which welcomed us into their “shul” and club (community center) to celebrate the Reading of the Megillah and the Purim holiday. A tiny minority of 150 families in a total population of 3 million, the Jewish community of Monterrey has created their own “shtetl” wherein

banditti lined the highways, and the homeward march was uneventful.

In the event your highnesses are considering pensions, land grants or other expressions of thanks for the courageous volunteers who participated, let the record reflect their names: Leshin, Milstein, Gandler, Graubart, Wilk, Epstein, Fein, Leff, Morris, Katten, Albert, Schlesinger, Lenowitz, Blumberg, Schmidt, Rosenberg, Kolker and your obedient servants, Howard and Annette Lackman.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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



Jack Gerrick (Fort Worth).....	<i>President</i>
Buddy Freed (Fort Worth).....	<i>Managing Editor</i>
Helen Wilk (Corpus Christi).....	<i>Proofreader</i>
Walter Fein (San Antonio).....	<i>Proofreader</i>
Nell Hall (Fort Worth).....	<i>Proofreader</i>
Geri Gregory (San Antonio).....	<i>Layout, Typesetting and Distribution</i>

Vegetarian Souffle Recipe

Monterrey Jewish Community
Caterer: Mrs. Maia Friedstat

Puff pastry for the bottom and top of a rectangular pyrex.

Mushroom Filling:

1. Saute chopped onion, add the mushrooms (may use canned) salt, pepper, and consomme.
2. Grease the pyrex, spread the puff pastry, add the filling and cover with puff pastry.
3. brush with egg whites, mark portions and bake until golden.

Special tip: place a pan with water on the bottom of the oven so the puff pastry can expand.

(no amounts were provided, and no recipe for the pastry)



Photos From the Annual Gathering in Laredo



Jack Gerrick presented the Past President's Pin to Helen Wilk.



Frieda Katz Dow spoke about the Katz Family.



Pancho Greenblum spoke about the Laredo Jewish Community.



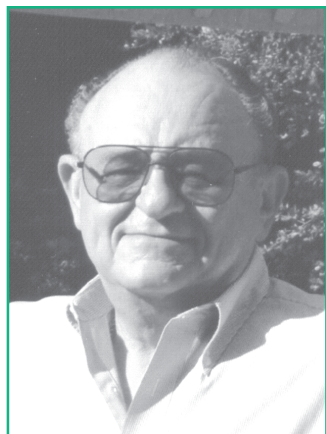
The entrance to the Monterrey Jewish Cemetery.



Seated (l-r): Mrs. Benito Gritzewsky (wife of the President of the Laredo Jewish Community), Yetta Leshin, Ana Portnoy Berner, and Enrique Berner. Standing (l-r): Marvin Leshin, Norma Albert, and Berta Schlesinger.

From the Editor Houston Jewish Genealogical Society Project Update

by Ann Oppman



I am honored to have been given the job of editing the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Newsletter. I am following several very dedicated people who have done an outstanding job of bringing this organ to the excellence it has become. I hope I will be able to maintain its quality.

The history of Jews in Texas is as old, if not older than Texas itself. Whether generations to come will study their precious legacy is not our immediate concern, although we hope and pray that they will. Our concern is to gather and record our history so it will be available for their study.

While attending our various meetings, listening to other people's stories and enjoying the camaraderie of a weekend spent with friends, we must not forget that our purpose is to participate in preserving our history. Today's school children may read about characters, fictional or real, who helped to build Texas and create a Jewish society here, but how much more exciting it will be for them when they realize that these are their ancestors? It is our duty to share this connection with them.

As editor, I look forward to receiving stories from you about your Jewish experience in Texas and how you came to be so fortunate as to be a Jew in Texas. Sharing these stories is what our organization is all about.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Buddy Sneed". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B".

Those of us whose schedules permit time at the *Herald-Voice* office are very enthused about this project that the TJHS has so generously supported. The opportunity to view first-hand source material on Jewish life in Houston and environs, in the first decade of the 20th century, is quite a privilege. There is a tremendous amount of interaction, in the form of traveling, entertaining and marrying, among Jewish people in Texas' cities and small towns. We are fascinated by the number of religious/cultural organizations and events; by the community's interest in Zionism, and by the role religion plays in the lives of obviously assimilated residents. Our planning for this project has paid off. The microfilm reader is simple to use and provides good light and magnification. Susanna Friedman and Don Teter spent hours developing the cards onto which we are entering data. The fields they have listed have corresponded to the copy, and have made data entry efficient.

A Request from ITC

The Institute of Texan Cultures has made a request for a ceremonial object that has been used at a *Bris*, to replace the one that had been on loan to them, and has been removed from the exhibit. If you can help, please call Helen Wilk at (361) 991-1118.

There are some wonderful surprises. We had not expected to see so many individuals' home addresses. Because we have completed all of 1909 and much of 1910, researchers will be able to use finding aids and easily obtain 1910 census records. Thus one notation in the Herald can lead to identifying a household of relatives! Neither had we expected articles pertaining to children's birthday parties. This is extremely helpful because a child turning five in 1910 was quite likely to have been born in his city of residence five years earlier, and these records are readily available.

Members who are not able to participate during weekday daytime hours have already volunteered their expertise in bringing the information to the Jewish genealogical community. Dave Fessier is in the process of writing a program; he has received several offers of help in inputting data. Please feel free to contact me directly for any additional information.

Please Note:

The Texas Jewish Historical Society and the editorial staff of this newsletter cannot guarantee the accuracy or authenticity of any article. This is the responsibility of each contributor, so please direct your questions, comments and/or corrections to each author directly.

Still Seeking Early Issues

We have received a good response to our request for previous issues of our Newsletters. However, there are still some missing. Since nobody seems to know exactly how many were published each year, it is difficult to know if we are missing any in some years. The following are dates of newsletters that have been received. Please check your copies, and if you have one that is not listed, please send it to **Davie Lou Solka, 501 Bermuda; Corpus Christi, TX 78411.** Fax: 361-852-5211; e-mail: davielou@solka.net.

1982-September
1985-Fall
1986-Summer
1987-Spring, Winter
1988-Spring/Fall, Winter
1989-January, Summer, Fall
1990-Summer, Fall, Winter
1991-Spring, Summer, Fall

1992-Spring, Fall, Winter
1993-Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter
1994-Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter
1995-Spring, Summer
1996-January, June, September
1997-March, October
1998-March, Summer
1999-January, June, September
2000-January, Spring

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Summer Board Meeting

Sunday, July 16, 2000

10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Open to all Members!

at the Dallas Jewish Community Center
7900 Northhaven Road
Dallas, Texas 75230

Cost is \$15.00 per person for lunch

**Reservation Deadline
June 25, 2000**

**For hotel reservations at Courtyard by Marriott
(near the JCC),
call 800-321-2211 - ask for TJHS. All rooms are \$64.00.**

**You may still be able to make the deadline! You should
have received a flyer in the mail for mailing in your reservation.**

A note of thanks

I want to express my thanks and appreciation for the concern that our members showed for me when I had to leave our Gathering in Laredo because of illness, which is now behind me.

The many phone calls that Yetta and I received, and the receipt of the card signed by the many members in Laredo made us feel like we are really family.

Yetta and I are very grateful that so many cared to inquire about me, and we are looking forward to our next meeting.

Sincerely, Marvin Leshin



Donations to Endowment Fund

In memory of Helen Wilk's mother, Lillian Goldman, from Ben and Barbara Rosenberg, Ed and Doris Katten, and Mickey and Noel Graubart.

In memory of Nancy Lyman, from Dr. Larry and Helen Wilk.

