

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Established 1980



Winter 2001

Newsletter

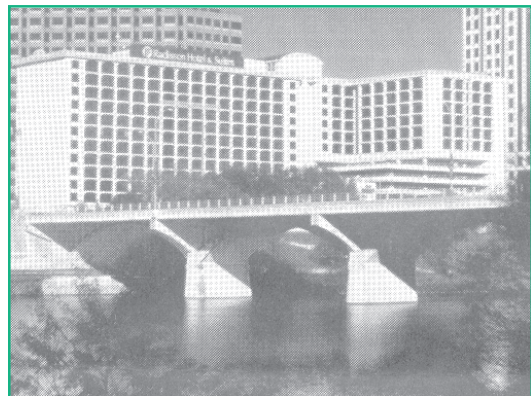
Save the Date!

Annual Gathering April 20-22, 2001 in Austin!

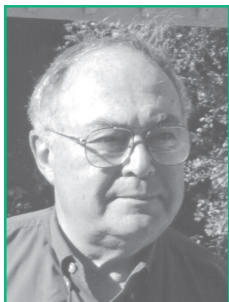
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**You should already have received the
Program and Registration form in the mail –
send it in NOW to reserve your place!**



From the TJHS President



The board of directors of the Texas Jewish Historical Society met last October in San Antonio at the Institute of Texan Cultures at our annual fall meeting. One of

the main reasons we met at the Institute was that the society has a substantial investment in the remodeling of The Jewish Texans exhibit and it has finally been completed with state-of-the-art technology. Walter Fein, who is a member of our society and a docent at the Institute, has stated that since we improved the exhibit, thousands of school children have been exposed to Jewish culture and since many of them come from small towns, it has been a very positive experience for them.

I want to compliment the Editor of the newsletter and Geri Gregory, our graphic artist, for an outstanding job. I don't think we ever had as many kudos. In response to page 16 of the last newsletter under the "Information Please!" column, we must have had as many as 40 calls about the families listed. Everyone wanted to give us information on their families and others they knew about.

The traveling exhibit that the society put together last year is well on its way to being one of the most popular sources of displaying Texas Jewish history. As of this writing it has been to Austin, Houston, Dallas and Corpus Christi. We are currently

formulating plans to take our exhibit to communities in West Texas, along with speakers, to promote the need to document Jewish history in Texas. The collective memories of the Jewish people is the greatest asset we have, as we face the future together.

As you will have seen in your mailbox already, our Annual Gathering is in Austin on April 20-22 of this year and I cannot stress enough the terrific programming that will be presented to the Society, from speakers coming in from other states to a new movie that was in part sponsored by TJHS. "Make Me a Match" by Cynthia and Allen Mondell has been shown in some areas of Texas with rave reviews and will be shown in its entirety at this meeting. We will learn about the Jewish history of Austin by the people who made it. I hope to see you all there for a fabulous weekend.

Shalom y'all,

Jack Gerrick

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.

Letter From the Editor

(Or Freedman Slips)



When I was in college, one particular assignment required a multi-page report.

One student thought he would test the professor's true dedication to

reading all of the reports handed in. The student buried deep within his essay "Prof, if you read this, I'll buy you a beer". The paper came back with a note "I get a beer, you get a D."

After the responses we got from our last bulletin, I am not about to make any such offers to our readers. Many, many of you have written, e-mailed and called with responses to the **Information Please** column. Ed Katten has sent pictures and text identifying the Jos. Nussbaum mystery. Turns out to be his *mishpucha*.

Regarding the San Antonio history, some people have asked why their families were not mentioned. There is certainly no slight intended, but history as beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder. We welcome all histories of Jews in Texas. The only way a story can be considered for inclusion is for it to be submitted. While this is not a promise to publish every story submitted, it certainly is an assurance that it won't be included if it is not submitted. As the old saying goes, "let's keep those cards and letters rolling in!"

One further note. If you like what you read, please show your nonmember friends your copy and ask them to join our society. On the other hand, if you don't like it or have suggestions for improving this journal, please tell me. I have only one requisite for complaints and gripes. Criticisms without suggestion for improvement will be ignored. It is your organization, let's make it even greater!

Buddy Freed

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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Letters to the Editor

RE: Can Anyone Identify This Photo?

Dear Buddy,

I am attaching a note and an article about the Joseph Nussbaum Company. Hope this solves the mystery of the photo.

Information about Joseph Nussbaum & Co.

Attached is a piece that is in my genealogy files. There is one error regarding Julius Desenberg coming into the business in 1871. My guess is that it was more like 1889. The last paragraph regarding children that are still alive is now totally outdated. All of those people are now deceased. Joe Nussbaum has some surviving grandchildren – Archie Archenhold of Fort Worth (TJHS member), Jean Schwartz of Hallettsville (TJHS member), Maxine Levy of Houston, Joe Nussbaum of Corsicana, and Mildred Denbina of Fort Worth. Julius Nussbaum has some surviving grandchildren – Julius Nussbaum of Greenville, Claude Nussbaum, Jr. of Mexia, Harold J. Nussbaum of Mexia, Joan Sikes of Huntsville, and Betty Ida Barnum of Gainesville, Florida. Julius Desenberg has some surviving grandchildren – Edwin Katten of Waco (TJHS member), Desey Desenberg of Houston (TJHS member), and Dianne Gilbert of Nashville, Tennessee.

Ed Katten (Waco)
The following is Ed's attached genealogy file

Nussbaum Came Soon after Railroad

Joseph Nussbaum came to the United States in 1869, from his home in Germany, landing in New York City. He then went on to St. Louis where he bought a supply of household wares, including pots and pans, needles, thread and thimbles.

He made arrangements to join a wagon train to Texas and peddled his

wares on the way. He landed at Pisgah Ridge where he opened a grocery store. During these days he would take a pack train to Navasota, the railhead, to get supplies. Later, he opened a store in Wortham.

When the railroad reached Mexia in 1871, Joe, as he was usually called, moved to Mexia and established a general merchandise business, building the two buildings where Eubanks Hardware and A. and W. Sales are now located. Here, his brother, Julius, who had served a five-year apprenticeship in the mercantile business in Germany, joined him. He was the first bookkeeper of the firm. Later in 1871, Julius Desenberg joined the business and the firm of Joe Nussbaum and Company was organized. This company sold just about everything, including clothing, shoes, dry goods, wagons, saddles, farm equipment, horse shoes and groceries. The three men traded in horses and mules.

Also, all three men acquired considerable acreage and some of it became oil property during the oil boom of the early twenties.

During the oil boom, the mercantile store was sold to other interests.

In his 50 years in business, Joe Nussbaum was a stockholder in the old First National Bank, which is now the Farmers State Bank. He was also a stockholder in the ice and electric light plant and the water works. In fact, Joe Nussbaum and Judge W. W. Doyle had the first running water in Mexia, piping the water from a public tank east of town. He also had a gas plant in his home to make gas lighting.

The firm of Joe Nussbaum and company built an opera house at the present site of Southwestern Electric.

Julius Desenberg spent some time serving on the school board and Julius Nussbaum was on the city council. In addition to other activities, Desenberg helped organize and was a director of the City National Bank; Julius Nussbaum was a director of the Farmers State Bank for many years. He started the practice of giving

memorial books to the public library.

Joe Nussbaum's only living child is Ida Nussbaum Scharff of Houston. Desenberg's children are Mrs. Elsie Juda and Mrs. Corine Katten of Mexia, Mrs. M.E. (Mildred) Lawrence of Waco, and Henry Desenberg of Houston. Julius Nussbaum's sons are J. Harold Nussbaum and Claude Nussbaum, both of Mexia.

RE: Information, Please!

A good friend sent me the information pertaining to the Fram Family Reunion, and I do have some information about a few of the people you wanted to know about.

Kenedy, Texas (Not Kennedy) – Jake Mayers, a formerly very good friend of our family, moved from Kenedy to Harlingen, many years ago and is now dead – I would guess about 3 or 4 years. His wife, Bess, is in a rest home in Harlingen with Alzheimer's Disease. His nephew is Joel Mayers in Dallas. Jake died probably in his 90s.

