

# Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas

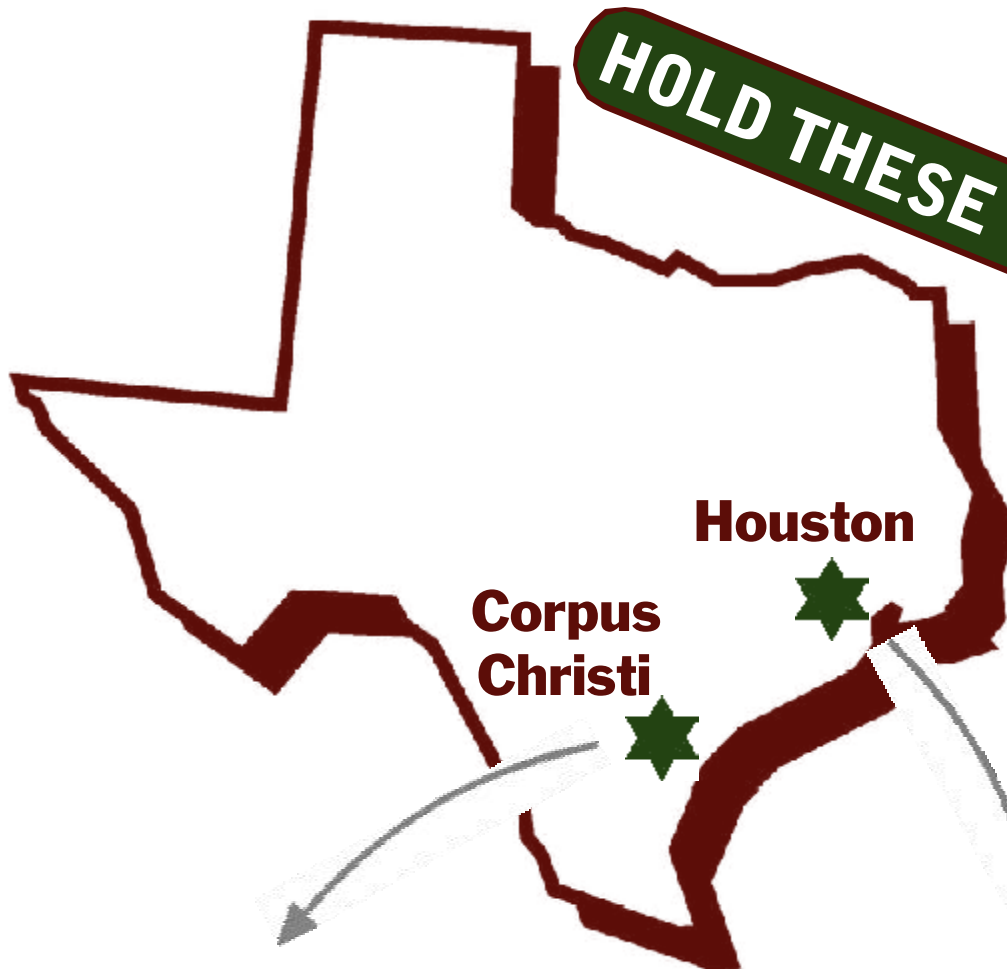
Established 1980



Fall, 2001

## Preserving Texas Jewish History

**HOLD THESE DATES!**



### Winter Board Meeting

**January 25-27, 2002**

### Annual Gathering

**April 19-21, 2002**

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## From the TJHS President



First of all, I want to congratulate Hollace Weiner on being elected the new president of the

Southern Jewish Historical Society. Hollace is an esteemed member of our society and the author of the book *Jewish Stars in Texas*, among many other publications. It's a real honor to have one of our members take over their presidency.

Hollace and Helen Wilk are coordinating a joint meeting with the Southern Society on October 25-27, 2002 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Everyone will be receiving information as we get closer to the date. It

appears it will be a fun and educational weekend.

The fall board meeting was held in Odessa, Texas on October 21 in an effort to interest West Texas residents to record their history, as we have very little information in that area of the state. I want to thank Roy Elsner and Charles Hart for organizing the board meeting. Due to major surgery I was unable to attend the meeting. Also, to the many board members that traveled to Odessa, which is no small trip, thank you for supporting the Society.

In this newsletter you will see another in a series of individuals in our state who have started businesses with little or no backing and have created major influences both in Texas and nationally. As in the past, we still need your family and business histo-

ries so that we can record Texas Jewish history.

Please mark your calendar for the next board meeting, which will be in Corpus Christi, January 25-27, 2002. The annual gathering meeting will be in Houston, April 19-21. We need your attendance because our many projects need the input of the membership.

One last item I feel needs to be addressed is an acknowledgement of Leon and Fay Brahman. Their efforts and dedication have resulted in 50 new members since taking over as membership chairpersons four months ago. We have also had countless renewal members. On behalf of the Society—thank you!!



*Our last quarterly Board Meeting was held in Odessa, Texas, attended by these faithful Board Members.*

## Texas Jewish Historical Society Website

Texas Jewish Historical Society • P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766  
Telephone: 817-927-8765

**E-mail address: [txjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:txjhs@yahoo.com)**

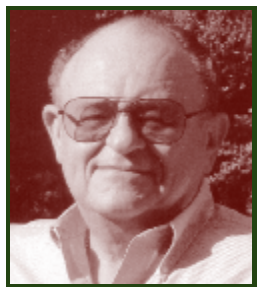
**Web Site address: <http://www.txjhs.org>**

The Texas Jewish Historical Society draws its membership from across the State of Texas, bordering states and across our great nation. TJHS supports a wide-ranging agenda. Quarterly Board Meetings are held at points of particular interest, an extensive newsletter is published regularly and a speakers bureau is maintained. A variety of research projects are facilitated through the Jewish Archives in the Barker Library and support is provided directly for projects such as "Virtual Restoration of Small-Town Synagogues in Texas."

We are very proud of our organization and ask you to look us up and celebrate the joys of Texas history.

# Letter From the Editor

## *or Freedman Slips*



I recently was visiting with some friends and discussing the TJHS. Our discussion turned to what

we know about our parents and relatives of their generation. It was very sad to hear that they knew almost nothing of their families. There was almost no trace of their existence other than their living offspring. What a pity that what was most likely a wonderful story of how the father left Europe, came to America, worked, found a wonderful woman to marry, married and had children, yet not even their children know but very little about their own parents.

I do not mean to disparage their not knowing. The fault is not theirs, nor do I want to criticize the parents, who died far too young.

The point of this story is the purpose of the **Texas Jewish Historical Society's** existence! I believe that

as members of this organization, it is our goal to tell our stories so that future generations may know.

Have you ever attended a funeral service and listened to a Rabbi grope for words for the eulogy? Not to be morbid, but how can a Rabbi know of a person's life, if their children don't know of their contributions and accomplishments and their experiences, if there is or was no record?

Issue after issue, I have used this column to appeal for family histories. Yet few, very few, have come in. Perhaps my approach has been wrong. Perhaps I should realize that while we call ourselves a Historical Society that wishes to preserve its histories, it is not our history we want to preserve; it is the histories of others. Perhaps it is our modesty that prohibits our writing about our families and ourselves.

Perhaps, in future issues I will try to find other material to fill the pages of your Newsletter.

*Buddy Freed*

**Wouldn't you  
like to see  
YOUR family's  
history  
printed in this  
newsletter?**

Contact Buddy Freed at  
817-926-0455, or  
ilfreed@aol.com

## Has Your Address Changed?

Has your address changed? What about your Area Code or phone number? Has your name changed? Do you want your name to appear differently on the TJHS mailing label? Please let us know. We'd really appreciate your help. Please send new information to:

**Fay Brachman**  
3720 Autumn Drive  
Fort Worth, TX 76109  
phone: 817-924-9207  
e-mail: leonhb@flash.net



## 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.

## The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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Jack Gerrick (Fort Worth)  
Buddy Freed (Fort Worth)  
Sandra Freed (Fort Worth)  
Alexa Kirk (Fort Worth)

*President*  
*Managing Editor*  
*Proofreader*  
*Layout and Typesetting*

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# Odette Ruben: A Texas City Gem

by Don Teter

In 1947, Texas City experienced one of the worst disasters in history when a ship laden with fertilizer exploded, badly damaging most of the city's industrial area, as well as homes, autos and businesses. Several hundred people lost their lives or were injured to some extent. Recovery from such a tragedy seemed impossible at the time, but this was a city determined to succeed and did it ever!