Texas Jewish Historical Society Donor Cards

This card is available for anyone wishing to honor or memorialize an individual through our endowment fund. Upon receipt of your gift, the Society will respond with this acknowledgement. To the members who have sent in funds in the past, thank you on behalf of TJHS. To all those who will send funds in the future, please send your gift to:

**Texas Jewish Historical Society
P.O. Box 10193
Austin, Texas 78766-0193**

The Texas Jewish Historical Society

gratefully acknowledges your gift to our

Endowment Fund

of \$ _____

in _____ of _____

An acknowledgement has been sent to the party you specified.

Your gift will further the efforts to record, preserve, and disseminate historic information about the Jewish culture in Texas.

Jewish Presence in the State of Nuevo Leon, Mexico

by Ana Portnoy de Berner



Jewish presence in the Northeastern region of Mexico dates back to the 16th. century. Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva, a devout Christian who was descendant of a crypto-jewish family, discovered and governed the New Kingdom of Leon, a territory known as “Carvajal’s Magic Quadrangle”, from Tamaulipas to Chihuahua and north into New Mexico to Corpus Christi. He brought along his sister Francisca’s family because his nephew, Luis de Carvajal “the Younger”, was his heir.

Francisca’s family practiced the forbidden Mosaic Religion, trying to be devout Jews. In 1589, when the governor and the Viceroy of New Spain claimed the same territory, the Carvajal’s were denounced to the Inquisition. The governor died in prison and the rest of the family were condemned and had to declare in public their sins in the Auto de Fe in 1590. Six years later they were tried again for practicing their Jewish faith and for heresy and burned in Mexico City.

Luis de Carvajal “the Younger”, proud of his Jewishness, was considered to be a famous rabbi and teacher. Some typical customs of Nuevo Leon, such as endogamic and levirate marriages* still practiced in small towns, flour tortillas and cabrito (a young calf) as the regional typical dishes and certain linguistic expressions are thought to be evidence of a Sephardic presence four centuries ago.

The modern Jewish Community in Monterrey, though, is not related to the Colonial past nor to the Crypto-jews. Though there is evidence of four or five German Jews in the second half of the 19th. century who arrived in the region in a period of economic prosperity and industrial development, the basis of an organized Jewish Community were established by the Jews who came from Poland, Lithuania and Russia in the early 20th century. The pioneers were David Safir (originally Scheiffer), Jacobo Lederbaum-Miller (originally Ladabaum) and Isaac Weil who were already living in the city between 1911 and 1916.

When the American Congress set the Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924,

hundreds of Jews arrived in Mexico, as this country continued with its Open Doors Policy. The Quota Acts allowed immigrants that had exceeded the national quota to live in any American country for a period of time in order to obtain new immigration visas as residents of the Western Hemisphere and enter the United States. For this reason, thousands of people emigrated to Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Philanthropic Jewish Organizations in the United States helped immigrants to become established in Mexico. There were Jews living in almost all the towns across the country, working as peddlers. There were Jews in northeastern towns of Saltillo, Torreon, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Nueva Rosita, Linares, Ciudad Victoria, as well as in Monterrey, a dynamic industrial city where economic opportunities attracted single men and a few families. In December 1925 there were 38 young men and six families.

Jews came to Monterrey for several reasons:

- They were urban settlers in their original countries, and they could find means of survival in commerce or as employees in a city which was a pole of attraction to immigrants from all over Mexico as well as from Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Syria because of its growing industry. Jews started as peddlers and became businessmen and industrial entrepreneurs. They tended to concentrate in a place where it would be possible to start an organized Jewish life, with more Jewish inhabitants and the means to support it. Most of the Jews living in small towns in the states of Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas and Coahuila migrated to Monterrey - or Mexico City-when organized communities were established.

- The fact that Monterrey is less than 200 miles from the Texas border meant that complying with the residence clause they could obtain the American Immigration Visa and establish themselves across the river. Several families moved to the States from the late 1920’s to the 1950’s. Many more remained as they had made a living and established a family

in Monterrey.

- The majority of the Jewish immigrants had family ties or came from the same small towns in Poland and Lithuania. Many brought brides from their “shtetl”, meeting and marrying them in Veracruz or Tampico on arrival. Even now a high percentage of the Community is related to each other.

- In 1925 the Jewish Social Club Hatikva was inaugurated in rented rooms downtown. In that same year the lots for the Jewish Cemetery were bought within the Panteon del Carmen and in 1932 the Community started a complementary Jewish education program for children in the afternoons that became in 1935 the Colegio Hatikva, a daily school, with 17 pupils ages 2 to 5.

- From the 1920’s until nowadays, the members of the Jewish Community live in the same neighborhood, close to the synagogue, the social club and the school. This tendency gave the immigrants the possibility to communicate to each other in Yiddish, and even to their descendants, to find emotional security in a familiar ambiance, a sense of identity and belonging and common experiences shared by all the group.



- Until 1940 Jewish families lived in downtown Monterrey. As the west of the city was urbanized, they moved to Colonia Vista Hermosa where in 1950-1954 the Jewish Community Center was built. It houses the Jewish School, an Orthodox Synagogue, a swimming pool, an auditorium, a ballroom and the administration offices. Close by are the kosher butcher and the Mikva and in 1970 the Community bought land for its own Cemetery.

- Nowadays 150 families form the Jewish Community in Monterrey. There are five Hadassah groups and a Zionist Youth Organization. 100% of the Jewish children attend the Nuevo Colegio Israelita de Monterrey (from kindergarden to 9th grade) and the Community has two Orthodox Rabbis, Rav Moishe Kaiman who arrived in 1944 and Rabbi Aaron Gulman who arrived in Monterrey in January 2000.

** Marrying within one’s group and a brother-in-law required to marry his brother’s widow.*

Texas Jewish Historical Society 2000 - 2001

Officers



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Ed Katten (Waco).....	<i>Second Vice-President</i>
Cynthia Wolf (Beaumont).....	<i>Third Vice-President</i>
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Blanche Sheiness (Houston).....	<i>Historian</i>
Howard Lackman (Arlington)	<i>Archivist</i>

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Rusty Milstein (Longview)
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Blanche Ladabaum Sheiness, TJHS Officer

This is the third article in a continuing series highlighting the life stories of TJHS Board Members and Officers.



I was born in San Antonio, Texas, November 24, 1913 to Harry and Ida Esther Heller Ladabaum. I had one brother, Joseph who was five years younger than I and died at age 40. My parents also raised Frances Sherr, the only child of my mother's sister. My father's parents were Israel and Eva Ladabaum. Israel died in the Ukraine at a very early age, leaving a widow and five children. Eva and the two youngest came to the United States about 1924; the other three children were already here. My mother's parents immigrated in the late 1880s. He was from Estonia and she was from Lithuania. All of their 6 sons and 2 daughters were born here. My mother was born in 1891 in New York.

My father emigrated to the United States around 1905-1907 through New York. When he arrived at the home of an aunt and uncle, he met the girl who lived up stairs. My mother was American born and understood very little Yiddish. My father on the other hand was a "greene" and knew no English. However, evidently language was not that necessary. My father was encouraged by HIAS, Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, to travel west, to Texas. His mother's sister's two sons, Sam and Harry Sugarman, had settled in San Antonio. My parents corresponded with each other, but how my father wrote before he learned English, I don't know. My father attended school that the National Council of Jewish Women conducted in San Antonio and peddled in the Austin/Taylor area. My father was a fairly well educated man in Hebrew, and believed in education, so he continued his studies. In fact, he was working towards attending the University of Texas in Austin, but romance prevailed. In December, 1912 my father went back to New York City and married my mother. My father's older sister told me that my mother was superstitious and did not want to get married in 1913, but it was alright for me to be born then.

My parents began married life



on Marshall Street in San Antonio, a street that has given way to an expressway. I was born at Dr. Kinney's Sanatorium, which I learned many years later, was an alcoholic treatment center. When my mother went into early labor and my father was not home, the neighbors were kind enough to take her to the nearest medical facility. Now is that why I have never cared for alcoholic drinks?