Yoakum, Texas – Meyer Handelman (spelled Handelman not Handleman) moved from Yoakum many years ago to New Orleans, where they retired and he died probably 2 or 3 years ago at age 95. His son now lives in New Orleans, and his name is Jay Handelman.

Surely there are people in Cuero who know these people you have listed – since they were in business there many years (Jake Cohen had a store there) and I am sure that the Chamber of Commerce can help you locate an address or two. He also had a daughter living in San Antonio, I think. The name Dalkowitz was the son-in-law of Jake Cohen. My e-mail address is maukro@cs.com.

Maurice Kroll
(Marlin, Texas)

Continued on page 9

A History of the Austin Jewish Community

by Mark Kilpatrick, editor of Austin's *Jewish Outlook*

This article appears in the *Newcomer's Guide to the Austin Jewish Community*

The first Jewish resident of Austin came to town more than 150 years ago to help spur development of the capital city.

Phineas de Cordova was born in Philadelphia in 1819 to a Sephardic Jewish family descended from Spanish and Portuguese royalty. He first went to Houston to join his half-brother Jacob, a prominent land agent in Texas.

But in the late 1840's, at the invitation of Texas Gov. Peter H. Bell, Phineas de Cordova moved to Austin. The city had gone through a decline a few years earlier when the government was moved to Houston and Washington-on-the-Brazos out of fear of Indians and Mexicans. But after Texas had become a U.S. state, in 1845, Austin again felt protected and was booming as the capital. So people like de Cordova were sought to help develop the city.

In the capital, de Cordova published a weekly newspaper (*Southwestern Statesman*), owned a land company and was associated with and close to a number of governors.

He was also active politically – serving on the State Democratic Executive Committee for six years, as an Austin alderman for two, as secretary to the Texas Senate for three legislatures, as state senator from Travis County for two terms, as a justice of the peace and as secretary to the Texas Military Board. He also helped found the first Jewish congregation in Austin, Congregation Beth Israel, and served as its first vice president. He lived here until his death in 1905 and is buried at Beth Israel's Cemetery No. 1.

During his lifetime, de Cordova went from being the first and only Jew in a frontier town to witnessing and aiding the establishment of a full-fledged Jewish community in a modern city.

With today's traffic-clogged streets, high-tech driven economy and hustle-bustle lifestyle, it's hard to imagine, but Austin had only 850

residents in 1840 (a year after it was designated the capital of the fledgling Republic of Texas). And not one was Jewish.

By 1870, after the Civil War, the city's population had climbed to about 4,400, but still few Jews were living here. The city had some 200 Jews in 1877, a number that remained

"It's hard to imagine, but Austin had only 850 residents in 1840 (a year after it was designated the capital of the fledgling Republic of Texas). And not one was Jewish."

relatively unchanged as late as 1907. By 1918, there were 300; by 1928, 490; by 1968, some 1,500; and by 1994, 6,000.

Today, in 2000, the Jewish population has more than doubled, exceeding 12,000. And Austin has become the second fastest growing Jewish community in the United States (Las Vegas, Nev., is first). Behind all these numbers is a fascinating history about the evolution of Jewry in Austin and its positive impact on all facets of life here.

The history of Jews in Austin dates back 150-plus years, though Jews had settled in other parts of Texas decades earlier. Keep in mind that, after the Texas Revolution, Austin was nothing but a small frontier village called Waterloo (population, 10). Today's Austin – the site of the Capitol, other majestic governmental buildings and the University of Texas – would come later. And so would its

Jewish settlers, starting with de Cordova.

The first Jew in Texas was believed to be Samuel Isaacs, who entered from the United States in 1821, when Texas was part of Mexico. Isaacs was among Stephen F. Austin's First Colony of 300 settlers, and lived in Fort Bend County, near what is now Houston.

A handful of other Jews are known to have entered Texas before the revolt in 1836 that led to the Texians casting off their ties to Mexico and forming the independent Republic of Texas. Some of the Jews fought in the Revolution, with Col. Fannin at Goliad and with Gen. Sam Houston at the decisive battle of San Jacinto, near present-day Houston. Among them was Dr. Moses A. Levy, the surgeon-in-chief for the Texian Army.

In 1837, the immigration of Jews into Texas began to rise, particularly to what then were the major population centers, Galveston and San Antonio, as well as in Houston and other smaller towns.

Jews came to Texas for the same reasons they entered other parts of the New World during those times – economic woes, political unrest and religious persecution in Europe. In the late 1840s, the '50s and '60s, they fled the upheavals and rebellions in Germany and Central Europe. In the 1890s and early 1900s, they fled Russia, Russian Poland, the Ukraine steppes, rural East Prussia and Russian Lithuania.

As the numbers of Jews increased, the immigrants began to organize and introduce traditional institutions of Jewish life into their new communities, including Austin – cemetery associations, synagogues, community centers and benevolent associations.

Though Austin got a later start than other cities in Texas, during the final 25 years of the 19th century the Jewish community firmly took root here.

With a Jewish cemetery

established in Austin in 1866, a move to form the city's first congregation began in 1874. It was to be called Temple B'nai Shalom. Synagogues already had been established in towns and cities across the state, including San Antonio, Jefferson, Brownsville, Dallas and Houston – the latter being the site of Texas' first congregation, Congregation Beth Israel, which was chartered, by the state in 1859. But the effort in Austin fizzled, despite the presence of a Jewish population consisting of some 30 Jewish families and 80 male adults.

In 1875, the Austin lodge of B'nai B'rith was formed – the first permanent Jewish organization here. During the coming decades, other groups were established, with some taking hold but many others lasting only a while. The Jewish population apparently was just too small to support the number of organizations popping up. Also, Jews were accepted into the Austin community, affording them plentiful opportunities.

On Sept. 24, 1876, a notice in the *Daily Statesman* signaled a new day in Austin:

"The Israelites of Austin will hold a called meeting this evening at 2 p.m. at the Odd Fellows' Hall, for the purpose of forming a congregation. All are cordially invited to attend."

At the time, Jews here were primarily German Reform immigrants who, after 1850, had become the backbone of Austin's retailing business. Many started as peddlers and later opened their own stores, selling such items a clothing, liquor, tobacco and jewelry. Their shops were located downtown along dusty Congress Avenue, which then was the main retailing center.

There were people like Henry Hirshfeld, who had a dry goods store on the southeast corner of Pecan Street (now Sixth) and Congress; Hirshfeld's father-in-law, Bernard "B" Melasky, who sold clothes at 618 Congress; Isaac Stein, who had a wholesale/retail shop selling china, glass and crockery, at 812 Congress; and Leopold Littman, who made and sold cigars. Among other local Jewish community leaders there were businessmen H. Goldstein, David Weinberger, Jacob Stern, Emmanuel

and William Moses, and Leon Seligman.

Meeting at the odd Fellows' Hall at Pecan and Congress on that September day in 1876, the community decided to form the city's first Jewish Congregation, naming it Beth Israel. The first officers were Hirshfeld, president; de Cordova, vice president; H. Hellman, treasurer; and T.H. Philipson, secretary.

A year later, in 1877, the congregation bought a lot for \$2,500 at

"In the 1880s and '90s Jews who began entering Austin and other parts of Texas came from different parts of Europe...adhering to different religious traditions than those who had come earlier."

East 11th Street and San Jacinto to build a synagogue. Construction of the limestone structure began in 1881, and the first services were held there during the High Holy Days in 1884.

Among Austin's prominent Jews was Joseph Koen, who was born in Vilna, Russia, in 1859 and came to America via England. He landed in New York, where he worked to raise money for his trip to Texas. In Texas, he worked in Waco a while as a jeweler and, in 1884, set out for San Antonio, then the state's major city, where a job awaited him. But along the way he stopped in Austin – and never went on. Investing \$40, he went into business at the Southeast corner of Eighth and Congress, and in 1888 opened a jewelry shop at 105 E. Sixth St.