Gertrude and I recently visited a Texas City friend who took us on a tour of the city. We were amazed at the progress that had been made over the years, mainly through the efforts and leadership of Mayor Charles Doyle. There are over 40 bronze statues all over town, many of children, such as the boy baseball player at the Little League Park, as well as the girl with bat at the Girl's Softball Park. There is a magnificent Memorial Park, dedicated to those who were killed in the disaster and World War II.

Most impressive is the Doyle Convention Center with the Phoenix Fountain in front. This truly represents the spirit of the people of Texas City, who have transformed the wreckage of 1947 into a clean, beautiful and progressive city. What we discovered to our delight were the twenty beautiful watercolor paintings commissioned by the city for the halls of the Center, depicting scenes throughout the city.

When we discovered that the artist, Odette Ruben, was a member of Jimmy Kessler's congregation in Galveston, we felt we just had to meet her and do a story for our newsletter. Subsequently, we contacted her and arranged a visit. She is a very charming and gracious lady, quite willing to answer our many questions and discuss her work with us.

Odette was born in New Orleans, grew up in Houston and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Washington University in St Louis. Her plans to become a fashion designer were changed when she married M. L. "Steve" Ruben, an optometrist practicing in Texas City, where, to quote her, "there wasn't a lot of opportunity for a fashion designer". After the birth of her two children, she started studying painting with world-renowned artists, mostly working in oil painting.

Eventually she discovered water colors, the medium in which she has done much of her work. Although she really finds them more versatile and enjoyable, she thinks that perhaps her late husband's complaints about the odor of the solvent used in cleaning the oil paints were a factor in determining her switch. Anyway, the many people and organizations in Texas City and around the country who have bought her paintings attest to her talent in producing so many lovely paintings.

Odette Ruben taught art for twenty years at College of the Mainland in Texas City. She teaches workshops, gives demonstrations at art clubs and juries exhibits in the Galveston/Houston area. Her favorite subjects are the old Victorian homes of Galveston and New Orleans, waterfront scenes and florals. She has received many honors and has had several one-person exhibits, as well as being included in numerous group shows throughout the nation. She is an "Elite" signature member of WAS-H (Watercolor Art Society-Houston). This is a designation for members who have been selected by a juror to exhibit in five or more of the society's annual International Exhibit. Her most recent honor was



*Odette Rubin*



*"Baseball Park"*

*An Odette Rubin watercolor  
commissioned for the  
Texas City Convention Center*

being named a member of Purple Sage Society, which is the highest category of the prestigious Texas Water Color Society.

A visit to Texas City is well worthwhile. You should take the time to see the sculptures and parks throughout the city. The one building you must see is the Charles T. Doyle Convention Center, itself a work of art, and in it are Odette's beautiful watercolors.

Pictures: Odette Ruben and *Baseball Park*, one of her paintings commissioned for the Texas City Convention Center.



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# Group Records Contributions of Jews in Texas

*by Sharon Denning*

*Reprinted from Odessa American*



Texans are known for their pride of heritage. But there's more to

Texas history than the Alamo, the cattle drives and the oil boom. Daughters of the Confederacy, Hispanics, African-Americans and Germans — all have documented their history and cultural impact on the state.

Alongside these efforts to record the diversity of Texas history are the continuing endeavors of The Texas Jewish Historical Society to share the stories and contributions of Texas Jews. The society has members throughout the United States, and its board members met in Odessa recently for their annual business meeting. Odessa resident Roy Elsner serves on the board and has written histories of Texas Jewish families and Jewish cemeteries throughout the state.

"This historical society isn't an organization dominated by big cities," Elsner said. "The history of Jews in Texas is written in small communities like Wink, Odessa, Tyler, and Arp." Jews who came to Texas after the turn of the 20th century were primarily merchants who started with empty pockets and persevered through hard work to create thriving businesses, he said.

"In most European countries, Jews were forbidden to own land for centuries," Elsner said. "Consequently they pursued their livelihood

in trade and banking."

German Jews immigrated to New York in large numbers in the latter part of the 19th century. Consequently, Jews who arrived later sought out less populated parts of the country, he said.

Galveston, a major point of entry for non-German Jews who fled persecution in Russia and the Ukraine, still has a substantial Jewish population, he said.

Elsner has written a history of his wife, Essie Schmerman Elsner's family. As a girl, she moved with her family from Denver to Borger during the Depression.

"Her family was a typical example of a Jewish family who brought with them whatever merchandise they could, set up shop in the front of an empty store and lived in the back," Elsner said.

Others started with nothing more than a backpack filled with needles, thread and fabric and became the "Jew peddlers" who traveled through rural areas on foot, selling their goods to farm housewives, he said.

Elsner grew up in Chicago. He said his father came to America in 1910 with \$2.70 in his pocket. He spoke no English and started work in a shoe store and eventually owned a department store comparable to Dunlap's.

Elsner said he felt Jews experienced more anti-Semitism in Chicago than in Texas, even though Texas Jews were more scattered throughout the state.

"Generally speaking, the Christian communities in the South were far

better friends to the Jewish people than were the northern communities," he said. "In the South, at least the two groups treated each other as equals."

Elsner said both he and his wife lost members of their family to the Holocaust, which only sharpens their desire to preserve history.

"This is a way of remembering what happened before us," he said, "and to our children and grandchildren, we are history."

Rabbi Jimmy Kessler started the Texas Jewish Historical Society in Galveston in 1980. According to the society's Web site, it encourages and sponsors research in Texas Jewish history, distributes a quarterly newsletter and funds scholarships. The society has a permanent archive of materials at The University of Texas American History Center in Austin. In addition, it has the exhibit "Shalom Y'all — The Jewish Experience in Texas" at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures Museum in San Antonio. For more information about the Texas Jewish Historical Society, visit the Web site [www.txjhs.org](http://www.txjhs.org).

## **We now have 817 members!**

Your membership enables us to accomplish our goals of collecting and disseminating the valuable information about the interesting heritage of the Jews of Texas.

For a non-recorded message on the further benefits of TJHS membership, call **817-924-9207**.

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# Jewish History Exhibit

## Accentuates Paucity of Sources

by Aaron Howard

*Reprinted with permission from the Jewish Herald Voice, Houston*

There were Jewish people in Houston when the city was founded. But if you wanted to research the history of the local community, there are a few primary source materials available. Lynna Kay Shuffield would like to change that. Shuffield is curator of the "History of the Jews in Greater Houston" exhibition that opened on Monday, October 1 at The Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Central Library. The exhibit closed at the end of November.

The exhibit profiled some of the prominent merchant families of Houston. These include Sakowitz, Finger, Zindler, Nathan and Levy, as well as other prominent Houston Jewish individuals and philanthropists. The exhibit also documents some of the Jewish organizations like the Jewish Family Service, the Texas Jewish Historical Society, the Houston



*Louis Sakowitz and Leah Nathan Sakowitz*

the history unfortunately is poorly documented. "There are just a few books out there that tell the story," Shuffield says.

The genesis for the exhibit comes from acting manager of the Texas Room, Will Howard. The Texas Room is a city-owned, noncirculating resource center history affiliated with the City of Houston Library Department. It is a historical collection and archive of books, documents and newspapers related to Houston and Texas. The Texas Room has mounted exhibits on local African-American, Irish and Mexican-American communities.

As a catalyst to develop new resources and materials and an interest in this topic, Howard and Shuffield decided to put together the exhibit.

"At the present time, we have only a few books and newspaper-clipping files on Jewish Houston," Shuffield says. "There is a shortage of primary source material." That's because most people aren't aware of the collection, Shuffield adds. Jewish families haven't donated material to the Texas Room.

More importantly, much primary source material gets thrown out when someone dies. Shuffield relates the

story of a cousin who was killed in World War II. For a long time, she was told her aunt had a box filled with all her cousin's old medals, war material and letters he wrote home. Unfortunately, when her aunt died, all this was thrown away.