By the time I was two, the family moved to Charlotte, Atascosa County, a small town about 30 miles southwest of San Antonio. In 1918 the family moved to Laredo. My father's brother, Joe (Yankel) had fled to Mexico to escape military service for WWI (the first draft dodger). My father left my mother and me in Laredo and went to work with his brother in Mexico. Can you imagine my mother, a book-keeper in NYC, who spoke no Yiddish and did not know how to cook? My father's relatives in San Antonio spoke only Yiddish. Mother kept herself busy. I have a hand written abstract for some lots in Charlotte, that Mother received as payment for doing abstracts and deeds of trust in the county.

When I was a child, there were only about 20 or so Jewish families in Laredo, most of whom were European and more or less

recent arrivals. The Mexicans referred to my mother as "La Judea", the Jewish lady. Two of the Sephardic Jews were an uncle and nephew, Haber and Baihn. The so called OTHERS were the Alexanders, Moser, Daiches (a Civil War Veteran), and the Wormsers, Tio Julio Wormser, a bachelor, riding in his horse and buggy long after everyone else drove cars. For the High Holidays only one service was held. A hall was rented and the Torah and Ark was brought from whose home it had been housed since last Yom Kippur. Some years the so called congregation felt the need to maintain the hall on a more or less permanent basis. Most of the years from 1918 until his death in 1940, my father conducted services. Some years the group would hire someone from the outside. And through the years people like Max Shafer and later Leon (Leibke) Katz assisted my father. I can still visualize Max Shafer slamming his prayer book on the table and saying, "Zol Zein Shtill," if the children became too rambunctious or the ladies too talkative.

Since Laredo is a border town with tight immigration laws prior to WWII, Mexico was more lenient to immigration. We had Jewish families who came and stayed in Laredo until all the red tape was completed and the families could be reunited. The family that stands out, in my mind is the Solomon Pines family. Mr. Pines was a Hebrew teacher, from whom I learned my prayers and hymns. Once his family was reunited, they moved on. My father had a store on Convent Ave. on the way to the bridge. It was a rest stop, especially for pregnant Jewish women who lived in Nuevo Laredo and walked across every day. Their reason? They could not come and stay and have their babies, but they could come for medical assistance and should they by chance go into labor, they would be rushed to an American hospital. The child would be an American citizen and its parents were on the priority list to enter the United States.

From time to time these delightful people would become aware of the need to educate the children in Jewish

Traditions, so a Sunday School would be organized. Growing up I was usually the only girl in my age range, but there were several boys and younger children, so we had a semblance of a Sunday School. By the early 1930s the Jewish population had grown enough to build a house of worship with money collected through the years. A building was built with a basement to house two congregations, the orthodox downstairs and the reform upstairs, but it was never used in that way. The orthodox group pulled out and later established a house of worship in the Heights. Now the Temple is part of the Laredo Independent School District Offices.

I attended Heights Elementary School, went on to L B Christian Junior High (now part of the administration complex) and then on to Laredo High (now the Posada Hotel). I graduated high school in 1930. Can you imagine a naive 16 year old coming from Laredo, a city of 20,000, entering a freshman chemistry class of 125 and Dr. Schochte saying, "Take a good look around you. By Thanksgiving some will be gone and by mid term most of the people in here will have flunked out. Just be sure you are still here." I made it. My first real brush with anti-Semitism was at the University. I had made friends with a non-Jewish girl and one day as we entered the library, I suggested we go to the back. Her remark was, "You don't want to go there. All the Jews sit there." I looked at her and said, "Dorothy, I am Jewish." Of course, she answered, "You are different." That is when I started looking at things differently.

During the depression, money was s-c-a-r-c-e at my home, so I only stayed the year and a summer. Laredo was hiring teachers who had 60 semester hours if they continued working towards a degree. In the fall I stayed with my grandmother Ladabaum and my father's younger brother in Brownsville and attended the junior college for one semester. I understood Yiddish, but could not speak it, so my grandmother and I had a hard time. It was decided that I return home, apply as a substitute in the public schools and take classes by correspondence and extension. I saved my earnings and borrowed and attended UT in the summers, or any

other university I could afford. The depression had forced me into teaching (never my first choice), but I had a good background for languages, having had Spanish and Latin in school and French from the Sisters of the Sacred Heart I attended the University of Mexico in Mexico City where I not only perfected my Spanish, but learned to speak Yiddish. When I returned to Laredo, my father taught me Hebrew. I earned a B.A. from UT Austin in 1937 and continued teaching in Laredo. At this same time, another Jewish girl named Faye Sheiness began teaching. I was so happy because at last I would have a friend with whom I would find a lot in common. Faye Sheiness insisted I meet her brother. In Feb. of 1939 we had a teachers meeting in Corpus Christi. We stopped in Alice and I met Faye's brother, Marvin. With my introduction to Marvin Sheiness of Alice, my life changed forever. On September 10, 1939 Marvin and I married in Laredo, moved to Alice and have lived there until 2000.

My family did not keep kosher, but my father's sister in San Antonio did. I spent many summer vacations there and by osmosis learned quite a bit. Alice never had a strong Jewish community, so with the exception of the oil boom years, Jewish families would come and go. There was never a house of worship. We established a Sunday School for a couple of years, but ended up driving the children to Corpus Christi. I am a life member of Hadassah and belong to Brandeis Women. Now that Marvin is gone, I am the official Jewish representative to both the JCC of Corpus Christ and B'nai Israel Synagogue in Corpus Christi.

I have three children, Herschel Lee, who lives in San Antonio, married Joyce Friedman and they have two children. Their son, Frank, works in Austin and Carrie is a junior at Tech. My twins are Marc Allan and Sally Elaine Sheiness Drayer. Marc is an attorney in Houston and is married to Paula. Sally is a teacher in Richardson and has three children, Aaron Drayer, an Aggie graduate, like his uncles, works in Boston, Mass. Rachel, also an Aggie graduate, is doing graduate work in Boston. Michelle is attending school in San Marcos.

From time immemorial

Thanksgiving centered around my birthday, until our sons became Aggies. Then we served Thanksgiving dinner around their schedule, as they were in the band. But this ritual ended in November 1992 when my husband, Marvin, died on THanksgiving and this changed Thanksgiving forever.

Curiosity is a peculiar thing. I have always been a people watcher and this leads to wondering what they do and how they got where they are going. With this in mind, it is not surprising that I became interested in the Texas Jewish Historical Society. After a TJHS meeting I went to SRD (Scottish Rite Dorm) for a trip down memory lane. I didn't feel so strange; same elevators, same room, same office and same fence, concrete rim around the grounds, where we sat and smoked at night, since we were not allowed to smoke inside. Years later when Herschel was a high school senior, he went to Austin to check out living arrangements and had a date with a girl at SRD. I asked on his return, "Do the girls still go out about 10 p.m. to sit on the fence and smoke the last one of the day?" He answered "Yes, but how did you know, Mama?" "Easy," I said. "That's where I learned to smoke."

Edited by Jan Siegel Hart

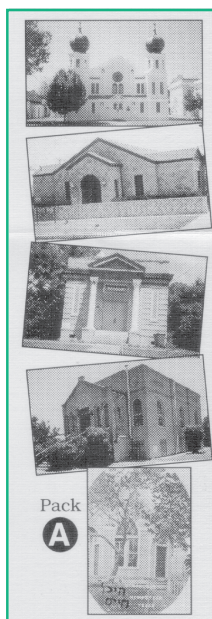
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Recollections of Congregation Agudas Achim in Laredo, Texas

by Stanley Freed

My father, Jack Freed, came from Minsk, Russia, to Galveston, Texas, prior to the First World War and settled in Laredo. This was probably around 1912-1913. When war broke out in 1917, he enlisted in the Army and was sent to France, where he served in the 36th Infantry Division, a Texas Division. After the First World War, he returned to Laredo to stay.