Koen, described as a well known, generous and beloved businessman, was very active in religious, civic and philanthropic activities in Austin, serving 25 years on the board

of the State School for the Deaf (15 of them as chair), as an officer of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, and 44 years as president of Congregation Beth Israel – a position he held from 1899 until his death in 1944, at age 88. His length of service with Beth Israel was not only the longest for the congregation but also was believed to be unequalled in the nation or the world.

Joe Koen's son, William, also served on the board, from 1943 to 1951, as both a trustee and president. William, who joined his father in the jewelry business in 1918, also was very active in religious, civic and philanthropic affairs.

In the 1880s and '90s Jews began entering Austin and other parts of Texas coming from different parts of Europe, speaking different languages, sporting a different look and adhering to different religious traditions than those who had come earlier. These new Jews held their first Orthodox service here in 1901.

The Orthodox also opened shops in Austin which tended to be on Pecan/Sixth rather than on Congress, as their predecessors had. The new and old Jews were different in other ways too – the old had merchant backgrounds, while the new came from Eastern European ghettos; the old spoke German and English, while the new spoke Russian, Polish and other languages, and usually no English; the old strived to fit in and adapt, while the new sought to maintain their traditions; and the old were Reform in their practice of Judaism, while the new were Orthodox.

Though they feared that the Orthodox would harm their efforts to blend into society, the German Reform Jews united with the Orthodox to raise money to help the needy, to educate their children in a single religious school for many years and for Purim balls and Sunday school picnics.

The Orthodox Jews were too few in numbers early on to establish their own synagogue, so they initially attended services at Beth Israel. But around the turn of the century, the Orthodox moved to conduct services

Continued on page 6

according to their own traditions. They began to meet separately from Beth Israel for High Holy Days services and then for Shabbat services. Even while the Orthodox worshipped at Beth Israel, they also held daily *Minyans* at homes and in the backs of their stores along Pecan.

In 1914, the Orthodox established their own congregation, Agudas Achim (which became Conservative some 35 years later). They conducted services in homes, in backs of their stores and at the Odd Fellows' Hall. In 1922, the congregation bought a house at Seventh and San Jacinto to use as a synagogue. The single story structure was stripped of its inner walls to make it suitable for services.

The first officers were Israel Cohn, president; Jim Novy, vice president; Abe Schwartz; and Sam Dochen. And the new congregation reinstituted the practice of young men becoming Bar Mitzvah, which Beth Israel had abandoned at that time.

By the 1920s, about 50 Orthodox families lived here. Among their prominent leaders were Wolf Meyerowitz, the cantor for Orthodox services 1916 – 22; Morris Ginsburg; Sam Winetraub; Louis Novy, manager

of Hancock Opera House; Leopold Cohn, who along with his brother helped organize the Orthodox; and Isaac Laborite, who helped the Orthodox organize their separate congregation and let them use his house for services 1915 – 22.

The University of Texas also has a long history with Jews, as students, staff and faculty. In 1881, UT's first graduating class included two Jewish students, Sid Samuels and Belle Doppelmayer.

By 1929, enough Jews were on campus to establish Hillel, which offered Hebrew and bible classes, plays, athletics and dances. It was one of only eight Hillels in the nation. At the time, it was linked to Beth Israel and shared a rabbi, Jacob I. Meyer, with the Temple. But the two entities parted ways in 1945, and Hillel attracted its own rabbi. With that split, Jewish life at UT took a separate path from that of the city, with Hillel at the center of Jewish activities on campus.

Barred from the other fraternities and sororities at UT, Jewish students had three of their own fraternities on campus by 1927 – Phi Sigma Delta, Sigma Alpha Mu and Tau Delta Phi – and one sorority, Alpha Epsilon Phi. By 1933, UT had some 325 Jewish students – but few Jewish faculty.

Like in other American Jewish

communities before World War II, Austin's Jews were active and observant. Little change occurred in the Jewish community's size 1930 – 50, when Austin's total population soared from 53,000 to 150,000. With the law and the Depression slowing immigration, fewer Jews were entering the country.

Over the 150-plus years that Jews have lived here, they have enjoyed good relations with non-Jews, and the city has been relatively free of anti-Semitism.

Through the 1930s, the immigrants primarily were concentrated in retailing. But since then a number of Jews have excelled in other fields.

Among them was Jeff Friedman, who at the age of 30 was the youngest ever elected Austin mayor, in 1975. Known as the "hippie mayor", he sported longish hair and a mustache, and advocated environmental protection, an ethics code and equal employment opportunities.

In the publishing world is Michael Levy, who launched the award-winning, Austin-based *Texas Monthly* magazine in the 1970s. Though he sold the magazine a few years ago, he continues as its publisher.

And, of course, there is Michael Dell, as in Dell Computers and the Dell Jewish Community Campus. He turned a one-man, UT dorm-based computer company into a 28,000-employee, multi-national corporation that helped put Austin on the high-tech map. At 35, he's a billionaire, the richest person in Texas and one of the richest in the nation and the world. Along with his wife, Susan, he's also been a generous benefactor in not only the Jewish community but also the community at large.

Thousands of Jews live in Austin today, participating in all walks of life and helping to make the city the special place that it is. Many of these people have deep roots in the area, while others are relatively new.

And it all began with Phineas de Cordova's stepping foot into town in the late 1840s thus blazing the trail for 150 years of immigration and migration by Jews into Austin and putting a permanent stamp on the culture of the city.

Texas Jewish Historical Society Website

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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, or supported directly 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.

“Make Me a Match”

Hits it Off with Premiere Crowd

By Philip Wuntch – Movie Critic of *The Dallas Morning News*



This article and photo appeared in *The Dallas Morning News* of October 20, 2000.
TJHS members will be able to see this movie at the
Annual Gathering in Austin this April – make your reservations now!

In its world premiere October 18 at the Jewish Community Center of Dallas, *Make Me a Match* made a love connection with the audience.

Allen and Cynthia Salzman Mondell's 75-minute film, which examines the Jewish singles scene in Dallas and other cities, took its full-house audience on a rich, entertaining ride while providing insights into the wisdom of maintaining a sense of Jewish identity and continuity in a world that encourages assimilation.

The audience applauded vigorously throughout the screening. Scene of Profiles, the Jewish Community Center's dating service, brought smiles of recognition, while a bachelor's gleeful admission that "buying my house was the best thing that ever happened to my dating life" drew guffaws of identification.

Dallas Morning News

columnist Marilyn Schwartz introduced the screening, saying, "People have asked me: 'Why Jewish matchmaking? Matchmaking is matchmaking.'"

"You might think so, if you grew up in Dallas or Houston. But if you grew up in Mobile, Ala, like I did, you know there *is* Jewish matchmaking.

While Ms. Schwartz related tales of her matchmaking aunt in Mobile, Mr. Mondell responded with stories about his Aunt Bertha.

"I was 16 when I first heard those words from my Aunt Bertha: 'Have I got a girl for you!' It was a natural instinct of all my relatives. They could not stop that instinct even 12 years later, when I married Cynthia."

According to *Make Me a Match*, God was the first matchmaker,

when Adam's rib was used to create Eve. But now matchmaking has evolved into a full-time career for many. In San Diego, a group called Meet Your Match is composed of 24 matchmakers.

The film humorously reveals the universality of human nature. A Brooklyn matchmaker proudly states that if a male client goes into specifics about the measurements he hopes his match will possess, he tells him, "I'm a matchmaker, not a pimp." However, he then adds that, having worked in lingerie, he can tell if a woman has the "merchandise."

Wise, witty and warm, *Make Me a Match* should have an enduring future on the festival circuit and at community showings across the country.

And, no, you don't have to be Jewish to appreciate it.

“Growing Up Jewish In The Texas Oilfields”

Essie Elsner's story – by Roy Elsner

Pete (Pincus) and Pearl Leah Nachtaylor Schmerman were born in Poland, married in Lublin and had one daughter, Rivka, who was born in 1909. Pete was the oldest of 4 boys: Pincus, Sam, Sol and Noah. Interestingly, Pete and Pearl met on their wedding day. A *shatchun*, a marriage broker, arranged their marriage. Pearl and her younger brother Harry were foster children, having been orphaned by the Black Plague that swept Europe in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Pete's cousin Sam Stark had already settled in Cheyenne, Wyoming and sent Pete and Sam tickets to travel by steerage to America. After a short stay in New York they settled in Denver, Colorado. There Sam married another immigrant from Poland. Pete worked to bring his wife and daughter to this country but, before he could do so, World War One broke out.