"People don't recognize the importance of these kinds of items," Shuffield says. "There's no monetary value to these items, and people don't recognize they have historical context value."

This isn't just an issue for historians. When a local facility develops these kinds of resources, anyone from a school student through a historian researching a book can come into the collection and at least have a beginning of where to start their research.

"If someone comes in to the Texas Room and we have nothing to direct them to, even if they are simply researching their family or community history, it's like reinventing the wheel each time," Shuffield explains. Take the example of Texas historical markers. According to Shuffield, of the thousands of historical markers in Texas, fewer than 30 are related to Jewish history, only one in Harris County.

To be able to prepare an application for a historical marker from the state, one must have historical documents to build one's case, she says. "Without the primary material, you have nothing to start with. There's a Jewish understanding that when you invoke the memory of your ancestors, they live forever. In a sense, that's what we're trying to accomplish. Otherwise, they are gone and forgotten," she says. "Hopefully, the more we can get resource material, the more



*Photo of early Sakowitz store.*

Jewish Genealogical Society, Jewish War Veterans and various synagogues and cemeteries.

The exhibit was far from a comprehensive history of Jewish Houston. Although the Jewish contribution to Texas and Houston is older than the establishment of the state and the city,



*Nathan's Men Store at 620 Main St. and Capitol*

projects people will want to do.”

For the exhibition, several Houston families loaned the Texas Room personal items and photos. For example, the family of Dr. Ray Dailey loaned her papers to the library.

Dailey was the first Jewish woman graduate of the University of Texas Medical School at Galveston, in 1913.

Dailey was also the first woman to be elected president of the Houston School Board. According to Shuffield, her family has been trying to get the Houston Independent School District to recognize Dailey's contribution to the school board in order to get a school named in her honor. They have not been successful, up to this point.

Jerry Finger and Relda Finger Hoffer have donated an extensive amount of historical material on the Finger family for the exhibit. By examining this material, one learns that one of the original Finger stores in Liberty County was burnt down three times in the 1930s. County authorities never apprehended the

arsonist. Of course, it's easy to surmise that the anti-Semitism probably played a role in the arson. After the third fire, the family moved to Houston.

Future Texas Room plans include purchase of the entire run of the Jewish Herald-Voice on microfilm for future researchers. “People should come to this exhibition to see what we've been able to collect and to get ideas about doing something similar for their own family,” Shuffield suggests. “We also hope some teachers will become motivated to give class assignments related to Houston Jewish history after seeing the exhibition.. We'd like teachers to encourage their students to come down and use the Texas Room.”

The exhibit will be remounted in October 2002 when the national convention of the Anti-Defamation League takes place in Houston. Families and organizations that were not able to participate in the last exhibit may want to submit materials for the 2002 exhibit.

## Dr. Charles Nathan

Dr. Charles C. Nathan, 81, died Wednesday, September 26, 2001. Dr. Nathan was a longtime resident of Houston. He graduated from San Jacinto High School in 1936, and with distinction from Rice Institute (now Rice University) in 1940. He received his M.S. and PhD. degrees in chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh in 1942 and 1949, respectively. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Navy and participated in the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in 1946. He worked as a chemical engineer with Monsanto, Texaco and Betz laboratories. He published and lectured widely on corrosion-related topics and ended his career as a professor at New Mexico School of Mining and Technology. Dr. Nathan had a lifelong commitment to the Jewish community in every city he lived in. He taught religious school as several synagogues, including Temple Emanuel El and B'rith Shalom in Houston, and led many adult education classes. In later life he was a member of Temple Emanu El, one of whose founders was his father, William Max Nathan. He was active in the Democratic Party. Dr. Nathan survived his beloved wife, Sylvia, who died in 1986. He is now survived by his dear companion, Muriel Shaw, of Houston; his daughters Anita Beckenstein of California, Debbie Nathan and Miriam Lerner of New York and Barbara Katz of Dallas; by their husbands and by five grandchildren. He also leaves numerous cousins and a sister and brother-in-law, Bebe and Carl Hess and a brother and sister-in-law, Kurt and Marilyn Carsch, all of Houston.



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# The Story of the Abraham Rosenthal Family

*By Fay Brachman*

This is the story of the Abraham Rosenthal family as it was told to me by my father, Harry Rosenthal. Unfortunately, neither my grandmother, Rachel Rosenthal, nor my grandfather, Abraham Rosenthal, told me “their story” directly.

Grandma Rachel was the youngest child of her Myers family. They lived in Eastern Europe, and decided to come to America just before Grandma was to be born. They settled in Rochester, New York, where her father established a dry cleaning business. They apparently prospered,

because they were able to send one of their sons back to Europe to find a suitable husband for Rachel when she was 15 years old, an age to be considering marriage. One of their requirements for a suitable husband was that he must be religious.

I understand Grandpa was a Yeshiva student in Eastern Europe. He was trained to be a Chazan (Cantor) and Shochet (Ritual Slaughterer).

Grandpa told me that he went by train to his port city to board the boat to come to America. He told me that the train route passed through a

beautiful valley in Germany that was called “Rosental” - in German it is translated to Valley of Roses. When he arrived in America, he gave his name as “Abraham Rosenthal.”

Abraham and Rachel were married in Rochester where they lived for a number of years. The family sent them to St. Paul, Minnesota because St. Paul was a meat packing center. Rachel’s family felt that he could learn the meat business there.

Grandpa took a job in St. Paul with a local synagogue, the Sons of Jacob, where he performed his job as Chazan and Shochet while he was learning the meat business.

My father, Harry, was the fifth child born to Abraham and Rachel, I think. He was born in St. Paul in 1889. His older brothers and sister were Max, Lazar, Minnie and Louis.

While they were still living in St. Paul, Grandpa brought his parents and brothers and sisters to St. Paul from Europe. His father, Rabbi Bernard Rosenthal, became the Rabbi of the Sons of Jacob Synagogue.

My brother, Melvin Rosenthal, lived with his wife and sons for a number of years in South Dakota. While visiting in Minneapolis and St. Paul, he somehow discovered that our great-grandmother, Sarah Rosenthal, had died while she lived in St. Paul. Melvin also discovered that she was buried in St. Paul and he was able to find her grave.



*Abraham Rosenthal's 70th Birthday Party  
Capps Park, Fort Worth, Texas  
Approximate Date 1934*

**Back Row (l to r):** Max Rosenthal, Louis Rosenthal, Harry Rosenthal, Sidney Levenson, Rachel Rosenthal, Abraham Rosenthal, Sol Rosenthal, Ben H. Rosenthal, Gertude Rosenthal Kantrovich, Estelle Rosenthal Myers, Hannah Rosenthal Nussbaum, Dora Levenson

**Middle Row (l to r):** Rube Rosenthal, Melvin Rosenthal, Irving Rosenthal, Ben Rosenthal, Jr., Leonard Rosenthal, Dr. Lesser

**Front Row (l to r):** Harry Rosenthal (from Dallas), Ben H. Rosenthal, Fay Rosenthal, Lena (Mrs. Max) Rosenthal, Jenny (Mrs. Harry) Rosenthal, Eva (Mrs. Ben H.) Rosenthal, Annabel (Mrs. Ben) Rosenthal, Abe Kantrovich, Edgar Myers, Mendel Nussbaum

**Very Front Row (l to r):** Manny (E.M.) Rosenthal, Margot Myers, Gloria Myers, Eli Nussbaum, Sara Lee Kantrovich, Mina Kantrovich





*Entrance to the Sons of Moses Cemetery  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

I was determined to see her grave for myself, and so my search began.

My brother, unfortunately, died before giving me the information of the location of the cemetery where she was buried. The synagogue that employed grandpa had merged with a couple of other synagogues over the years. Their records and meeting minutes were lost. The St. Paul courthouse had burned, and all of the documents of the period were lost or destroyed.

The personnel of the Sons of Jacob Synagogue were very helpful to me. They found the list of the graves in the Sons of Moses Cemetery, and the location of her grave within the cemetery. But they had no other information about the Rosenthal family while they were in St. Paul. It was a very long process, but worth every minute of it! All of the telephone calls and letters made the search a successful one.