I was born in 1930 and, therefore, my earliest recollections of Congregation Agudas Achim start around 1935 or 1936, when I was five or six years old. For information about Jewish life in Laredo prior to that time, I refer you to a book written by Albert Granoff, who owned a furniture store in Laredo and was a member of Temple B'nai Israel. Albert wrote a book of his personal reminiscences of coming from Europe to the United States and then to South Texas and about his early life in Laredo. The Granoff family lived across the street from my family.

For purposes of these reminiscences, let me break down my recollections into two time periods. The first will be called the "Pre-War Time Period", which is prior to the conclusion of World War II. The period of time after that I will call the "Post-War Era".

Patsy Brand Sanditen had an old pamphlet dated November 14, 1924, that contained the Constitution and Bylaws of Temple B'nai Israel, the earliest Jewish congregation in Laredo. This was a congregation composed of a group who was almost orthodox and a group who was reform.

In 1924, the entire Laredo Jewish community was one congregation. The pamphlet that Patsy Sanditen gave me is silent as to the type of service to be conducted. I don't know where they had services. At the end of

the pamphlet there is a list of the officers, trustees, committees, and all of the members. There were thirty-four families listed: B.M. Alexander, L.G. Alexander, A. Baum, A. Chaleff, L. Daiches, W. Daiches, M.S. Davis, I. Davis, Sol Dalkowitz, A. Evans, W. Epstein, L. Franklin, M. Franklin, J. Freed, I. Frelich, I. Goodman, A.L. Granoff, H. Granoff,



1930s Location of Congregation Agudas Achim on the second floor - Laredo, Texas.

S. Gurwitz, M.A. Hirsch, I. Hirsch, L. Hausman, S. Hausman, E. Joseph, A. Kramer, H. Ladabaum, J. Moser, A. Moser, H. Meyer, Sol Rubinstein, George Rosen, S. Sbar, H. Schen, and Max Shaefer.

Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews, by Ruthe Wingarten and Cathy Schechter, a book sponsored by the Texas Jews Historical Society, gives the early history of the Laredo Congregation as follows:

In Laredo, services were

initially held in a rented hall. In the 1930, funds were raised for a two-story building: one story for the Reform Jews and another story for the Conservatives. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory, so the money was divided. The Reform became Temple B'nai Israel, and the conservatives formed Agudas Achim. A similar arrangement existed in Port Arthur, with the Reform and Orthodox Jews sharing a building. When the Reform rabbi was on the Orthodox side, he wore a hat; he removed it when he walked to the other side.

In his book, Albert Granoff states that at a meeting at his furniture store, the congregation members voted to split into two separate congregations, with the Reform congregation keeping the lot that they owned. The other congregation, which was the genesis of Congregation Agudas Achim, took the funds that were in the bank account. This was probably in the early 1930's. The division took place, and Congregation Agudas Achim was born. The reform group later built a building at the corner of Washington and Main in the downtown residential district, around 1937.

The listing of officers in the 1924 Temple B'nai Israel Constitution and Bylaws publication shows the following members, who later left Temple B'nai Israel and became the founding members of Congregation Agudas Achim:

Louis Franklin (my uncle) who was President of the combined congregation (father of Selma Avigael, Sylvia Shanken, and Clarice Seeman). A. Schwartzman (Vice-President) of the combined congregation.

M.S. Davis (Gary Jacob's grandfather) (trustee of the combined congregation).

Continued on page 12

Members: Mose Franklin, Jack Freed (my father), Sam Gurwitz (my cousin), Harry Ladabaum, and Max Sheaffer (my uncle).

Prior to 1948, Congregation Agudas Achim did not have its own synagogue building. It held services in a rented hall, which was located on the second floor of a building in the 400 block of Flores Avenue, across the street from where Sears used to be. It was above what was the I. Alexander Men's Store. (See Photos) This hall was rented or borrowed from the Woodman of the World, which was a men's fraternal organization and which had its lodge in the building. It was used by the congregation for the purposes of holding High Holiday Services. I don't recall any other services being held elsewhere, other than on Purim. Purim services would be held in the home of my uncle Max Sheaffer, who kept the Torahs in a portable ark in his living room. I recall all the kids sitting around the floor with pots, pans, spoons and knives, to make the appropriate noise. Joe Ladabaum, who was one of the oldest of the young people, was deputized as sort of sheriff. He would have a bugle or a whistle and, upon a signal from my uncle or his father, he would blow the bugle or the whistle, and we would all make the appropriate noise by beating the pots and pans with spoons or knives. Whenever the High Holiday Services were to take place in the rented hall, the Torahs were taken to the downtown hall in the portable ark. I don't believe there were services for Passover or for the other holidays, other than the High Holidays. Whenever anyone needed a *minyan*, they would call my uncle Max Sheaffer, and he would see to it that there were enough people for a *minyan*, which

would be held in a private home. Until his death (around 1940), Mr. Harry Ladabaum would conduct the services for the High Holidays. These were held in the Woodmen of The World Hall on the second floor of the building located in the 400 block of Flores Avenue. The congregation at that time didn't even own any books. I recall all of the men having their own books. My father had his own set.

Around 1938 or so, it was decided to have a Sunday school. This was a combined Sunday School of the entire Laredo Jewish community. A school was organized, and the congre-



1940s Location of Congregation Agudas Achim on the second floor - Laredo, Texas.

gation either rented or borrowed what was then the American Legion Hall, which is located off of Market Street, behind what are now the Market Street Tennis Courts. This was a large hall and had different areas for different classes to meet. I remember there were many attending. There must have been at least three different classes. I don't remember who our teacher was, but I do remember coloring pictures of Moses and Abraham, probably very similar to the ones that the kids still color today. *Deep in the Heart*, on page 223, shows a photograph, circa 1938, of a large Succot party that was held for the Laredo Jewish Sunday School classes. This photograph was taken in the backyard of Harry Granoff's

home, which still stands on Chihuahua Street. It is a photo of the combined Sunday School of Congregation Agudas Achim and Temple B'nai Israel. The backyard sidewalk was covered with a trellis which was easily converted to a sort of Succah. The lunch was spread out on a long table, which was the length of the trellis. All the kids are sitting around the table, and some people are standing and posing for the photograph. I suppose that was the first Sunday school or religious school that we had in Laredo. Later, Frieda Granoff, Albert Granoff's wife, would build a Succah at her home, and there would be a Succot party for the kids.

About 1939 or 1940, the congregation made a move but not to its own synagogue. The congregation moved one block north to another rented hall, which was in the upstairs of a building located in the 500 block of Flores Avenue in downtown Laredo, directly across the street from the present Mercado. (See Photo), Located on the ground floor was my dad's cousin's jewelry store (Sam Gurwitz). Just to the south, was the Tivoli Theatre. The hall that we occupied was on the second floor of this building.

The hall was adequate. It had one large room where we had our synagogue services, a large, very old fashioned kitchen, and another large hall, where we had a ping pong table. It had another smaller room, which was used as a school. In summer and during the holidays, it was very hot. This is all still prior to the Second World War. All holidays were now observed, as we had a year round synagogue facility. We occupied that location until about 1948, when our present synagogue was built on Malinche Street.