Pearl lived a nightmare for the next four years. Having to look after her young brother-in-law Noah, little Rivka and herself, she went about eking out an existence for the three of them in the midst of a ferocious war. From honey she would make a liquor called Med, and sell glasses of it to the Russian soldiers passing through. When the bottle became half full, she would add water to it, diluting the liquor but increasing her assets by one hundred per cent. How and what they ate for those four years one can only imagine. In 1918 the war ended and Pete was able to bring his wife and child to America. In Denver they lived in the East Colfax area which was primarily Jewish, and Pete prospered in a clothing shop.

The Great Depression of the early 1930s found many small businesses unable to survive in a big city. Sam Schmerman had already left Denver and set up a small *shmata* store in Borger, Texas where an oil discovery was like a gold rush, and the small town was really booming. Pete

unloaded his family and some merchandise and opened a clothing store, and there he prospered and life became much more pleasant for Essie and her siblings.

However, as one might imagine, speaking nothing but Yiddish when they came to America (they didn't even know Polish well) made doing business more difficult, but their pioneer spirit remained high and they

**“The bus stopped
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shootout ensued.”**

lived a good but simple life.

Pearl Leah knew none other than a Kosher home and, even though theirs was in the back of their tiny shop in Borger, she prepared only kosher food. Meats weren't plentiful because they had to be shipped from either Kansas City, Kansas or Denver, but they managed. Their Jewish community consisted of the two Schmerman families and a couple of others, but at Pesach they got together for Seder, and they observed the High Holy days as best they could. The time came, however, where they had almost no meat to eat. Importing from Kansas City was very expensive, so Betty, who worked for the local Chamber of Commerce, came home carrying a chicken she bought in a local meat market. She asked her mother to prepare it. Mrs. Schmerman said not a word, but cooked it for her family and that was the end of her

kosher kitchens in the Texas oil fields. She never would, however, permit *traif* in her home.

Essie remembers well the incident in Wink, Texas which comes straight out of a Larry McMurtry novel. She was a tiny tot playing in the dusty street in front of the store with her brother Sol, three years older than she. The bus stopped and a feared Texas Ranger stepped down. He was there to arrest a local tough, Heavy Bracheen. A shootout ensued. Mrs. Schmerman grabbed her two young ones and pushed them under a bed. Heavy Bracheen survived the shoot out. The Ranger didn't.

When the oil boom began to play out, Sam moved his family to Crane, Texas. Pete and Pearl packed up their family and merchandise and drove several hundred miles across the state of Texas to Tyler, in East Texas. There, life was colorful for this little girl, but not much to do. So, in the afternoons when there was a revival in the empty lot next door, she would take a couple of her mother's kosher dill pickles, sit on the front row, enchanted by the preaching and singing.

There, as they had done in Borger, they opened their store, again living in the back. Next to Arp, Texas, and when that boom played out it was back to West Texas and the oil boom in Wink. There they encountered a number of Jewish families. Mose Lester and Joe Shoshone had a small jewelry counter in Robert's Diamonds & Jewelry store. Their small jewelry counter was the beginning of Lester's, a chain of jewelry stores in Texas and Oklahoma.

In Wink, Louie Hight, Pete's dear friend, also a Jewish immigrant, operated a small clothing store and Pete found the furniture business to his liking. Times were still tough so Pearl went to neighboring Monahans where she opened a dress shop. By this time Essie, at age fifteen had graduated

from Monahans High school. Every morning, all alone she would drive the family car from Wink to nearby Pecos to make bank deposits. Danger never occurred to her or her parents and she never encountered a problem.

Since her parents wouldn't permit her to leave home and go to college at so tender an age, Mr. Hight hired Essie as a clerk. One day Mr. Hight left Essie to mind the store while he stepped across the street to the cafe. A customer came in dressed in overalls and wearing work boots. Of course, Essie was new in the store so she didn't know the customer. He made a rather large purchase, gathered up the merchandise and headed for the door. Now, Essie had a huge responsibility for a fifteen year old and couldn't let the man leave without paying for the clothes. Tiny as she was she stood in the doorway and wouldn't let the man leave. About this time Mr. Hight returned to his store to find Essie blocking the customer's departure. "You have quite a clerk here, Louie," the customer said. Mr. Hight turned to Essie and said, "Any time Judge Halley comes in, give him whatever he wants. He'll pay us when he can." Judge Halley was one of the richest men in the Lone State State-This was the way of the oil boom wildcatters in Texas.

By this time Essie's older sister, Betty (Rivka) Scherman, had gone to live in New York, found Ben Nedow, a Russian immigrant, married him and brought him to East Texas where they opened a furniture store, first in the tiny town of Arp, later in West Texas.

Betty had a great head for business and Ben was good with his hands. Eventually the single store in Monahans grew to another in Odessa. Odessa was, by far a larger community so Essie went to live with her sister and family and was a clerk in the furniture store. Her parents would now permit her to leave home to attend college for two years, at which time she entered the University of Texas at

Austin. In 1942 her brother Sol joined the Air Corps and spent three years serving his country during World War Two. Beautiful single Jewish girls were scarce in the Permian Basin so Essie served her country by enjoying lots of dates with the Jewish airmen at the Midland Bomber Base. The Jewish community hosted the airmen at Seder and other Jewish holidays.

In 1945 Ben and Betty Nedow purchased the lot at the SouthWest corner of 4th Street and West County Road, in Odessa, intending to build a synagogue. They along with Ben Glast, Adolph Frankel, Ben Sadovnick and others organized and built Temple Beth El in Odessa. Although the synagogue built a new building in 1961, Nedow's name still appears on the cornerstone. He was the second president of the Conservative congregation. Essie's parents were charter members.

From 1946 to 1947 Essie worked in the diamond industry in New York City, living with Orthodox Jewish relatives and observing laws of Judaism that just didn't exist in the oil fields of West Texas. Returning to Texas she, once again, worked in her sister's family furniture store. The Nedows also owned a radio station, KECK, 920 AM which was housed on the second floor of the store building. Roy Elsner, having spent three years in the Marines during World War Two arrived in Odessa in August, 1947 to his first job in broadcasting, as an announcer. He and Essie were married in May, 1948.

Their participation in the local Jewish community has been extensive. Essie has twice been elected President of the Sisterhood, while Roy has served several times as Congregation president. Today Essie runs the temple gift shop.

They are parents of Phil Elsner and Susan Elsner Furman, and proud of their five grandchildren, ranging in age from fourteen to seven, all of whom live very Jewish lives in Dallas, Texas.

Growing Up Jewish In The Oilfields was a memorable and unique experience, but aren't they all?

Letters To the Editor

continued from Page 3

RE: Information Please!

I have some material about my father and his brothers and brothers-in-law, whom are all deceased now and buried in Agudas Achim Cemetery in San Antonio.

My father was Ben Tudzin, his brothers were Max and Leon. His brothers-in-law were Jake Cohn and David Krisfield. I am first generation born in the USA. My father's generation of people were hard workers coming to this country with nothing and becoming merchants and could learn five to six languages and were respected merchants. My father had stores starting in Cuero, later moving to Kenedy, back to San Antonio, and finally moving to Gonzales in approximately 1936 – at first a dry goods store and then a furniture store until about 1971. He retired to San Antonio, enjoying his later life by going to Shul, working with B'nai B'rith, and spending time with his grandchildren. My father died in 1979.



In Gonzales, most of the Michelsons are deceased. Stahl's son is a doctor in his 70s living in Austin. Irving Forgetstein is also deceased. Meyer Handleman is also deceased, but he had a daughter named Esther, who married a cousin of mine named Marvin Tudzin, who lived in Houston. Esther is also deceased and they had 4 sons.

I hope that some of this information is what you might want for your records. My cousin in Cuero (Sarah Aronstein) has more records than I...that she had recorded in Cuero Historical Society.