Leon and I visited the Sons of Moses Cemetery in St. Paul. We found the tombstone in the location that the synagogue had given us. The working on the stone had eroded from age and weather, and was almost

unreadable. However, near the bottom of the stone was etched in very large, deep letters - SARAH ROSENTHAL - 1890.

We found it!

I wish that the other words were legible. We had hoped that we could have more information about the family from the stone. We have no clues about the family - where they came from in Europe, and even what their name was in Europe. At least I saw the grave of a woman that was my great-grandmother. A

woman who was unknown to me until about 8 years ago.

Their family continued to increase. After Harry, there were Ike, Sol, Ben, Gertrude, Estelle, David and Hannah. To my knowledge, this was the entire family.

The Abraham Rosenthal family moved from St. Paul to Dallas with a stop for a year or so in Chicago. Grandpa always got work with a local synagogue as a Chazan/Shochet. There is a picture of Grandpa in the Shearith Israel Synagogue in Dallas dated 1904. He was their second Chazan-Shochet.

The "boys" of the family always helped with the family business. Ike and my Dad often rode on horseback out to the farms in the country to buy cattle for their father. One day, as they were herding some cattle back to Dallas, it became necessary to cross a flooded area of the Trinity River. While making the crossing, Ike slipped from his saddle into the dirty, oily flood water. My Dad told me that he pulled Ike out of the water. Ike never recovered from the accident, and died a short time afterward.

Another incident that occurred

while the family lived in Dallas was that my Dad was herding some cattle into downtown Dallas on one of the main downtown streets - Lamar Street. He received a traffic ticket from the police for herding too many cattle at a time down the street! (Herding cattle in downtown Dallas was legal at that time, but the number in the herd was limited. He had exceeded the legal number!)

The meat from the hind quarter of the cow is considered non-kosher, and had to be sold at a discount to non-Jewish customers. My grandfather perceived an economic opportunity in the non-kosher business, and started a very large non-kosher meat market in downtown Fort Worth after the stockyards opened there in 1904. At long last, the experience gained in St. Paul had begun to pay off.

It is interesting that all of the sons of Abraham and Rachel Rosenthal chose to make their living in the meat business. Louis Rosenthal started a meat packing plant in Galveston. Sol Rosenthal owned the City Packing Company in Fort Worth along with his sons, Leonard and Bobby. My father, Harry Rosenthal owned the Rosenthal Packing Company in Fort Worth along with his sons, Irving and Melvin. Ben Rosenthal of Fort Worth owned the Standard Meat Company along with his son, Manny. They produced specialty cuts of meat for restaurants and hotels. Max Rosenthal had four sons in Dallas, all of whom were involved in the meat packing industry - Ben H., Harry, Rube and Sam.

Standing before Sarah Rosenthal's tombstone was a moment that I will never forget. I had never known before Melvin's discovery of Sarah Rosenthal's existence in America. I just wish that somehow or somewhere we could have more information about our early family. However, I am happy that at least we have this bit of "new" knowledge.

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# A Texas Jewish Historical Lead

By Martin Davidson

Sam Williamson, a Houston attorney, first told me in the 1950s of the Jews' land in Montgomery County. Between his own "seeming" reluctance to be seriously interviewed and the difficulty of finding a competent oral historian to pursue the story, I am concerned that this tragic experience of a Jewish farm colony in Texas will be lost to the historical record.

It is my understanding that there was a local "Chevra" in St. Louis that was vaguely associated with the Jewish National Farmers Alliance. The latter organization was philosophically related to a long standing 19th century effort in Europe to return Jews to farming. In a sense, it was an American "chalutz" movement, and may have been funded by Baron de Hirsh, one of whose main interests was to resettle Russian and Central European Jews out of the Eastern port-of-entry metropolises.

Each family in the local "chevra" put 25 cents in the "pushka" at every Thursday night meeting until they were able to buy land near Conroe. Ultimately, a small colony of men, women and children left St. Louis, moved to Montgomery County and attempted to raise peanuts and do subsistence farming. The land, which was never suited to farming, was known as the Ida and Isidore Strauss subdivi-

sion (Vol. 67, p. 383, plat vol. 67) and was named after the husband and wife of a philanthropic family that went down with the Titanic.

My recollection is hazy but I tend to recall Sam's telling me about the death, among other children in the colony, of his younger brother from pellagra. This would certainly have to be confirmed with Sam. One by one, the families returned to St. Louis. However, they kept the ownership of the land and it was Sam's task (having married Sophie Kaplan and moved to her hometown of Houston) to chase the squatters off the property once a year and to look after any legal and tax matters.

In time, the vacant property became very valuable as real estate development acreage and most, if not all, of the original settlers' descendants sold their land at high prices.

In addition to Sam Williamson (the prime source), further information on the Jews' Land may be acquired from Isidore Fry (if he is still alive) or his heirs in St. Louis; or from Jacob W. Rittles of St. Louis. Both these names were given to me by Sam Williamson.

## Interview with Leonard Englander

*The following interview was conducted by Nicole Krasnov and Jacob Gross, seventh graders at I. Weiner Jewish Secondary School in Houston.*

**Jacob and Nicole:** Can you tell us a little about the first Jews in Waco?

**Leonard:** The first Jewish Community was founded in 1849 by a man named Jacob De Cordova. He was a Jamaican Jew who got a land grant to settle what was then known as Waco Villiage and is now known as Waco.

**Jacob and Nicole:** What about the first Jewish cemetery and synagogue?

**Leonard:** The first Jewish cemetery was established in 1869. The name of it was Hebrew Rest Cemetery. The first Jew buried in it was a small child.

The first synagogue in Waco was a Reform congregation established in 1879. It was Congregation Rodef Shalom. There were forty founding families. The second synagogue was Orthodox and was built in 1889. It was named Agudath Jacob. They are both still here today.

**Jacob and Nicole:** Were there any famous Jews in high positions in Waco?

**Leonard:** There were a few famous Jews. There was Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Finger. Mr. Goldstein left millions of dollars to Waco when he died.

**Jacob and Nicole:** Is there a Jewish newspaper in Waco?

**Leonard:** No there is not.

**Jacob and Nicole:** Well, that is all we need. Thank you for your time.

## Help Needed

8 Nov. 2001

I would most appreciate it if you could research my mother, siblings and father, who came from Russia in the early 1900's into Galveston.

The father's name was Gershon Kopernik (maybe spelled then Kupernick). His daughter's first names were Anne, Esther, and Yetta.

Please let me hear from you. We have tried to trace our family to no avail.

Sincerely,

Geraldine Wolff  
4107 Pt. Loma Ave.  
San Diego, CA 92107

## Laugh Line

### *I'm a Senior Citizen*

I'm the life of the party...even when it ends at 8:00 PM.

I'm very good at opening childproof caps with a hammer.

I'm usually interested in going home before I get to where I'm going.

I'm awake many hours before my body allows me to get up.

I'm smiling all the time because I can't hear a thing you're saying.

I'm very good at telling stories; over and over and over and over...

I'm aware that other people's grandchildren are not as bright as mine.

I'm so cared for: long term care, eye care, private care, dental care.

I'm not grouchy, I just don't like traffic, waiting, crowds, politicians.

I'm sure everything I can't find is in a secure place.

I'm wrinkled, saggy, lumpy, and that's just my left leg.

I'm having trouble remembering simple words like...

I'm realizing that aging is not for sissies.

I'm sure they're making adults much younger these days.

I'm wondering, if you're only as old as you feel, how could I be alive at 150?

I'm a walking storeroom of facts...I've just lost the storeroom key.

I'm a SENIOR CITIZEN and I think I'm having the time of my life!

## The Washer Brothers

By 1882, Fort Worth had grown to a population of 6,000 and Jacob and his brother Nathan Moses (Nat) Washer arrived from Tennessee.

Washer Bros. Clothiers prospered, selling such frontier items as boots and bandanas. In 1889, Nat moved to San Antonio to open a Washer Bros. store there. In 1893, he laid the cornerston of Fort Worth's County Court House while serving as grand master of the Masonic order's Grand Lodge of Texas. In San Antonio, he served as president of Temple Beth El where the rabbi, Ephraim Frisch, was married to Rabbi Henry Cohen's daughter.