During this period of time, circa 1940, we had two different teachers, at different times, who held Hebrew School in the upstairs synagogue. One was named Jacobs or Jacobson. My

brother Philip was Bar Mitzvah in 1939. About the same time, so was Arthur Gurwitz, who was my cousin. Soon after that were the B'nai Mitzvah of Mendel Granoff and Joe Mike Kavy. Mendel now lives in Israel, and Mike Kavy lives in San Antonio. We didn't have any Rabbi to teach Philip, Mendel, Arthur or Mike. Philip and Arthur were taught by Rabbi Z. Gurwitz, who was Arthur's grandfather and had come from San Antonio to stay for about six or eight months to teach them. Mendall Granoff was taught by Leon Katz. Later, probably prior to 1942, we hired our first Rabbi. His name was Rabbi H. J. Horowitz, who, I believe, came from Houston. Rabbi Horowitz taught the boys in my age group, Neil Gurwitz, Irving Greenblum, Arnold Nitishin, Jerome Granoff, and me. Also attending class was Sam Haber's sister, Ruth. I suppose there were additional classes. Later, he also taught Ike Epstein. We attended Hebrew school on the second floor hall every afternoon after school to study for our Bar Mitzvah. During the summer, we went every morning for two hours. We worked very hard. Neil Gurwitz's Bar Mitzvah was in February of 1942. Irving Greenblum's Bar Mitzvah was in June of 1942, followed by Jerome Granoff's in August 1942, followed by Arnold Nitishin, whose Bar Mitzvah must have been in September or October of 1942 because it was on Yom Kipper Day. My Bar Mitzvah was in February of 1943.

I want to share my recollections with you of the early Laredo Bar Mitzvah parties (1930's and 1940's). We didn't have a synagogue building and we did not have formal Bar Mitzvah parties. Families did not rent a hotel room nor have a caterer. The regular Bar Mitzvah ceremony was at the synagogue downtown in the rented hall in the 500 block of Flores Avenue, followed on Sunday with a party usually starting around 5:00 in the afternoon. It would be held in the yard at the home of the Bar Mitzvah. That's the way my brother's was, and most of the others. The food would be mostly delicatessen from San Antonio,

the usual corned beef, pastrami, salami, and potato salad. Most people had big wash tubs used for laundry that would be stocked with bottles of Coca Cola, Nehi, and Pearl beer, all covered with ice. There was no band or fancy combo. Most of the time, we didn't even have music. Everybody would sit around, eat, visit, and be friendly. Sometime during the evening, the Bar mitzvah would deliver his speech for the third time, having already delivered it at services on Friday night and Saturday morning. Irving Greenblum had a dance on his front porch for the younger people around 8:00 o'clock in the evening. Because my Bar Mitzvah was in February, we couldn't have a party out in the yard, so we had it at the American Legion Hall. There was a party for the adults around 5:00, and I had a dance with a "juke box" for some friends starting around 7:00 o'clock. I remember that Neil and Arthur Gurwitz's and Mike Kavy's Bar Mitzvah parties were also in their yards. In the 1950's and thereafter, the Bar Mitzvah parties were held in hotels. There were no Bar Mitzvah ceremonies until much later.

When war broke out in 1941, many Jewish servicemen were stationed at the Laredo Air Force Base and at Fort McIntosh, the present Laredo Community College campus. Many attended services and our congregation more than doubled in size. There were many latke parties for the servicemen. Because of the fact that there were so many servicemen we began holding High Holiday Services at the American Legion Hall on Market Street around 1942 or 1943. It was larger and was easier for most of the families to walk to than the downtown synagogue, because it was located in the Heights residential area. We had our regular synagogue downtown at the rented hall, but we would have our High Holiday Services in the American Legion Hall. I recall one year the Hazzan became ill. Somehow, we concluded the services.

In 1943, both Temple B'nai Israel and Congregation Agudas Achim again organized a combined

Sunday school. It was not a Hebrew school, but a Sunday school. Classes were held at the Temple. I remember going there for a whole year, concentrating on Jewish history and traditions. Classes started in the fall of 1943 and continued through the spring of 1944. The principal in charge was Frieda Granoff, who was Albert Granoff's wife, assisted by Sylvia Jacobs. I was a member of the confirmation class, and we were taught by Sylvia Franklin Shanken, who was living in Laredo while her husband was in the air force in Europe. My confirmation class, which was confirmed in the spring of 1944 consisted of Frieda Katz (Dow), the daughter of Leon Katz, who now lives in Houston; Sylvia Weineki, who later moved to California; Jerome Granoff (Florida); Stanley Freed, Irving Greenblum, both living in Laredo; Carmen Rottenstein (Schneider), who still lives in Laredo, the daughter of Dr. Max Rottenstein; and Norma Goldberg (Kutler), who was Nathan Goldberg's daughter and lives in San Antonio, Texas. The girls wore long white dresses, and all the boys wore brown sport coats. I believe it was one of the early confirmations in Laredo.

After my uncle Max Sheaffer left Laredo (around 1946), my uncle Louis Franklin again became president of the congregation. He decided that we had to have our own synagogue. Because the air force base had closed, he was able to arrange for the purchase of one of the two chapels that was located at the air base. My cousin Jack Safir, who lived here for a number of years after the war, supervised the moving of the chapel from the air base to its present location on Malinche Street in 1948. Another military building was purchased and was set up in back as the community hall. It was named Charles Shafer Hall in honor of my uncle Charles Shafer, who donated most of the money for moving and remodeling it. Charles Shafer Hall was replaced during the 1960's by the Louis Franklin Center.

Continued on page 14

The synagogue building has been remodeled several times and is now faced with brick.

I don't remember whether or not the congregation had a rabbi between the mid 1940's, when Rabbi Horowitz left, and the 1960's. There may have been rabbis in the late 1940's or early 1950's but, during this time, I was usually away at school and don't recall any. I do recall that either Louis Nitishin or Leon Katz would conduct the Friday night Sabbath Services, which would be held in the new synagogue. Leon Katz also conducted other services and read from the Torah. We would always have a rabbi and/or a cantor for the holidays and always managed to have very nice services. When I returned to Laredo in 1958, the congregation had decided they wanted to have a full time rabbi. Rabbi April was hired. This must have been around 1959. Since that time, we've had several rabbis. I will try to recall their names. I am not certain of the sequence, but, as I recollect, there was Rabbi April, followed by Rabbi Stone. There were Zvi Ben Shalom, who had been Cantor of Congregation Agudas Achim in San Antonio. David Fairman who was not a Rabbi, but was employed as a teacher for the religious school and who conducted services. Sometime after that, there was Rabbi Ravaad, followed by Rabbi Armon, followed by Rabbi Akiva Gerstein, followed by Rabbi Joey Garon-Wolf, followed by Rabbi Lieberman, followed for a short period until his death by Rabbi Stauber, followed by Rabbi Gordon, followed by Rabbi Unger. I think everybody will agree that my brother Philip was always the most instrumental force in making sure that the congregation had a rabbi. My brother always felt that we needed a rabbi to have an organized service, as well as an active, organized congregation. The succession of the presidents, I believe, is Louis Franklin, Max Sheaffer, Louis Franklin, Philip Freed, Louis Nitishin, Harry Moskowitz, me, Ralph Norton, Lester Avigael, Lewis Lidsky, Larry

Plotkin, Rick Norton, and presently co-presidents, David Kalisz and Les Norton, who serve as Co-Presidents. Ike Epstein recalls my uncle Max Sheaffer giving a shoe shine boy a dime or so on Shabbos to turn the lights on and off.

During the late 1940's or early 1950's, a combined religious school was again established by Temple B'nai Israel and Congregation Agudas Achim. It was a weekday Hebrew School as well as a Sunday School. The main teaching was done by some of the Jewish women who volunteered. Later, when we began hiring a rabbi, he would teach Hebrew. Miriam Norton and Evelyn Wilson, Abe Wilson's mother, were very active in the religious school. The religious school still continues.