Pearl Rubin (Fort Worth)

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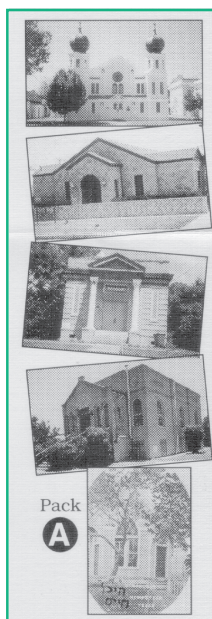


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From Poland and Russia to Comanche, Texas

by Leo J. Hoffman

In The Beginning: Poland

My father was born (in 1894) and grew up in the town of Hrubieszow, located in the south-eastern part of Poland, within a few miles of the present border with Ukraine. He was given the name Ephraim Zalman Hoffman. He was a member of a large family which had evidently already lived in that area for more than 100 years. His father was one of seven siblings. And my father had three sisters, all older than he; by the time he left they were married, with children of their own. So he had been surrounded there by innumerable parents, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins in all degrees.

Hrubieszow was not a *shtetl*. It was a substantial town, with a population of perhaps 15,000, of whom about half were Jewish.

In 1913, at age 19, my father left Hrubieszow, all alone, to emigrate to the United States. He left his large family behind. He spoke no English and had very little money. He corresponded with some family members and he sent money home, but he never had the opportunity to see or talk to any member of his immediate family again. What motivated and drove him to leave? In later years my mother said that he left so abruptly because his father, a strong-willed person, was insisting that he prepare to become a Hassidic rabbi and because his father had also betrothed him to an older woman who perhaps had means but was unattractive. Evidently my father was not interested in either project. (With few exceptions the other members of my father's large family remained in or near Hrubieszow and were ultimately lost in the Holocaust. One branch had emigrated to Canada long before World War II and a handful had escaped to Palestine a few steps ahead of Hitler.)

My father emigrated from



Leo J. Hoffman

Poland just before World War I. He traveled to Bremen, Germany, and took passage on a ship which deposited him at Galveston, Texas. This destination was the result of the organization of the "Galveston Movement" which had been orchestrated in large part by Jacob Schiff with the aim of distributing the Jewish immigrants away from the overcrowded conditions of New York and into the southern and southwestern parts of the country, where it was hoped that they could find better employment and become more rapidly assimilated. I have often thought that if it had not been for Jacob Schiff I might still be living in a tenement in the Lower East Side of New York without ever having had the opportunity to become a Texan.

My father arrived in Galveston none too soon, for the following year the Galveston Movement was terminated. In any event, because his entry into the United States was not sponsored by any relative or friend, the Jewish agency which was processing the Jewish immigrants shipped him off to Fort Worth to look for a job.

The Fort Worth Connection

In Fort Worth Dad readily found a job at the stockyards. But it was soon discovered that he was under age and he was discharged. While he was walking the streets, very upset and seriously concerned about what to do, he encountered Mr. Joseph, the owner of Joseph's Cafe, who very kindly offered him a job as a waiter in the cafe. It was there that he seriously began to learn to speak English, and it was most likely there that he adopted the given name of Charles, because the name Ephraim Zalman was too heavy a burden for a young man to carry in Texas.

It was during the period of his employment at Joseph's Cafe that Dad met the young lady who later became my mother. She was born with the name Sarah Berenstein (later spelled Bernstein) and grew up in the town of Parichi in Belo-Russia. Her father (my grandfather) had left for the United States in 1911, with the understanding that as soon as he could earn enough money he would send for his wife and five children, of whom Sarah was the oldest. He landed at New York but found his way to Texas, where he was peddling bananas in and around Gatesville. When he sent the first 100 rubles home it was decided that Sarah would use it to emigrate ahead of the remainder of the family. Just as Dad had done, she traveled to Bremen, Germany, and boarded a ship which transported her to Galveston. She arrived there about two weeks after Dad's arrival, on Yom Kippur eve, 1913. She was likewise 19 years of age.

Mother joined my grandfather in central Texas for a short time and then moved to Fort Worth to take a job and also to go to school part time. There she met Dad. They were married in 1915, in the study of Rabbi Fox. They were allowed to use the Josephs' car and chauffeur during the evening as their honeymoon. In due course my brother Maurice was born in 1916, I came next in 1919, and my

brother Harold came last in 1920. We were all born in Fort Worth, I think at home, in a little frame house located at 505 South Jennings Avenue. (The last time I drove past that site I found a furniture store occupying the lot where our house had been.)

With a growing family it became necessary for Dad to take a few steps up in the business world. Accordingly, he left Joseph's Cafe and established two successive retail businesses in Fort Worth, each with a partner, and each of which failed after some early success. The last was a grocery and produce business located on Houston Street in downtown Fort Worth.

On To Comanche

After the two business failures in Fort Worth, Dad and Mother decided to leave the big city and take a chance with the dry goods business out in the hinterlands. I think that they initially had in mind one of the towns in the Ranger area that had experienced oil booms in varying degrees. But in making a quick survey trip they reached Comanche in central Texas, noticed a vacant store location on the west side of the square, and decided that they had gone far enough and that Comanche would do. It then had a population of about 2,300 people. With some help from relatives they entered the retail dry goods business there. It was 1923 and I was four years old. We had earlier moved from South Jennings Avenue to a house on Lipscomb Street in south Fort Worth, and one of my earliest memories is of me watching the moving van back up to the front porch of the house on Lipscomb Street, preparing to load up and transport our limited household goods to Comanche.

The new business was begun in the unoccupied store building on the west side of the square, under the name "The Economy Store." Since I was only four years old I was not consulted about the selection of that name. (However, at some point during the late 1920's or early 1930's the store was moved to a larger building, still on the west side of the square, and by then the store was known simply as

"Hoffman's.") Upon our arrival in Comanche we moved into a rented house located about ten blocks north of the square, and thus within walking distance from the store.

Comanche County was principally a farming area. The majority of the farms were relatively small family farms, on which every member of the family was expected to work, just as in the case of our dry goods store. Our store catered to customers of modest incomes, both in town and on the nearby farms. "Modest incomes" describes most of the population of that time.

One of my earliest memories of Comanche relates to my brother Harold. Mother spent a lot of her time working in the store, and during those hours her sons more or less shifted for themselves. One day, not long after we had settled in Comanche, and while we boys were all at home, Harold simply disappeared, without his brothers realizing that he was gone. He was about three years old at the time. It turned out that he had wandered off down the street, dressed only in his underpants. A neighbor lady accosted him about two or three blocks from home as he was apparently headed downtown to see what was going on in the business world. She managed to identify him and bring him back home none the worse for his adventure.

It is my tribute to the town of Comanche of that time that it was almost without crime. The children required a minimum of supervision, being safe from most everything other than the damage they might inflict on themselves.

It is also worthy of comment that we never locked the doors of the successive houses we lived in there - we may not even have had locks or keys. When we left town briefly to pay visits elsewhere we simply pulled the doors shut and departed. (There are those who would contend, however, that there was not much there that was worth stealing, so not much temptation was generated by our absence.)

Life In Comanche

During most of our *sojourn* in

Comanche we were the only Jewish family in town. I was never aware of the slightest bit of anti-Semitism. (I did not learn about anti-Semitism until later after I enrolled at the University of Texas.) At most, I think that some people may have regarded us as a sort of curiosity since we were of the "chosen" people. As an example, a little boy came into the store one day and immediately approached my mother. He was on a serious mission. He said, "Mrs. Hoffman, I want you to tell me how I can become a Jew so I can make good grades like your boys do." Unfortunately, there is no record of Mother's response. Likewise, there is no record that the little boy converted to Judaism in order that he might make good grades. Being the only Jewish family in town we probably merited the classification of "secular Jews." However, my parents took our Jewish identity very seriously, and I can remember Dad advising me and my brothers that we should always walk the high moral ground so as not to give the Jewish people of the world a bad name in Comanche. Dad's admonition made a profound impression on me, even though protecting the Jews all over the world was a heavy burden for a small boy to carry.