In 1895, the brothers sold their Fort Worth store to Leon Gross, a partner. The Washers continued to be active in community affairs. Nat helped found the Masonic Home for Widows and Orphans near Fort Worth in early 1899. He was orator, singer and writer. In 1932, exactly fifty years after he arrived in Texas, Nat served as president of the State Board of Education.

Gross, also a native of Tennessee, continued as president of Washer Bros. for half a century. One of his early customers was Theodore Roosevelt, who came in on April 8, 1905, and purchased a Stetson hat and two blue army shirts. Gross married Edith Mayer, and when Gross died in 1945, the nephew, Raymond Mayer, who had been managing the store, became president. Mayer owned Washer Bros. until 1966, when he sold it to Hart, Schaffner & Marx of Chicago. The Chicago firm added suburban stores and combined them with James K. Wilson. In the late 1980s, the name Washer Bros. was dropped.

## Complete Galveston (Texas) Immigration Records Online

Did you have ancestors that came to the U.S. through the port of Galveston, Texas? Billing itself as the first computerized listing of immigrants, the Texas Seaport Museum has made available a complete list of immigrants to the U.S. through Galveston. In all, the names of 132,119 passengers from 1844-1954 are accessible at [www.pearland.com](http://www.pearland.com).

The database includes names of passengers and members of their traveling parties, age, gender, occupation, country (or area) of origin, ship name, dates of departure, original port of their departure, date of arrival, and destination in the United States as well as the source of the information listed.

From 1907-1914 more than 10,000 Eastern European Jewish immigrants came to the U.S. through this port in

what became known as the Galveston Movement. Its purpose was to divert Jews from Russia and eastern Europe



away from congested communities of the Atlantic coast to the interior of the United States. The movement was funded by Jacob Schiff, a wealthy New York Jewish philanthropist.



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# The Kosher Kidnapping

## *The True Story of the Most Improbable Posse in the Annals of Texas*

*Researched and written by Gerard Meister*

### **Los Angeles, 1921**

It all began, as so many strange happenings do, in L.A. It was early in the evening of June 18th and the sun was slowly sinking past the peaked rooftops of a sleepy residential block. The police had a house staked out awaiting the return of "Little Phil" Alguin, a 26 year old career criminal recently paroled from Folsom Prison. The slightly built Alguin, a hot-tempered Mexican-American, was suspected of pushing drugs from his home. In charge of the surveillance team was LAPD Detective John J. Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald and Little Phil knew one another. It was Fitzgerald's testimony that had sent the mobster to Folsom. But it was in that blinding, spilt second flash of recognition that the trigger-happy punk fired first, hitting the officer in the stomach. Mortally wounded, the detective staggered backward and fell to the ground. Fitzgerald's back up rushed to his side, but the stricken cop was beyond help. In the confusion Alguin, now a cop killer slipped away. Louis D. Oaks, the Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department and a personal friend of the murdered officer, organized a nationwide manhunt for the cop killer. Feeling the pressure, Little Phil fled to Mexico after learning that Mexico, in the midst of a diplomatic tiff with United States, was not extraditing anyone. The fugitive made his way to Ciudad Juarez, a stone's throw across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas, and the home of one Samuel Dreben, 1st Sergeant U.S. Army (Ret.) and a famed soldier-of-fortune, who was known to friend and foe alike as "the fighting Jew." Dreben, an observant Jew and a Russian immigrant from Kiev, took an

even more circuitous route to El Paso (where he had settled in 1910). Arriving at our shores at the outbreak of the Spanish American War, Sam, wanting to do something for his new found land, enlisted in the Army and stayed for three hitches and four of our nation's wars. In one of Sam's tours of duty he was a scout for General Pershing during the Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa in Mexico. Sam was also a key member of The Adventurer's Club of El Paso - a bunch of good old boys, ready for anything. So when Little Phil dropped into Juarez he soon found out that he had landed in Dreben territory.

### **Hatching the Plot**

By mid-September, word reached Chief Oaks at the L.A.P.D. that Little Phil was holed up in Juarez, thumbing his nose with impunity at the police in El Paso. Oaks called his counterpart there, Chief Peyton Edwards, to ask for assistance. Oaks was told that El Paso stood ready to do its part to help nab a cop killer, and to come on down. The Los Angeles Chief spent the rest of the week tying up loose ends at the office, took the Pullman sleeper out of Union Station on Sunday night, September 24th, and got to El Paso early the next afternoon. He went directly from the train station to police headquarters to meet with his counterpart. The word "kidnap" was never spoken, but Oaks and Edwards knew that's where they were heading. A strategy meeting was set for the next morning, leaving it to Edwards to invite some good old boys; boys with the right kind of stuff. Edwards called Dreben that night. (The El Paso police chief, sensing the extent of the problem when he first spoke to Los Angeles, had briefed Sam the week

before.) It was an informal council of war; a round of introductions, then everyone grabbed a chair. Besides Dreben, Edwards invited his First Deputy, Captain W.A. Simpson, and Chief of Detectives, Claude Smith. When Chief Oaks began to clear his throat, Dreben shifted in his seat, "I have a plan," he said. All eyes turned to Sam. The ex-sergeant explained that after Chief Edwards first briefed him, he had slipped into Juarez a couple of times to get the lay of the land. He learned that Little Phil was extremely sensitive about a dead give-away tattoo on his right forearm, a flower superimposed with another of his sobriquets "Arizona Phil," and had asked a few local doctors if it could be removed, which in pre-laser days was next to impossible. "All we have to do," Sam explained, "is open a doctor's office in Juarez, advertise that a new American specialist has arrived and his specialty was removing tattoos." Sam reasoned that Little Phil couldn't resist checking out a new doctor. "Then, when the killer drops into the office, we'll knock him out with a mickey or something, put him in a waiting car and scoot across the International Bridge back to El Paso." Sam, cocksure of himself, already had enlisted another Texan, San Antonio detective J. H. Kelly to act as the American doctor. (Sam and Kelly had served together as soldiers-of-fortune in Mexico.) Dreben had also talked a real M.D., Dr. R.H. Ellis, an El Paso physician, into being a "technical" advisor. (Sam had an easy time recruiting his posse, because Chief Oaks had posted a \$5,000.00 reward when he came to El Paso.) Dr. Ellis, a stickler for details, gave detective Kelly a short course on hypodermics,

supplied a couple of syringes, the anesthetic (chloroform), some medical accouterments to throw around the office and a phony diploma to hang on the wall. The power of Dreben's persona was such that six grown men, including a physician and two police chiefs, all nodded in approval. Sam left for Juarez to rent something appropriate.

Tuesday, Sam put a couple of ads in local papers and printed up some handbills. Wednesday, the 'doctor' and his 'nurse' (a brilliant touch by Kelly) opened the office and began their wait. Nurse and doctor were astonished when Little Phil, as if on cue, walked through the door on Friday. After the doctor examined the offending tattoo, an appointment was made to perform the procedure next Monday in Little Phil's house, the only place where the wary con would agree to undergo anesthesia. The canny "Dr. Kelly" got a deposit out of Little Phil before he left.

### **The Posse Makes Its Move**

That night the makeshift posse met and decided they would need two cars for the stakeout and getaway. Chief Oaks would drive one (no chance of his getting recognized), the others would pile into a cab, which, they believed, would make them invisible. After all, who takes a cab to a kidnapping? Everything was in motion: Detective/Dr. Kelly walked into Little Phil's house carrying a telltale doctor's bag, ordered his patient to lie down and administered the chloroform, while the stakeout cars (one hailed from the El Paso Public Livery stand!) got into position. All that had to happen now was for Kelly to spit through an open window, the agreed signal that the felon was out cold. As with all the best-laid plans, this one didn't work either. Little Phil was groggy, but not completely out. Dreben decided to make a run for it anyway by stuffing the fugitive on the

floor of the car and then race across the bridge to El Paso. By the time Little Phil was dragged from the house to the car, he was wide awake, kicking and screaming in Spanish that he was being kidnapped by gringos. A mob quickly gathered, blocking the car. Police were called. Sam, Detective Claude Smith, and the hapless cab driver were arrested, and Alguin set free. Kelly, who had melted into the crowd, made it back to El Paso, as did Chief Oaks who drove off when the trouble started. The situation grew uglier by the hour. A lynch mob surrounded the jail. Only the timely intervention of one of Sam's legion of friends in Mexico, General J.J. Mendez, commandant of the local garrison, who had ordered troops into the melee with fixed bayonets, saved the Americans. The Juarez press screamed for the prisoners' execution. When El Paso learned of Dreben's predicament the city came running. El Paso Mayor Charlie Davis led the charge. He appealed to Congress, the governor's office, the State Department and Army Chief of Staff, General John J. Hines (who, in a great piece of luck for Sam, was passing

through El Paso at the time). Pressure mounted on Mexico to release the prisoners. American troops massed at the border. Mexico blinked. Sam and his cohorts were released after three days in jail. Reporters asked Sam, who was fed only bread and water while in jail, how he managed. "It wasn't so bad the first day," he replied. "You see, that was Yom Kippur, and I wouldn't have eaten anyway."