The services that were held until the late 1940's, were almost Orthodox. There was very little, if any, English in the service. Rabbi Horowitz' sermons were in Yiddish. It was sometime after the war that there was a change from orthodox to conservative services. It started out little by little. The older generation realized that there had to be more English in the service and that it had to be more of a conservative service rather than an orthodox service in order for the young people to participate. Our services are still conservative.

When Israel was in the process of declaring its independence and faced with invasion on all frontiers, she was purchasing arms in the United States. Some of the congregation members got involved. There was an embargo on sending the arms from the United States directly to Israel, so the arms would go through Laredo into Mexico, and from Mexico to Israel. The Laredoans involved knew everybody on the Mexican side of the bridge. They would go over, shake a few hands, and obtain permission for shipments to pass into Mexico. I understand that one member hid rifles under the seat of his car and delivered them to a house in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

Congregation Agudas Achim now has a membership of eighty families and is still "doing its thing" in Laredo, Texas.

Challah receipe

From Cheryl Sigel –
Victoria, Texas

(this comes from *Modern Jewish Cooking*
by Bonne Rae London)

(Cheryl made this for the *Oneg Shabbat*
hosted by Congregation B'nai Israel at
our January Board meeting)

2 1/4 oz. Packages yeast
6-7 cups flour
1/2-3/4 cup sugar
1 Tbsp salt
1 egg
5 Tbsp margarine
2 cups warm water
1 additional egg, beaten

In mixer bowl combine yeast, 5 cups flour, sugar and salt. Attach beaters and begin mixing on low speed. Add eggs, margarine and water and mix until a very thick batter is formed.

Attach dough hook. Gradually add remaining flour, until dough clings to dough hook and clears the sides of the bowl. Continue mixing on low speed to knead dough until satin smooth, about 4-6 minutes longer.

Place dough in a greased bowl and turn to grease the top. Cover with plastic wrap and place dough in a warm, draft-free spot. Allow to rise until double in bulk, about 2 hours.

Punch down dough. Divide into 8 portions, then divide each portion into thirds. Roll each piece of dough into a rope and braid 3 strands together. Place on greased baking sheets and let rise until double in bulk, at least 1 hour. Brush the top of the Challah with the remaining egg. Bake at 350 30-45 minutes until golden brown. Yield: 8 small loaves.

Do You Know....?

Sandra Freed needs a Webcore Wire Recorder to transcribe old recordings. If you have any idea where one is available, please call Sandra at (817) 926-0455.

A History of Laredo's Jewish Community

By Dr. Stan Green, Texas A&M International University/Laredo

(an edited version of the talk delivered to the TJHS Annual Gathering in Laredo)

Historians know as fact that Luis de Carbajal, the original founder of Nuevo Leon in 1579, came from a Portuguese Jewish family and brought many Jewish settlers in his train. And it was from the Nuevo Leon ranching families around Monterrey that the settlers of Laredo came. Carlos Larralde wrote that Jews were probably among those who founded Laredo in 1755. Yet the Inquisition consigned many of Carvajal's kinsmen to the flames. How many of these Sephardic Jews survived to carry on their secret faith we will probably never know.

As far as the documents show, Laredo grew up as a catholic ranching community. Political allegiance shifted to Mexico in 1821, and then the United States flag came in 1847 as a result of the U.S. Mexico War. A few Americans and Europeans drifted in. There were about 40 or so of these in the 1870's, out of a population of about 3,000, and they probably included a Jewish family or two.

It was in the year of 1881 that the modern world intruded. Railroads were built to Laredo, the International and Great Northern from San Antonio and the Texas Mexican from Corpus Christi, bringing with them an economic boom and Jewish families.

Laredo Jews definitely enter the historical picture in 1881 for the *Laredo Times* on September 21 carried a letter to the editor announcing the beginning of the Jewish New Year on September 23, for which

The Israelites of this city have united with the Israelites of New Laredo to keep divine service at the residence of Mr. Hirsch, where all those who are not impersonally notified are invited to attend.

The only one of those 1881 "Israelites" whose name we have is Morris A. Hirsch himself, father of

Isaac (Ike) and Esther Hirsch. He was a rancher and capitalist, loaning money to other ranchers, including Ygnacio Benavides, and then serving as vice president (1908) in Benavides' First State Bank. His son Ike later became a director of the Union National Bank.

Hirsch was part of the first wave of Jewish immigration, occasioned by the railroad boom. These were Western European Jews-or Ashkenazim. They had been coming to Texas since the 1840's. Most of the Ashkenazi Jews in Laredo in the 1880s and 1890s were Germans with a sprinkling of French, and most of them were Reform Jews.

The Reform Jews of Laredo would be followed after 1900 by Orthodox Jews who left their homes in East Europe and Russia as a result of anti-semitism. By World War I there were two Jewish communities in Laredo, with the Orthodox branch becoming the larger.

A prominent Laredo family began with Samuel and Rosa Alexander, born in Hohenzalsa, Germany, who came to Texas about 1865. They set up a dry goods store in Victoria and then in Cuero and Edna, and came to Laredo to retire in 1892 largely at the insistence of their sons. The eldest of these, Isaac, had come to Laredo in 1886 to manage the store of S. Cahn and after Mr. Cahn's death the store became I. Alexander Men's store, a Laredo institution for 92 years. The girls were Frances, Annie, and Mayme, and the boys were Louis and William C. (for Centennial, born on July 4, 1876), who began with Isaac in the store, and Benjamin, who began as a clerk in the Laredo office of Mexican National railways and then moved to the Laredo National Bank where he eventually became president. His brother Louis followed him as president.

There were Ferdinand and Julius Wormser, also from Germany.

Julius had an adventurous life. Born in Bavaria in 1854, he left Germany at the age of 15, started working for his cousin in Matamoros, moved upriver to Mier after seven years to start ranching in Brooks County, and then came to Laredo in 1890. Here he opened a dry goods store, Wormser Brothers, with his brother. Ferdinand was born in Landau, Germany in 1857, came to the United States as a young boy, first to Corpus Christi and then to Laredo in 1892. The brothers moved from dry goods to farm equipment and then electrical goods-along the way breaking with the Jewish retail tradition by going into the farming business, raising Bermuda onions and other vegetables. Ferdinand would become a leader of Laredo Judaism until his death in 1922.

The saddest case was that of G.J. Levytanski from Poland who came to Laredo apparently in the 1890's and set up a jewelry shop. In December 1911, at the age of 39, he was murdered in his shop by two ex-soldiers, one of whom was hanged for the crime.

His business was bought out by an individual who would become a leading figure in Laredo's Jewish community until his death in 1954. Leon Daiches came to Laredo in 1899 at the age of 21 and after being quarantined here because of the smallpox epidemic, decided he liked the place and opened his own jewelry business.

After 1900 the complexion of Laredo Judaism began to change. Persecutions in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Lithuania) and Russia sent out a new stream of immigration. These were usually Orthodox Jews. This movement lasted until the laws of the 1920s put a halt to most European immigration. Even after that date, however, Orthodox Jews would make it to Laredo, often by way of Mexico.

Continued on page 16

Orthodox Jews stood out from the earlier Reform families. While the Reform brand of Judaism made it easier for the Western European Reform Jews to blend in with the Americans, the East European and Russian Jews renewed the European flavor of border Judaism. Their religious services called for the use of Hebrew almost exclusively. They subscribed to Yiddish newspapers, and street corner conversations took place in Yiddish, the common bond of Eastern European nationalities., while from their kitchens came aromas of exotic dishes of Eastern Europe. Orthodox gatherings kept an Old Country flavor.

Divisions were also social. Reform Jews had been on the border for some 20-30 years and were well established. Their names show up on the lists of civic and social organizations. Charles Moser and Ike Alexander took part in the first Washington Birthday Celebration in 1898; Hirsch and the Alexanders were influential in banking circles, and Charley Ross was thought a good fellow in the lodge crowd. Leon Daiches and Joe Moser were on the school board as early as 1917. Ferdinand Wormser, in addition to being in B'nai Brith and on the Jewish Welfare Board, was also in the Knights of Pythias and the Chamber of Commerce. Orthodox Jews would do this also, but now they were spending their days and nights building their businesses. Their time would come somewhat later.