We did observe the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, by closing the store and gathering and forming *minyans* with several other Jewish families in the nearby town of Hamilton or occasionally Dublin. In addition to our observance of the High Holy Days, Mother did make the effort, when her boys were still young, to light the candles and recite the prayers for Friday evening *shabbat*. But she got little cooperation from either her boys or her husband, and the effort was soon abandoned. She was simply outvoted by her horde of hungry males.

It should be noted, however, that my grandfather Bernstein, who had finally settled in Fort Worth, and who had been a teacher in Russia, drilled me in Hebrew when I visited him as a youngster in the summertime and when he occasionally visited us in

Continued on page 14

Comanche. I did pretty well at it as long as he had control of me. He and I were pals, and I think that when I was still quite young he envisioned that he might make a rabbi out of me. If his vision had worked, I would definitely have been the first and only rabbi ever produced by the town of Comanche, Texas. But it was not to be, and so I grew up with little depth in Judaism, which was left to be acquired later along the way on an ad hoc basis.

I can never forget the arrival of our first family automobile. One day in 1924, while we were still living in the first rent house, I happened to look outside just as Dad drove up and stopped in front of the house in a shiny new Model "T" touring car. I got so excited that I ran outside and vaulted over the front seat passenger door without bothering to open the door first. I can still hear Dad rebuking me for daring to risk scratching up his new car. That was the beginning of a long affair with the Model "T," in which we made trips as far as Fort Worth, about 100 miles away. It was a temperamental vehicle, but it was still a cut above the horse and buggy. However, after that particular car Dad never bought another Ford product. Henry Ford's publication of the Dearborn Independent newspaper, which was blatantly anti-Semitic, probably lost him Dad's repeat car purchase business forever.

Our telephones were in big wooden boxes hanging on the wall at home and in the store. The mouthpiece, receiver and a crank protruded from the box. The telephone number at home was "7" and the store number was "235." The telephone operator was called "Central." She sat at a switchboard located near a window overlooking the square, on the second floor of an old bank building. One day while I was at home I needed to talk to Dad at the store. I lifted the receiver and rotated the crank. A female voice said "Central" and I responded with "235, please." There was a pause and then Central said, "If you are calling your father, I just saw him walking across the square, heading toward the post office." I can attest that since I have lived in Dallas, Southwestern Bell

has never been able to equal the personal service provided by the telephone company in Comanche in the days of yore.

Off To School

I started to school in 1925, at age six. I can still remember feeling some apprehension at first, but by the time Mother walked out and left me there I think that I was already adjusting and looking forward to the new adventure.

I always enjoyed school. It was fun. I liked acquiring new information and learning how things functioned, and the homework and the tests were usually a pleasant challenge. I think that I also enjoyed the spirit of competition with the other kids. Most of all, though, I wanted my parents to be proud of me. After a while, however, good grades were expected and assumed at our house, and at some point I took to forging a parent's signature on my report cards so as not to bother them. (Years later, when one of my own children would show me a grade of 100 on a test or report card, I was wont to say, "Why couldn't it have been 110?" They didn't always appreciate my sense of humor.)

When I reached the fourth grade level, my parents sent me to stay with my grandfather in Fort Worth, so that I could attend public school there and also attend Hebrew school ("cheder") classes at the synagogue after public school hours. I managed the school and cheder work all right but after about one semester I got so homesick that my parents took me back. Apparently I missed fighting with my brothers.

At about the fourth grade level I took up the trumpet in Comanche, under the tutelage of the local band director. My horn stayed with me through the public school grades and on through college. Among other outlets for amateur musicians in Comanche were the churches. From time to time I played with an orchestra which performed during Baptist church services and during Methodist church services. Consequently, it has occurred to me that throughout my growing up years in Comanche I may have spent

considerably more time in Protestant church services than I did in Jewish synagogue services. But my attachment to Judaism was never in doubt.

I finished the third grade at the elementary school, and I was then passed on to the Comanche Grammar School, which offered grades four through seven. Except for the brief interlude at Fort Worth, I covered those grades in Comanche Grammar School.

During part of my Grammar School career Herbert Goodson, who lived just past our house on the same street, owned a donkey and a matching two-wheel cart. He drove the donkey and cart to school, where he would tie the donkey to a tree during school hours. Harold and I were invited to ride in the cart with him both ways each day. The only drawback was that as we approached our neighborhood he would usually whip the donkey up into a rather fast trot, and we had to jump out as the donkey and cart passed our house. The donkey was not allowed to shift gears at that point. Occasionally as I dismounted (or parachuted) from the cart my books and I went in different directions and I would land on all fours in the dust of the dirt street. It was a good learning experience but if there had been a school bus I probably would have preferred it.

I was valedictorian of my Grammar School graduating class. Being valedictorian meant that I was privileged to deliver the class address at the graduation ceremony. Apparently though, I was not trusted to prepare that address on my own because Miss Wemer, the English teacher, wrote it out for me. I still have her handwritten script. It was totally innocuous, so as not to offend even the smallest cockroach.

The Hoffman Store

The store was at the center of our lives during our entire sixteen years in Comanche. Dad and Mother devoted themselves to it, and as Maurice, Harold and I grew we became more and more involved. It was a typical small-town operation, with every member of the family

pitching in to keep the overhead down and the sales up. In addition, we had hired sales people, the number depending on the volume of business from time to time.

Business was good during the 1920's, while the farmers and the townspeople enjoyed good times. Then, beginning in the early 1930's, when the big depression hit, business was slower and profit margins were thinner. But I think that our store was always profitable to some degree because we concentrated on merchandise that our potential customers could afford to buy, and because we conducted a low overhead operation.

I have many memories of the store, especially during the 1930's. During all of those years Saturday was the big day of the week because that was the day when the farmers cleaned themselves up and came to town. On Saturday we tended to stay open until the last potential customer left the square, sometimes ten or eleven o'clock at night. On the other hand, there were week days, especially during the summer, when we might as well have kept the store closed.

My job in the store began at about age nine, when I had become big enough to push a broom. At that point I went to the store nearly every morning before school and swept it out. As I grew older I took on other jobs, ultimately including the most important job: waiting on customers. At one time or another I think that I sold everything that we had for sale, including even piece goods and ladies' dresses and lingerie.

Maurice did not like to wait on customers, so he took over record keeping, invoices, and other paper work, including the creation of advertising to be published in the weekly newspaper, the Comanche Chief, or in the form of circulars to be distributed around town. While we were still young, Maurice was also put in charge of outfitting Harold and me when we needed new clothes. It didn't take me long to figure out that, being the astute inventory manager that he was, Maurice saw that as an opportunity to get rid of dead merchandise. I occasionally protested when he proposed to fit me in something then out of style. In

the most extreme cases I appealed to the highest authority (Dad), using the argument that it would be unwise, from the business point of view, for me to appear at school wearing something plainly out of style.

Dad was well respected in the community as an articulate and wise man, and he had a rather outgoing and commanding personality which attracted others. When I was hanging around the store I was always impressed when other people, especially business men on the square, would come in just to consult with him. Even

**“Saturday was the
big day of the week
because that was
the day when the
farmers cleaned
themselves up and
came to town.”**

though he was still not far removed from immigrant status, Dad was elected to the School Board in Comanche early on, and he was elected President of the Lions Club and Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce. Some of the business men also urged him to run for mayor of the town, but after family consultations it was decided that he would not run. It was the consensus that, among other considerations, his service as mayor would probably not be good for business.

Dad also had a somewhat volatile disposition, and occasionally a mercurial response of his to some occurrence would cause me to have to get involved. Once during a busy day, probably a Saturday, when I was of high school age, a young man came into the store and headed for the men's dressing room and closed the door in order to have a drink out of some kind of bottle he was carrying. We were all waiting on customers, but Dad saw him go into the dressing room

with the bottle, the sight of which spontaneously set off Dad's rocket engine. I suppose that he saw the occurrence as calling into question the status of our store as a wholesome family place. So Dad ran over to the dressing room, jerked the door open, and demanded that the guy leave the store immediately, even in mid-drink. The subject, who was already well on his way to happy land, promptly took umbrage at Dad's unbridled rudeness and challenged Dad to a big fight right there on the premises. I was not far away and I knew that I could not let my father lower himself to that level. So I moved between them and took the intruder on myself. It wasn't much of a fight since my opponent was already quite drunk. We pushed each other around a bit, and I had almost wrestled him to the floor when the town Marshal, who had been fetched by somebody, came in and escorted our drunken intruder out of the store. It took a while to get normal business restored.