### **Epilogue**

*Little Phil was eventually extradited and tried for the murder of the Los Angeles detective. Convicted in 1923 and given a life sentence, Little Phil was paroled in 1953. He disappeared into Mexico and was never heard from again. Sam, who had moved to Los Angeles in 1924, died suddenly on March 15, 1925, from an overdose of medicine administered by an inexperienced nurse in his doctor's office. Upon learning of his death, the Texas State Legislature passed a resolution honoring Sam Dreben, lowered the Lone Star flag to half-staff and recessed for the day - a unique tribute to that remarkable man, the fighting Jew from Texas.*



*The Good Old Boys of the Adventurer's Club in El Paso, Texas, 1920. Sam is standing, center. The gentleman seated in front of Sam, second from right, smoking a cigar is "Tex" O'Reilly, noted adventurer, author and newspaper editor. Sam was the only one of those "boys" to make the "Little Phil" posse.*



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# Profiles of Success: Bernard Rapoport

*"Be better today than you were yesterday."* This is Bernard Rapoport's trademark expression and the one he strives to live by every day. He is up at 5:00 AM for a little exercise, a little reading and then breakfast. At about 6:30, he plays a game of tennis with his good friend Dave Campbell. And, until 2 years ago, he was in the office by 8:00 AM.

Bernie, as his friends call him, began his career with a year-long job as a salesman with Pioneer American Insurance Co. in 1950. He then joined his wife's uncle to start the American Income Life Insurance Company. They secured a \$25,000 loan to start AIL, which quickly became a nationwide business. The company sold in 1994 for \$563 million.

"I didn't want to sell AIL," Mr. Rapoport says. And he stayed on as Chairman of the Board for another 5 years. "But what makes me the most proud is, the company is not doing just as well, it is doing even better now that I'm gone."

That kind of money is quite a large sum for someone who started life in poverty. Mr. Rapoport's father, David Rapoport, immigrated to America from Russia, after escaping a death sentence. He believed in the teachings of Karl Marx and was exiled to Siberia for distributing propaganda against the czar in the Russian Revolution in 1905. He was condemned to death, but escaped in 1910. He walked 600 miles to Belgium, depending on the kindness of strangers along the way.

With the help of relatives, he came to the United States and ended up in San Antonio. He promptly joined the Socialist Party. Every morning, he told Bernard to remember the saying, "Workers of the world, unite – you've nothing to lose but your chains."

Reva Feldman was Mr. Rapoport's

mother. She was from Sevastopol, a city on the Black Sea, and was a daughter of Hasidic Jews. "My mother taught me about God," says Mr. Rapoport, "my father taught me about Karl Marx."

Poor and struggling, they began their life together. The elder Rapoport peddled blankets from a pushcart on San Antonio's west side. During the Depression, 7-year-old Bernie came home to the family's furniture in the street. "We had to move to another house," Mr. Rapoport recalls. "I didn't realize what had really happened, but I did notice that our new house wasn't as nice as the one we'd left. So at an early age, I realized that scarcity of money was a very terrible thing."

But poverty wasn't the only adversity Mr. Rapoport overcame. When he



*Audre and Bernard Rapoport*

was 13, he was rushing home from Yom Kippur services when a car struck him. He sustained injuries that left him bedridden for a year and a half. He only finished high school with the help of tutors, but was in the top 1% of his class. The injuries left him with a permanent limp, however, that disqualified him from military service.

The Rapoport family, however, were culturally rich. Mr. Rapoport's father instilled in him at an early age that reading was essential to success. "My father would leave the house at 4:30 in the morning with his pushcart and he would call me about 5:00," he says. "I was about 12 years old, and he would say, 'What were you doing?' I'd say, 'Poppa, I was sleeping.' He'd say, 'Do you want to be a bum the rest of your life? Start reading a book right now.'" By the time he was 13, Mr. Rapoport had read Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Tolstoy.

Not only were the Rapoport family well read, but they were linguistically inclined as well. Mr. Rapoport's father spoke Yiddish, Russian, English and Spanish. His mother spoke Yiddish and English. Mr. Rapoport, himself speaks two languages. "Because we were among Mexican families, I learned Spanish before I learned English," he says.

Mr. Rapoport's only sibling is Idell McLanathan, a retired clinical psychologist and a former chairman of the psychology department at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. "My mother wanted me to be a professor," says Mr. Rapoport. "I was working on my masters, but I got out of school to help my sister get through school. I worked at Zales Jewelers and I found out there that I was pretty good in business."

Over the last five decades, Mr. Rapoport has met, and made friends, with almost every major politician, including Israel's former prime minister Golda Meir, civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, former Senator Thomas Eagleton, former presidents Carter and Clinton, astronaut John Glenn and West Virginia Sen. Jay Rockefeller, just to name a few. His offices are wallpapered with letters that begin "Dear B."

*continued on page 15*



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# Belles of the Ball

by Hollace Weiner

Fort Worth once had its own version of Ballyhoo – the elegant dance for Jewish ladies and gents spotlighted in the 1997 Broadway hit, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. The award winning play, about the post-war Southern Jewish social scene, was set in Atlanta.

The Fort Worth equivalent was Presentation, a Jewish debutante ball hosted from 1936 to 1953 at the city's Blackstone Hotel. The dance, held during Thanksgiving week, was the Jewish social event of the season.

At the holiday gala, young ladies in floor-length gowns descended a dramatic, two-tiered Gone With the Wind-style staircase then made a deep curtsy to the community. Cradling bouquets of long-stemmed roses or chrysanthemums, the debbs — who were high school juniors and seniors — posed for group pictures that ran in the next day's *Fort Worth Press* and *Star-Telegram*.

"The curtsy didn't worry me like the stairs," recalled Frances Weltman, a deb during the 1940 season. "Walk-

*continued on page 17*



## *Presentation of Jewish "Debs"*

*Venetian Ballroom, Blackstone Hotel, November 24, 1936*

**Back Row:** Nolan Glazer, David Samson, Phillip Hurwitz, Willard Glazer, Irving Rosenthal, Mitchell Victor, Joseph Shanblum

**Front Row:** Charlotte Miller Mehl, Eleanor Klotzman Gachman, Bertha Samson Shanblum, Annette Bockstein Taylor, Shirley Ginsburg Anton, Betty Jo Drescher Silberstein, Louise Klar Lipshitz

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*Rapoport, continued from page 14*

or "Dear Bernie."

When AIL sold in 1994, Mr. Rapoport and Audre, his wife of 59 years, put all their energy into the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Foundation, whose mission is to support programs that have a broad impact in meeting human needs and aspirations, with emphasis on the least advantaged members of society. Though only twelve years old, the Foundation has already distributed more than \$19 million to charitable organizations.

In 1997, the Rapoport's received an award for establishing a fund supporting

the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas. In 1998, Mr. Rapoport was identified by Fortune Magazine as one of the "Top 40 most generous philanthropists," a tag he despises. That was the year he gave \$15 million to his alma mater, the University of Texas and \$5 million to the Jerusalem Foundation. Mr. Rapoport's rags-to-riches story earned him the 1999 Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Award. This association recognizes men and women who personify success through hard work and courage.

Mr Rapoport doesn't do it for the awards or the money, however.