Of those we know about, there were Louis and Moishe Franklin, from Lithuania, who had a store in San Antonio, and in 1917 moved to Laredo and set up Franklin Brothers Store.

After coming to Texas through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Harry Ladabaum moved to Laredo in 1917 and, at various times in his life, was a travelling salesman with stints in Mexico and had a piece goods store on Convent Street. Max Shaefer came from Russia about the time of World War I and went into the scrap metal business. Until he moved to California

in the mid 1940s he was a leader, and his sense of humor is still remembered.

Jack Freed, from a small Russian town near Minsk, came to Texas about 1910, first to San Antonio, and then to Laredo about 1916 after hearing of opportunities on the border. Like many others he brought his family over, his mother, two sisters, and his brother Sam who went into the furniture business with him.

We know about Albert Granoff, and many details of Laredo's early Jewish community, because in 1968 he set down his reminiscences, entitled "To American, With Love".

“By World War I there were two Jewish communities in Laredo, with the Orthodox branch becoming the larger.”

He was born in 1891 in the Ukraine as Labele Katz, came to America at the age of 10. He first lived in Fall River, Massachusetts where he peddled on the street, or door-to-door, went to school with his cousin, also called Albert. Their business was reproducing photographs. They would send the picture to a studio in New York, and later deliver it to the customer and collect.

Granoff ended his days as a town-to-town salesman when he came in to Laredo on October 15, 1915. He had been on the road for 5 years and did not have much to show for it, was getting older, and had found out that Mexican families in South Texas were good customers. Also the weather was good. After a period of walking Laredo streets, they rented half of a wooden shack on Hidalgo Street and they lived in the back of the store.

Albert and his cousin went canvassing to the nearby coal mining towns of Santo Tomas, Cannel, and Dolores. When they learned that the

Mexican workers were devoted to their Catholic saints, they added pictures of the saints to their line, studying books of miracles to be prepared. They sold for \$3.50 “on the installment plan”, 25cents down and 25cents a week. They worked 10-12 hours a day, 7 days a week, at night putting the frames together for the next day. Albert Granoff became a citizen in 1921, and in 1926 married Frieda Reich of San Antonio. Although of Orthodox background, Granoff attended services with the Reform group where he had many friends.

It was something of a bachelor society. There was always a shortage of marriageable girls for these young men in search of opportunity. When one did appear, as Granoff related, she was treated like the Queen of Sheba. He told the story that when Bertha Shaefer came in 1919, “young and pretty and blonde,” to visit her brother Max Shaefer, Granoff's friend Louis Franklin moved in as fast as he could- to get there before his rivals- and soon he and Bertha were engaged. They married in 1920.

It was a time when Americans-and many Laredoans were of immigrant stock- preferred to emphasize their common traits rather than their differences. Those who came in the early 1900s loved America, and they loved their traditions. This could be seen during World War I. In the old country, Jews went to great lengths to avoid serving as the tsar's or emperor's soldiers, but in their adopted homeland many signed up for World War I with no hesitation. Maurice Akabas gave his life, and his name can be seen on the monument in Jarvis Plaza. Jack Freed served, as did Harry Ladabaum's brother Yankele, and so did Albert Granoff's cousin. Granoff himself was called but failed the physical examination since he weighed only 103 pounds.

Granoff related how one day during the War a man came into his store and offered him a large sum of money, \$10,000 to \$20,000, if he would help wealthy people from Chicago get their sons out of the country to avoid the army. Granoff told the man that

he supported the war, and the man never came back. He later learned the “well dressed young man” was an FBI agent.

By the 1920s many of the itinerant sellers had saved enough to open their own store, and these, added to the earlier shopkeepers, made for a sizeable contingent around the International Bridge. Of the 11 department stores listed in the Laredo City Directory of 1923-24, five were owned by Jewish merchants: Franklin Bros., M. Joseph, Rubinstein Mercantile Company, Aaron Schwartzman and Shaput and Frelich. Under “Clothing” there was also Ben Lecht. There were many others during those years; The Davis brothers, Sam Behr, Sol Dalkowitz, Isadore Goodman, Sam Gurwitz, The Hausman brothers, Marcus Samet, Milton Lindheim.

It was impossible to think of Judasim without a Temple as it was known to Reform Jews, or synagogue, as Conservative and Orthodox Jews called it...*shul* in Yiddish. With the growth of the community, talk turned to building a temple, and when there was discussion of a temple the question would come up of what kind it would be.

With some 50 people in the Jewish community by 1924, it was decided the time had come to do something. A meeting was held and the members voted to contribute for a lot. Although there were various pledges, nothing was said about what kind of synagogue, and nothing was decided at another meeting held in 1925. In the meantime services were being held in a hall over Guajardo's Drug Store, and after that in the old Latin American Building at the southwest corner of San Agustin and Houston, a structure that became the Webb County Courthouse Annex in 1929.

During these joint ceremonies it was agreed that the Orthodox would pray first, and then the Reform Jews, but this did not work out. The split came on Yom Kippur (1925) when Mr. Ladabaum and others followed the Orthodox custom of walking in their stocking feet to which the reform group objected. The Reform group

then rented the American Legion Hall in the Heights, and obtained the services of a student Rabbi through Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati: David Lefekewitz, son of Rabbi Lefkewitz of Dallas. He came down for High Holidays for a couple of years.

The orthodox group calling itself Agudas Achim, remained downtown. There were now two Jewish communities in Laredo.

Through the 1920s and 1930s immigration continued to feed the community. For Laredo the restrictive laws of the 1920s had a lesser impact

**“In these decades,
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since European Jews could come to Nuevo Laredo. The Jewish community of that city numbered about 60 in the 1920s according to Morris Greenblum. Since there was much mixing between the two cities, they often met someone who helped them move over the border.

Morris Greenblum of Grodno (now Poland, then in Russia) also took the Mexican route. In 1925 he arrived in Nuevo Laredo via Puebla at the age of 27. Starting with \$21 in his pocket, he went peddling door-to-door, at first writing out his sales talk in Spanish using Yiddish letters. He prospered and moved over to the U.S. side in 1940.

Ralph Norton, before he moved to Laredo in 1940, learned business by selling in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon on a bicycle before he could afford a horse and buggy. He brought over his brother Sam in the mid 1930s and they came to Laredo

and opened La Perla in 1939, a store that remained a border landmark for half a century.

Samuel Fisher was passing through on his way to Mexico City during 1938, stopped to sell some of his merchandise, did so well he decided to stay. He opened a store that became La Dama Elegante. Sam Meyer remembers that his father spent time recovering from typhoid in Laredo and ended up staying.

In these decades, the 1920s and 1930s, it became clear that the Jewish community was making its mark on the Laredo scene. Laredo had its class divisions, but successful individuals whatever their ethnic or religious background were usually welcomed in. It would not be accurate to say that Jews had begun as a class apart, for even in the earliest days they had entered into civic activities. But they were now receiving public and political recognition for these activities.

It could be seen in the 1920s. Leon Daiches' name had appeared in almost all the civic functions of those days, and a school was named after him. In 1927 Louis Franklin was elected to the City Council. Ben Alexander, and after his death, his brother Louis, became presidents of the Laredo National Bank. In 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Jennie Goodman to head the Laredo Post Office, a position she was to hold until 1960.