I remember thinking afterward that, all things considered, it might have been better, and certainly much less disruptive, if we had let the man have his private drink and then leave the store quietly. But Dad was not one to compromise his ethical principles.

From time to time the store would advertise a big sale to encourage our potential customers to let go of some of their hard-earned cash. I still have the circular from one of those sales. By comparison to present-day prices, the prices that we advertised in those days (the 1930's) are now almost unbelievable.

There were all sorts of business adventures and misadventures through the years of “The Store.” It was a big part of my growing up process. For a long time I vaguely assumed that after I completed my education I would come back to the business in a permanent way, with Dad and Maurice and Harold. I envisioned, and even talked a little bit about, our establishing a chain of similar stores in central and west Texas (to begin with), with perhaps

Continued on page 16

one or more managed by each of us. (I may have had the idea for a Wal-Mart before Sam Walton had it.) But when the moment of choice arrived, I passed up the opportunity in favor of staying in school and heading toward a career in the law.

Comanche High School

After finishing Grammar School, I enrolled at Comanche High School in the fall of 1931. It included grades 8 through 11. I was twelve years old, and not very worldly, and high school seemed very sophisticated. We were in the early part of the Great Depression, and there were no frills offered at the high school. It had a bare bones curriculum, for budget reasons, but all of the basic subjects were there and they were taught with enthusiasm by some competent and dedicated teachers.

Ola Cunningham ("Miss Ola") taught English; Hattie Brightman ("Miss Hattie") taught mathematics; and Minnie Cunningham ("Miss Minnie") taught history. There were others too, but Miss Ola and Miss Hattie were especially good teachers, and they had had years of experience before I arrived. I enjoyed their classes, and I carry a very fond memory of them. (Years later, at a reunion of Harold's high school class, to which I was invited as a guest

speaker, Miss Hattie appeared as an honored guest. She was then about 92 years old. When we all gathered together in the new high school building, I introduced myself to Miss Hattie. She instantly responded, "Oh, I remember you. You were the best math student I ever had." She really made my day. But I hung around for a while to make sure that she wasn't saying that to all of her old students.)

In June of 1935 I graduated from Comanche High School. I had just turned age 16. I was declared the valedictorian of the class. There were only 38 of us. It was the depth of the depression, and some of the kids had dropped out along the way in order to go to work. As valedictorian I was granted the honor of delivering the class address, which I composed myself that time. I think that it could have been classified as corny. My speech is best remembered for my having said that "even if I live to be fifty years of age" I would never forget the proud moment of graduation. I don't know where I got the idea that age fifty was recognized as the end of the line. I certainly don't accept that now.

Departure From Comanche

Upon graduation from Comanche High School my brothers

and I, each in turn, enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin and ultimately earned an undergraduate degree and a law degree. While we were in that process, Dad in 1939 experienced a heart attack and was advised by his local physician that he should quit work and take the remainder of his life very easy. By then my brothers and I were all inclined to make something of our education in the law and to abandon the dry goods business. So the decision was made by the family that we would sell the existing merchandise in the store at retail and then leave the dry goods business. Following that, Mother and Dad would move to Austin and establish a home there for all of us. In due course all of that was accomplished.

Thus, at about the end of 1939, our 16-year sojourn in Comanche came to an end and we officially became citizens of the City of Austin. Since then I completed my degree requirements at the University of Texas, served more than four years in the U. S. Army during World War II, and finally settled in Dallas. In addition, I have visited and worked in a number of other countries around the world. But through it all I have continued to treasure my growing-up years in Comanche. It was a splendid place to make a start, even for a Jewish boy.

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:

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

William Haas Remembered

*This article, submitted by TJHS member Idarene Glick (Dallas), was written in 1917, and appeared in several newspapers at the time. William Haas' grandchildren were as follows: *Leroy Gilbert, *Ben Gilbert, Sol Gilbert, *Harold Gilbert, *David Samson, Bertha Samson Shanblum, Leonard Samson, *Louis Levy, Milton Levy, Idarene Haas Glick, *William Haas, and *Marcia Sue Haas Sherman (*deceased).*

William Haas, Long-Time Merchant of This City Dies on Atlantic

Friends, neighbors and business associates of Wm. Haas were shocked and grieved Thursday afternoon to hear of his sudden death which occurred on an ocean liner sometime during the day, while he and his wife were on their way to Germany for a long-cherished vacation trip to the old homeland and other European countries. The message telling of Mr. Haas' death was sent to his son-in-law, Max Gilbert, of Fort Worth, and was phoned to the members of the family here. The very brief message did not give details of the illness that brought on death, but intimate friends of Mr. Haas say that he was bothered with high blood pressure and that this was very likely the source of his fatal illness.

In the death of William Haas, Weatherford and Parker county loses one of its most respected and substantial citizens. He was a man of the highest integrity and against whom no one was ever heard to speak a word of harm. The deep and sincere friendship held for him was attested to on the day that he and Mrs. Haas left Weatherford June 12 for the long journey across the sea. Friends and businessmen whom he had known for so long and with whom he had business dealings for the past quarter of a century, warmly shook him by the hand, wishing him bon voyage and a very pleasant vacation. None doubted at that time but that he would return and be with us for many years.

Mr. and Mrs. Haas had been planning and looking forward to the trip to Europe for a long time. In fact, it had been the fond hope of Mr. Haas for many years to revisit Germany, the land of his birth, and where his youthful years were passed. He had left that country 52 years ago and 35 years of that time had been a mer-

chant in Weatherford, where the house he founded has had a long and honored career. During all these years as a merchant in this city, he had been very attentive to his business and this was to be the first real vacation. He appeared to be as happy as a boy over the prospect. Five sisters and one brother of Ms. Haas and several of his nieces and nephews were to be visited in Germany and then they planned to see Berlin, Coblenz, Frankfurt, Trier, Klefeldt and still later, perhaps, Paris and London. They did not expect to return to Weatherford before October 15. They left here two weeks ago, spent a few days at St. Louis and Chicago, then went on to New York where they embarked on the liner Reliance, June 1, bound for Bremen. Two days out from New York death came to William Haas and ended all his worldly hopes and plans.

William Haas was 67 years of age at the time of his death. He was twice married, his second wife surviving. By his first marriage there are three sons and three daughters, as follows: Emanuel Haas of Marlow, Okla., and Sidney and Albert Haas of this city; Mrs. Ben Levy, Mrs. Herman Sampson and Mrs. Max Gilbert, all of Fort Worth.

According to a later message, the body of Mr. Haas will be taken to Bremen, the original destination, and from there will be brought back to America on the same ship, arriving at New York on July 17th. From New York the body will be brought to Texas where burial will take place with honors. Mr. Haas was a long and honored member of Lone Star Lodge No. 4, Knights of Pythias, and Weatherford Lodge No. 77, I.O.O.F.

Burial will be made in the Jewish cemetery at Fort Worth, where his first wife now rests.

Profile of Our President

Jack Gerrick, Fort Worth

I grew up in Pharr, Texas in the lower Rio Grande Valley on the Mexican border, a member of one of just two Jewish families. I had two younger brothers and a sister all living now in California. My father and mother came to Pharr by way of Chicago after immigrating to the United States from Poland and Russia. They were in the citrus growing and packing plant business.

Growing up in Pharr was very ecumenical in that we had no Jewish education at that time and ended up with friends at various churches, but we knew who we were and that we were Jewish. When I approached my 13th birthday, I was sent to Chicago to study for my Bar Mitzvah and lived with my grandparents. I attended Pharr-San Juan Alamo High School and was offered a (make good) football scholarship to the University of Texas. However, at that time due to the National emergency of the Korean War, I was caught up in the first draft and entered the U.S. Air Force before college students were deferred.