"That's why I work," he says, pointing to a picture of his family. His son Ronald, Marshall Professor of Government at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, is standing with his wife, Patricia and their daughters, Rebecca and Emily. "Sure, money is nice," he says, "but its real value is what it can do for others. Maybe by the time Rebecca and Emily are Ronnie's age, things will be better, huh? We gotta try. That's all. We gotta try."

*Compiled from articles in the Dallas Morning News and Etc. Magazine.*

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# Neiman Marcus Succeeded Despite Family Conflict

by Bill Fairley

*Reprinted with his permission from the Fort Worth Star Telegram*

Stanley Marcus, the scion of the founding Marcus in the Dallas-launched Neiman Marcus department store, has become the esteemed name and face most often associated with the exclusive and elegant store.

But "Mr. Stanley," the moniker bestowed on him by his workers, was only 2 years old when Neiman Marcus opened in 1907. It was his father, Herbert, who was the founding Marcus.

The "Neiman" name on the marquee refers to Stanley Marcus' aunt, Carrie, and her husband, Abraham.

Herbert Marcus was the boys' clothes buyer at the Dallas Sanger Brothers store when his sister, Carrie, a blouse buyer at another Dallas store, A. Harris, married Al Neiman. Neither the Neimans nor Herbert Marcus had graduated from high school. Al Neiman was born in Chicago in 1880 and was raised in a Cleveland orphanage. Early in his retail merchandising career, Marcus garnered the reputation of being an "aggressive go-getter."

Carrie Marcus Neiman was a tall, elegant brunette, born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1883. Friends and family wondered at her attraction to the rather boisterous, opinionated — and wealthy — Al Neiman.

She and her siblings were born of European immigrants who had met in Louisville, where they married. Minnie Lichtenstein, the mother, was born in Hanau, Germany, and the father, Jacob, was born in Wronke, a town on the disputed German-Polish border.

Herbert Marcus was also born in Louisville.

Al Neiman was not well-liked by members of the Marcus family, who thought him pompous and egotistical. He generated more disfavor amongst

the Marcuses when he persuaded his new wife to resign from her job and go with him to Atlanta to start a sales promotion company.

The new business was created to help, for a fee, merchants in rural Georgia raise cash by staging special sales, which were promoted by garish signs and banners and crowd-pleasing band music.

The Neimans were so successful that at the end of two years, they had two offers to sell their company. One offer was for the outright sale for \$25,000 in cash. The other offer was for the couple to exchange their business for a franchise in Missouri or Kansas for a relatively new drink called Coca-Cola.

The couple opted for the cash and returned to Dallas with a plan to open their own retail store. To acquire additional capital, they sold shares in the proposed store to family members. The Neimans used the capital to pay for fixtures, carpets and merchandise for their 50-foot storefront in the heart of Dallas' downtown.

When the Sangers heard of the venture, they offered Herbert Marcus a raise to keep him from pursuing this "foolish dream," but he left.

On September 8, 1907, a full-page ad ran in *The Dallas Morning News* announcing the grand opening of Neiman Marcus. Herbert Marcus was 29, his sister 24 and his brother-in-law 27.

Despite a "money panic" in 1907, which caused a downturn throughout the nation, Neiman Marcus survived and was an immediate success.

With his wife and brother-in-law both ill on opening day, Al Neiman greeted every customer walking through the door. Thereafter, the three

worked together in the store, which was initially limited to women's wear.

Stanley Marcus, a Harvard University graduate, came into the business in 1926, setting up conflicts between Herbert and Al, and Stanley and Al.

"Tensions between my father and Uncle Al continued to mount, caused no doubt, in part, by my presence in the business," Stanley Marcus wrote in his book *Minding the Store*.

Two years after his entry into the business, Al Neiman demanded: "Either Stanley goes or I go."

Herbert Marcus borrowed \$250,000 from a Dallas bank to buy out Al Neiman's interest in 1928. Carrie Neiman announced that she would have no part in the business dissolution, and she ended her marriage to her philandering husband.

In Al Neiman's contract of sale, he stipulated that he would not enter or be associated with any Dallas retail operation for 10 years. But Neiman reneged on the deal, and Marcus sued. The angry Neiman never spoke to the Marcus family again.

Al Neiman was 48 when he left Neiman Marcus. He engaged in numerous mercantile and other enterprises in Chicago, Minneapolis and New York, but through the ensuing years, he lost everything.

Herbert Marcus died in 1950, and Carrie Marcus Neiman died in 1956.

Al Neiman invested in various enterprises, but his losses mounted and he spent his last days in poverty, living at the Masonic Home for the Aged in Arlington. He died on October 22, 1970, and was buried in a pauper's grave in the Emmanuel Hebrew Rest Cemetery on South Main Street in Fort Worth.

ing down the steps at the Blackstone, I was scared to death I was going to fall. You were not permitted to hold onto the railing.”

The girls rehearsed often enough that none ever fell.

Following the elegant descent, each deb danced in the limelight with a tuxedoed escort, fox-trotting to a favorite song. Rosabelle Letwin, on the arm of Sylvan Fox, selected *A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody*. Ruth Gilbert and her date, Leonard Samson, danced to *Lovely to Look At*. La Rue Glickman, escorted by Gary Luskey, chose *I Only Have Eyes for You*.

The charity ball was sponsored by Beth-El Congregation's Sisterhood, with each deb nominated by one of thirteen Jewish organizations, including the Orthodox congregation Ahavath Sholom. Eleanor Klotzman represented the Ladies Auxiliary to the Hebrew Institute; Annette Bockstein was nominated by the Council of Jewish Juniors, while Shirley Ginsburg represented Hadassah, and Madlyn Brachman was dubbed the “sweetheart” of AZA. Young ladies from both the Temple and the Shul were well represented. Their escorts were usually good friends, not “beaus,” and included cousins or brothers of other girls in the debutante class.

Each deb sold tickets, with profits benefiting Sisterhood. The nominee who brought in the most partygoers was crowned queen. In 1936 the crown went to Annette Bockstein. Sylvia Rosenthal won the 1940 title.

“It was a nickel a ticket,” recalled Eleanor. “The purpose was a fundraiser for Sisterhood.”

Fort Worth's Presentation ball was similar to a slew of corresponding social events celebrated across the Jewish South. In Montgomery, Alabama, Jewish fraternity boys

threw a seven-day fete over the Fourth of July called Falcon Picnic. Jewish singles in Columbus, Georgia, celebrated Hollydays, a December gathering replete with Christmas trees. Birmingham called its gala Jubilee. Atlanta's was Ballyhoo.

Louisville's Jewish singles threw parties during the Kentucky Derby, patterning their dances after galas that excluded Jews. Memphis Jews did likewise during their city-wide Cotton Carnival. These parties were essentially the Jewish answer to WASP-only functions.

Fort Worth's Presentation event differed from other Southern Jewish galas because it was orchestrated by adults, rather than the singles themselves. Also, it was a local, not a regional affair. But, like the round of parties and dances in Louisville and Memphis, Fort Worth's Presentation mimicked coming out parties thrown by the city's social elite.

“There were no Jews in Steeplechase then,” recalled Fay Rosenthal Brachman, a 1937 Presentation deb, referring to the men's club that still sponsors an annual debutante ball. “This was the equivalent.”

Social exclusion was a two-sided coin. In that era, the organized Jewish community rejected intermarriage. It was taboo. If a mixed marriage occurred, families went into mourning, literally sitting shiva.

Southern folklorist Carolyn Lipson-Walker, who has analyzed the Ballyhoo phenomenon, wrote in her classic treatise, *Shalom Y'all: The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews*, that these social events were “mating stratagems” of great necessity for survival of the tribe. “Marrying within the group operated as a social mechanism for the survival of Jewry in the South.” Furthermore, Jewish families from Georgia to Texas had

strong preferences for Southern Jewish partners as opposed to Yankees. These social events waned in the early 1950s as American society became more mobile and less regional. While they lasted, gatherings like Ballyhoo, Jubilee, Falcon, and Presentation served as the setting for many a Southern Jewish youth's “first dates, first drinks, and first kisses.”