It had been along time coming, but in 1938 Laredo's first temple was constructed. Prime movers were Louis Alexander and his sister Frances, who promised a substantial contribution. The project led to one last effort to unite the two congregations. In memories and in documents there are different dates for the dividing of the ways. Although visiting Rabbis always urged unity, there were two different congregations from about the mid to late 1920s. There were apparently several reconciliation meetings, all of them fruitless. There was one last effort, in Granoff's store one Sunday morning in 1938, just

Continued on page 18

before the building of the Temple. Where only donors could vote, a poll followed Reform-Orthodox lines, and the Reform group won 8-5. A committee was then appointed, composed of Max Shaefer, Leon Shapu, and Granoff, which decided that the Orthodox group would get the accumulated fund of \$800 while the reform group would get the lot.

On October 3, 1938 the entire congregation gathered to lay the cornerstone, in which were placed several documents, including a list of donors. It is instructive to note that the list contained, along with those from B'nai Israel, the names of almost all the members of Agudas Achim as well as the names of many non-Jews.

The Laredo Times described the building as the work of 75 families, a brick structure consisting of one story for services, and a basement for Sunday School classes and meetings. A bronze plaque in the memory of Ben Alexander was placed on the south inner wall. The original cost was set at \$8,500 and eventually went up to \$15,000.

The dedication of Laredo's first Temple on Friday evening September 29, 1939, was a community event, including a talk by the Methodist minister. The theme of the ceremony, from the prophet Isaiah, was "My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." Principal talks were given by Dr. Ephraim Frisch of San Antonio and Rabbi Sidney Wolf of Corpus Christi. Student Rabbi Julian Flieg of Cincinnati was in charge of the ceremonies.

Another milestone was reached in 1949. Louis Franklin, president of Agudas Achim and a member of the City Council, led a move to acquire a synagogue building. The Gunnery School (later Laredo Air Force Base) had closed down and the Agudas Achim group was able to acquire one of its two chapels. With remodeling and a brick veneer added, it is still the congregation's synagogue. A second building from the Gunnery School became a meeting hall named after Charles Schaffer. In later years

Louis Franklin Center replaced Schaffer Hall.

The story of Laredo Judaism goes on. It has grown out of its precarious status, thanks to the success of retail trade. With its European tone and Yiddish subculture almost gone now, it is clearly not the Judaism of old. It has become an American Judasim with Latin American shadings.

It is still something of an immigrant community. Political upheavals and economic distress continue to send Jewish refugees, for the border retail trade is the Rio Grande version of the American Dream. Israel has contributed citizens to Laredo as had Iran. Probably the dominant strain—since the late 1950's—has been from Latin America. Some fled Fidel Castro, some came from Bolivia, others from Northern Mexico. And links with Nuevo Laredo continue, many families living on one side of the Rio Grande and working on the other.

The progression of generations has mixed the old with the new. The toil of immigrants gave the next generation an established business, and allowed grandsons and granddaughters the freedom to choose. When once it was a noteworthy day that the first Jewish professional came to town, now grandsons and granddaughters see a professional career as the natural order of things. The old tradition of sons following fathers into business has not passed entirely, however, for many of the old businesses still remain in the family, possibly with different names and possibly managed by daughters and granddaughters.

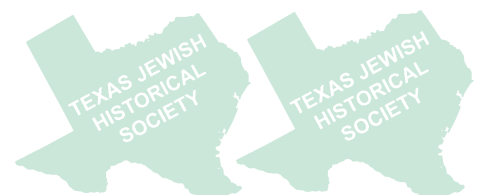
At Agudas Achim one name is frequently brought up. Louis Franklin (1893-1951) holds a special place in the history of Laredo Judaism, remembered not just for his political prominence, but for his generosity. Many immigrants got their start thanks to him, for it was his practice to help newcomers by staking them to peddling goods on credit. During World War II he and his wife Bertha, along with others, regularly invited young men from Ft. McIntosh and the Gunnery School over for Sunday

dinner. And he was always looked to in times of crisis: "Find out what Louie thinks."

In the Reform congregation the line went from Morris Hirsch, to Ferdinand Wormser, to Leon Daiches and Louis Alexander. According to Albert Granoff, a key figure of the Reform group was Ben Alexander. Granoff stated that his style as a banker was paternal. When someone came in for a loan, he would ask questions about the business and what the money would be used for. "He would talk loud and people would think he was bawling you out. But after his criticizing and advising, he would ask in a soft voice—How much do you want?"

The nature of the challenge evolves. By the river in the early days, it was a question of keeping up basic observances with a scattering of people. In the late 1900s demographics favor the border and it is safe to say that as long as Laredo continues to be a gateway, it will continue to attract Jewish families with business interests. The threat now comes from another direction. Jews survived oppression in the Pale, but can they survive a secular America, an ethic that does not attack spiritual values but ignores them?

Laredo Judaism has not escaped the contradiction of an America that at once has more religious resources but less inclination to use them. But the story of Jews, even more than Christians, can not be built solely around the synagogue/temple, for much of Judaism takes place in the home. For Jews are also a People, a People who look back at a common history, at the same symbols. It is too the story of customs that become a part of daily living, of the ways of forefathers which are not to be surrendered lightly.



My First Yarmulke Was Made of Steel

I attended Washington Boulevard Temple in Chicago from age five to eighteen. It was a very Reform temple under the direction of Rabbi Samuel Schwartz and our young Assistant Rabbi, Gunther Plaut. Our home was in the town of Cicero, a Western suburb where there was no Jewish life at all. When riding the El trains of streetcars I had seen men wearing the funny little caps but thought them strange. When, on the rare occasion we would see a man wearing one during Yom Kippur services (which lasted only 3 hours) we children would giggle and poke one another as children are wont to do. We had no idea why men wore a kippah.

The scene changes. I am now a twenty year old United States Marine engaging in the invasion of Iwo Jima, the first part of the Japanese empire invaded by America during World War II. The second or third evening of combat, a runner came to our position and told us that Sabbath services for Jewish personnel would be held at a large shell crater nearby. I picked up my rifle and cautiously made my way to the shell crater indicated because Japanese snipers



were hidden in destroyed enemy fighter planes on Moroyama airfield Number One. I slid down into the crater where a few men and our 5th Marine Division Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, had assembled. As the rabbi was about to begin the Shabbat service I removed my helmet, as was the custom in the temple where I was raised. Lt. Sg. Gittelsohn said to me, "Elsner, I'm a Reform rabbi so I understand your custom of removing your helmet, but in a combat situation such as this you must wear it." I did, and that was the first time I wore a head covering during a religious service. I was wounded by mortar shell fragments two weeks later and was evacuated to a hospital on Guam so that was the only religious service I attended while on Iwo Jima. I later moved to Odessa, Texas where the only temple was the Conservative synagogue. I've been a member for 52 years, and 6 times president, and yes, I always wear a yarmulke in the temple.

*Roy Elsner
Jewish War Veterans
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We are very proud of our organization and ask you to look us up and celebrate the joys of Texas history.

Mazal Tov to...

Fay and Leon

Brachman, who were honored by Israel Bonds at a recent dinner in Fort Worth.

Corpus Christi member **Chris Adler**, who was recently recognized as one of seven 1999 Distinguished Alumni by Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. **Robert and Chris Adler** were also honored by the Volunteer Center of Corpus Christi.

Condolences

To **Helen Wilk**, on the death of her mother, Lillian Goldman.

To the family of **Hilda Chaleff Lewin**, who passed away at the beginning of May.

To the family of **Abbye Freed, Jr.**, of Waco.

To the family of **Anne Louise Freed**, of Waco.

To the family of **Judge Morris A. Galatzan**, of El Paso.

To the family of **Vera Zlabovsky**, of El Paso.

Mazal Tov to Congregation Agudath Jacob, Waco!

Founded in 1888, Congregation Agudath Jacob celebrated 112 years of worship in Waco on June 18 with the dedication of a "State of Texas Historical Marker."

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