I played football in the service for three years and was a member of the National Service Championship team while stationed at Carswell AFB in Fort Worth. Upon discharge, I re-entered the University of Texas and graduated in 1957. While at UT, I met this cute girl from Birmingham, Al. 45 years, two children, and two grandchildren later, we still reside in Fort Worth.

I have been active in the Jewish Community in Fort Worth with memberships in B'nai Brith, Jewish War Veterans, and other Jewish organizations. I have always been interested in history, especially Jewish History of Texas because it's so unique. It was certainly a thrill to be elected President of the Texas Jewish Historical Society so that we can preserve our Jewish Heritage for generations to follow. "I see the possibility of accomplishing a great deal if we make people aware of what we are doing."

The N.L. Marwil Family: From Vistytis, Poland, to Henderson, Texas

by Mrs. J.M. Frost, Jr., of San Antonio, Texas

It all began in Poland when my grandfather, Nathan Louis Marwil (the name was originally Maravavilsk) was born February 1, 1861. N.L., as he was usually called, sailed for America in 1870 with his grandmother, mother and two sisters. On the voyage to New York, N.L. became very ill from scarlet fever and as the boy showed no signs of life, Captain Winzer wanted to bury N.L. at sea. Grandmother Hatty pleaded for more time and worked on the boy until his breathing was normal and his vital signs restored. If it hadn't been for Hatty, none of the N.L. Marwil descendants would have existed.

N.L. lived in Detroit seven years and then moved to Tyler, Texas, for three years before settling in Henderson, where he remained the rest of his life. This was 1880 and he started a grocery store on the town square. Marriage came next, to Jeanette Brachfield of New Orleans, and they welcomed a family of six children, five sons and one daughter. My father Mose Hiram was the oldest son and was called "Big Brother", the second son was called "Little Brother" and Aunt Fay, the only daughter, was called "Sister." My grandmother was only 17 when she married N.L. and was a very small woman, so we children could never understand why we called her "Big Mama." I was to wear her wedding gown when I married J.M." Jack" Frost in 1939 in the Marwil family home at 402 E. Main in Henderson.

When N.L. opened a ready-to-wear store around 1905, three of his sons were in business with him. My father had one semester at A&M after his graduation from the Henderson Academy with highest honors in every subject. As he was needed in the family business, he left college but was

a student, self taught, all his life. In 1913, M.H. married, Stella Jackson, a school teacher from St. Louis. He promised his bride to be that they would move to Dallas after one year if she didn't like living in Henderson, a small town of under 2,000 with streets not paved and few homes with indoor

**"We were not aware
of prejudice, but a
boy in the
neighborhood made
my sisters and me
cry when he called
us 'Jew baby.'"**

plumbing.

M.H. and Stella were to remain in Henderson for almost 50 years, in the same house he had built on N. Marshall St. My father bought the store from his father and ran it until he retired around 1935. Both of my parents played important roles in the growth and development of Henderson. M.H. was mayor for two terms, was chairman of the Board of the First National Bank, and raised money for every drive from Liberty Bonds and Victory Bonds to the Red Cross and Salvation Army campaigns. M.H., during his lifetime, probably devoted more time to aiding campaigns for funds than any other person in Rusk County.

There were four children of M.H. and Stella, born in the front bedroom of the Marwil home in Henderson; Vera Marwil Remer, of Longview, Doris Marwil Frost of San Antonio, Stanley Jackson Marwil of

Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and Shirley Marwil Sanger of Dallas, Texas. Vera was the family scholar, graduating as Salutatorian, Doris was the star debater, Stanley marched in the school band, and Shirley was on the tennis team. The three sisters went to the University of Texas, though Vera only had one year, then attended Business school in Tyler. She worked in our father's store and later did income tax work with our father. Growing up, we all walked to school, rain or shine. We were content to have the treat of Saturday afternoons at the Liberty theater to see a Western movie with stars such as Hoot Gipson, Bob Steele, Ken Mainer, Tom Mix and others. The big attraction was seeing an episode of the serial and I remember Green Archer. Admission was 10 cents and popcorn and Hershey bars were five cents each. Shirley and Stanley went to summer camp and we passed the long hot summers swimming, playing tennis, listening to the radio, reading and just taking life easy. Vera and I went to an orthodontist in Shreveport, Louisiana, to have our teeth straightened and had a long bus ride monthly. Stan and I had our tonsils out at a clinic in Longview. Otherwise we were healthy children, but shared mumps, chicken pox and measles.

We were not aware of prejudice, but a boy in the neighborhood, Dolon H., made my sisters and me cry when he called us "Jew baby." Later when Dolon became a star college football player, he said some of his best friends were Jews.

When our parents married, there were about 8 Jewish families in Henderson, all related and with large families of six to ten children. Most moved away, but several returned to Henderson to practice law, dentistry and medicine.

Our great uncle, Charles Brachfield, was a prominent lawyer and a Rusk County Judge from 1898 to 1902 and a state senator from 1903 to 1911. Two nephews, Louis Wolfe and Charles Williams joined his law firm. Years later, my son, Congressman Martin Frost, was to follow in his footsteps.

When our grandma "Big Mama" died in 1933, N.L. remarried. My mother was matchmaker, as she had her widowed aunt, Nettie Steinlein, come to Henderson to be N.L.'s housekeeper. Within four months, N.L. proposed and the couple married in Dallas. Our father went along and he was thought to be the bridegroom, Aunt Nettie was 58 and N.L. was 72. My grandfather was deaf, but he didn't miss much. I remember the office he had in his home and that he was always working on the books. He was a shrewd investor in the stock market and at one time he was in the Land Development business and in Real Estate. He sold most of his holdings, but retained mineral rights to

property that proved to be lucrative in later years.

"Big Mama" was the matriarch of the Marwil family. Her sons and brother, Charles Brachfield were expected for lunch every day except Sunday. She wouldn't hear of two sons marrying out of the faith. Uncle Gus and Lois went together 16 years before marrying after their mother died. Uncle Leo, the youngest, dated Lena "Mike" Stone over 14 years before marrying and having a daughter, Jenny Marwil Hardy. The M.H. family home was sold when M.H. passed away in 1966 and the N.L. home went to Uncle Leo and our cousin, Jenny Hardy. It was sold and has a Historical Marker, as the home dates back over 125 years.

Our father lived and died in Henderson, the town he loved and to which he devoted a life of service! Dad wrote poetry and we now have a book we put together. My favorite poem is:

When die I must, more peacefully I'll
rest
If it be said by one who knows me

best.

I feared not death, nor judgment, life
nor toil,
I hope a son will tend the seed I
pressed
with tenderness, where flowers grow
the best.

May you rest in peace, Dad,
knowing your son, Stanley, his two
sons, Lindsay and Earl and their three
sons, Mark, Scott and David, will carry
on with pride and love the family name
of Marwil.

A Request for Information

My grandfather, Maurice Abramson, was a Rabbi in Galveston in the early 1920s. Does anyone have information about him?

Jon Abramson
1807 Fifth Street
Berkeley, CA 94710
(925) 462-3010
Fax: (925) 417-0947
jonathan_abramso@hotmail.com

Texas Jewish Historical Society Annual Membership

☐ **YES!** I am enclosing my dues payment to the Texas Jewish Historical Society for the 2001 membership year. I am a ☐ New Member ☐ Renewing Member.

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Contributions to the **Texas Jewish Historical Society** are tax deductible within the limits of the law.
Please clip and send with your check to **TJHS**, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193.

Welcome New Members!

October 29, 2000 –
January 22, 2001

Harris and Dianne Gilbert
(Desenberg), Nashville, Tennessee

Relda Finger Hoffer, Houston

William and Lou Beth Nemzin
(Jagoda), Houston

NOTE: If you know of any TJHS members who have passed away or married, requiring a change in membership status, please notify Geri Gregory. Contact information is in the box at right. Thank you!

In Memoriam

Audrey Given (*El Paso*)

Ann Sikora (*Dallas*)

Beulah Schnadig (*El Paso*)

*TJHS extends condolences
to their families.*

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713-623-8882; hspector@itcusa.com

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