Many a girl wore a specially purchased gown. Eleanor Klotzman's aunt in Baltimore sent her a dress for her 1936 Fort Worth debut. Livia Schreiber got her ball gown at Ruben and Rose Fuller's boutique, located in their Pennsylvania Avenue home. “It was a deep green,” Livia recalled, adding, “Mrs. (Daisy) Landman gave each of us a set of pearls, a double strand. I still have mine.” Frances Weltman's accessories included her Aunt Marguerite's “garnet necklace and earscrews.”

Fay Levenson's most vivid memory was the setting itself, the Venetian Room with its dramatic staircase. When Leon Brachman later proposed to Fay, she planned their 1941 wedding for that very same room in the Blackstone Hotel.

The ostensible reason for Presentation was fundraising. The unspoken aim, sociologists say, was matchmaking. For some it worked. Eleanor Klotzman went to the 1936 ball with David Samson, brother of another deb. During the evening, David introduced Eleanore to Leon Gachman, a fellow three years her senior. It must have been love at first sight. Eleanor and Leon became - and remain - an item. This January they will celebrate their 64th wedding anniversary.

(Hollace Weiner, author of *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis & Their Work*, is researching the history of Fort Worth Jewry.)



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# Hollace Weiner Assumes Presidency of Southern Jewish Historical Society

by Helen Wilk

Sunday, November 4, during the 26th annual business meeting of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, held in Norfolk, Virginia, Hollace Weiner assumed the Presidency of this important organization. Sherry Zander and I were extremely pleased to be present for this fascinating weekend and to lend support to our fellow TJHS Board member as she begins her two-year term.

The weekend was filled with the warmth of southern hospitality as we toured interesting sites, heard erudite presentations from a number of speakers and learned about many aspects of Southern Jewish history. Among the speakers was Joyce Antler from the Brandeis University Department of American Studies, who spoke about Gertrude Weil, a Southern Jewish Citizen Activist, and Professor Melvin I. Urofsky, whose topic was The Levy Family and Monticello: A Drama in Five Acts and a Coda.

Hollace moderated an extremely interesting Book and Author panel that

featured Englishman Clive Webb who wrote *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights*, Wendy Low Besmann, author of *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* and Leonard Rogoff who wrote *Homelands: Southern-Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*. The panel discussion evoked a number of questions and observations from the audience and was followed by book signing by each of the authors.

Saturday night's dinner and program was held aboard the Spirit of Norfolk ship as we cruised in the bay. We were greeted by red, white and blue decorations and each person was given a ribbon and American flag pin with the phrase "we will never forget." These lovely decorations reminded us that the military community of Norfolk is intimately involved in our war against terrorism.

In 2002, the Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold it's 27th annual meeting in Shreveport, Louisi-

ana during the month-long regional celebration of Shreveport/Bossier Jewish History Month as part of the commemoration of Congregation Agudath Achim's 100th Anniversary. At that same time, the Texas Jewish Historical Society will hold our fall Board meeting in Shreveport and share the programming with SJHS. So mark your calendars NOW to attend the TJHS fall board meeting on October 25-27, 2002. This will be an opportunity to view a number of special exhibits and hear an amazing array of speakers who share our passion for preserving the history of the Jewish experience.



## Mark Your Calendars

For a joint meeting of the  
Southern Jewish Historical Society  
and the Texas Jewish Historical Society

Date: October, 2002  
Location: Shreveport, LA

*Further Details will follow.*

Catherine Kahn, of New Orleans, outgoing president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society passes the gavel to Hollace Weiner, newly elected President.



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# Raymond Reiser, Pioneer Biochemist

*by Richard Reiser, his son*

Dr. Raymond Reiser, Ph.D., a leading research scientist in lipid chemistry and cholesterol, died November 15 in Houston, Texas. A Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Biochemistry at Texas A&M University, he was 95 last July.

From 1940 to 1976 he was an active member of the faculty at Texas A&M, leaving only during WWII to serve as a Captain and Clinical Chemist in the U.S. Army at stateside and European hospitals. In 1960 he received the National Institute of Health's Research Career Award in Research and in 1965 was made Distinguished Professor, Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics. He received his Emeritus status in 1976, but continued going to his laboratory until 1987 and as late as 1990 made a contribution to a major series of scientific volumes entitled *Meat and Health*.

"Raymond Reiser was one the true scientific pioneers at Texas A&M," said Dr. Mack Prescott, former Vice-President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Science at A&M. "He arrived on campus at a time when what research did exist focused only on applications. Dr. Reiser proved capable of excelling at both applied and basic research, emphasizing the latter, throughout his long career. His work on lipids brought international recognition to the university he loved and served."

According to Dr. Robert Wells, Director, Center for Genome Research, at the Texas A&M Health Science Center, "Dr. Reiser made fundamental and seminal contributions to our understanding of the biochemistry of polyunsaturated fatty acids in addition to the role of diet, blood lipids, and lipoproteins in atherosclerosis. He was always on the cutting edge of technology and

techniques, leading the way in the use of radioisotopes, chromatography, and electronics in biochemical research." He was often called upon as an expert in proceedings involving the peanut oil, egg, and dairy, and meat industries.

Dr. Reiser was born in Philadelphia, PA, July 28, 1906, and graduated from Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, in 1929. He received his doctorate in biochemistry in 1936 from Ohio State University, which honored him with their Centennial Achievement Award in 1970. He was a Fellow from the American Institute of Nutrition and was a Fellow, President, and Member, Board of Governors, of the American Oil Chemists Society. He was also President, Southwestern Section, of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine and President, Texas A&M-Baylor Section, of the American Chemical Society. He was a member of both Sigma XI and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies. He received numerous additional national awards, including the Norman A. Borlag Award for contributions to agriculture and the Alton E. Bailey award from the American Oil Chemists Society in 1974 and 1976, respectively.

An active researcher, with over 150 peer-reviewed publications, he was also a widely-sought lecturer, speaking in over sixteen countries, including lectures in Beijing and Xian at the invitation of the China Center for Preventative Medicine in 1985.

At Texas A&M, he was a charter faculty member of the Department of Biochemistry and Nutrition in 1947 and was a driving force behind the food technology program at the university.

Over the years, 19 of the graduate students in his laboratory received their Ph.D. degrees and went on to

important careers in academic, industrial, and medical research. In addition, he trained at least eight postdoctoral fellows and four visiting scientists and for many years taught biochemistry to students in the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine.

His wife, Shirley, who died in 1995, was the Director of the Hillel Foundation at Texas A&M for over 20 years. For almost half a century, Raymond and Shirley Reiser were the key representatives of the Jewish community at Texas A&M and Brazos County.

Dr. Reiser is survived by his son Richard and his wife Gail Cason, son Donald and his wife Gay Yellen, grandson Damon, granddaughter Cyvia, grandson Martin and his wife Brenda Fikac, and great-grandson Richard Raymond.

Interment next to his wife in the City Cemetery in Bryan, Texas, was on Sunday, November 18, followed by a memorial service at Congregation Beth Shalom in Bryan, both conducted by Rabbi Shaul Osadchey of Congregation Or Ami of Houston.

The family suggests that, in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Raymond Reiser Lecture Series in Biochemistry, established in 1986 at the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

## NOTE:

If you know of any TJHS members who have passed away or married, requiring a change in membership status, please notify:

**Fay Brachman**  
3720 Autumn Drive  
Fort Worth, TX 76109  
Phone: 817-924-9207  
E-mail: [leonhb@flash.net](mailto:leonhb@flash.net)

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# Texas Jewish Historical Society 2001-2002



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Fort Worth, TX 76107

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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, TX 78766-0193**

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## Have Exhibit, Will Travel

The Texas Jewish Historical Society, in cooperation with the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, has designed an exhibit to be used as an educational tool for schools, Sunday Schools, Jewish Community Centers, Synagogues, Temples and Special Events in any town or city in Texas.

The exhibit depicts the journey of Jews in tiny villages and shtetls in Europe to America and their eventual settlement in the communities of Texas. It shows families, businesses, homes, children, religion and holidays.

The exhibit is designed to be either hung on walls or set up on tables on foam board with an easel stand. The entire exhibit comes in two boxes, weighs 40 pounds, and can be shipped very easily via UPS. There is no charge for the exhibit and the only cost is the return charges via UPS.

**To reserve the exhibit, along  
with a speaker, contact Jack  
Gerrick at 817-927-8765.**





# Texas Jewish Historical Society

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