

# Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas  
Est. 1980



April, 2011 News Magazine

## Texas Jewish Historical Society Helps Underwrite *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities* by Davie Lou Solka

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has agreed to support the Institute of Southern Jewish Life's effort in writing the Texas section of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*. The Institute has received a grant of \$15,000 that will help underwrite the costs of travel, research, writing, and publishing the histories on the Institute's website.

Dr. Stuart Rockoff, director of the ISJL History Department, and oral historian Josh Parshall have been traveling to various communities in Texas to collect information about the Jewish communities in those cities. They have used the help of interns who have been working on this project. Dr. Rockoff presented some of his findings at the January board meeting of TJHS in San Antonio, and many people gave him additional information and leads.

If you have information on a town in Texas that has either no Jews still living in the community or only a small number, Dr. Rockoff would appreciate any information

that you can give him. He can be contacted at the Museum of Southern Jewish Experience; PO Box 16528; Jackson, MS 39236-6528; phone 601-362-6357.



*The ISJL Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities is designed to present a history of every congregation and significant Jewish community in the South. Currently, it has completed nine states and will add other states in the future. The Encyclopedia is designed to be a continual work-in-progress. If you have information about any of the communities or congregations, please email Dr. Rockoff at [rockoff@isjl.org](mailto:rockoff@isjl.org).*

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# Message from the President

by Rusty Milstein

It is difficult to comprehend that just a few weeks from after writing this message, I will have completed my one-year term as president of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. Time flies when you are having fun.

I say that not facetiously, but with wonderment.

Problems can crop up at any time and anywhere, but with friends—officers, board members, and TJHS members in general—everything has been handled. And that is fun!

We had a great winter meeting in



San Antonio, thanks to Candy Gardner and Abbi Michelson. We also had a first-time-ever meeting/Annual Gathering in Texarkana, thanks to Ellen Kusin and her team in Texarkana. Sally Drayer is chairing our summer orientation meeting in Dallas.


From there, we will

go to Gainesville for the fall meeting, thanks to Vickie Vogel and Hollace Weiner. From North Texas, we will go to South Texas for our winter meeting in Del Rio, thanks to Douglas and Willie Braudaway. And after that, it is

time for our Annual Gathering (2012) in San Angelo.

Behind the scenes, there are those who have helped make all of this possible: Marc Wormser and his helpers have reconstructed our database. Davie Lou Solka puts much time and effort into the publishing of our News Magazine. And we cannot forget the members who write articles and take pictures for the News Magazine. Finally, it goes without saying how much we appreciate Alexa Kirk and Kimberly Deitz.

I mention three things from the Institute of Southern Jewish Life and Stuart Rockoff, PhD. In this issue, there is an excellent article (by Dr. Rockoff) about Luling, Texas. Also, in the ISJL newsletter, "Circa," there is an acknowledgement of the support that TJHS has given Dr. Rockoff regarding the Texas portion of the ISJL web magazine. And I would be remiss if we failed to congratulate Dr. Rockoff on his being elected president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. Mazel tov!

So you see, being president is fun because I am surrounded by caring, hard-working people, and I get to speak first at our meetings! 

Rusty Milstein  
President, 2010-2011

## The Texas Jewish Historical Society April 2011 Quarterly News Magazine

The Texas Jewish Historical Society News Magazine is published four times annually. Stories about Texas Jewish history, oral histories, and requests for assistance with research are welcome, as are photographs and historical documents. Please provide color photocopies or scans at 300 dpi or greater, in .gif, .tif, or .jpg format, and send electronically to Assistant Editor Davie Lou Solka at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) or mail to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, 512-527-3799. Be sure to include your name and contact information.

**Publisher-Editor** Alexa Kirk  
**Assistant Editor** Davie Lou Solka  
**Photographer** Marvin Rich

Note: The Texas Jewish Historical Society is unable to guarantee the safe receipt and/or return of documents or photographs. It is strongly recommended that you provide color photocopies of both color and black & white documents. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

*Visit us on the web at [www.txjhs.org](http://www.txjhs.org).*



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# My Memories of the Lippman Family of Schulenberg, Texas

by Ira "Ike" Weiner

Vickie Vogel's recent story about Leslie Lippman reminded me of many warm memories that I have of the Lippman family.

For some years, I traveled to Schulenberg, Texas, and was privileged to know the Jewish families who had dry-goods stores in the community. I spent many an hour talking to Leslie and Sarah Lippman and enjoying the warm feeling that came from the store.


One afternoon, I walked into the store and saw that it had been modernized, and the Lippmans were very proud of the new look. They had covered the counter with Formica and replaced the brass tacks that had been

on the former wooden counter with new ones. The brass tacks were placed at every foot on the counter, in order to measure fabrics. Each pair of work socks was hung over the counter by a thread, so that when a pair was sold, all the clerk had to do was to reach up and pull them down. On the top shelf, hats were kept in the large boxes that had come from the manufacturer. I still have two of these boxes on the top shelf in my closet as a reminder of the "good old days."

The best part of my visit was not the products that I sold to them, but the goodies that Sarah made and always had on hand for me. Her recipe for kosher pickles was a closely guarded

secret, but she bestowed it on me.

Many years after Leslie passed away, we stopped in Schulenberg at Frank's, one of our favorite eating spots, and Sarah joined us. She was still one of the warmest people whom I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. My heart was heavy when I learned that she had died.

With Sarah's passing, the story of small-town Jewish merchants and a way of life also passed. As I drive down the same highways, I see that these merchants are no longer there. Some died and some were pushed out by Wal-Mart stores. But, one thing remains—the feeling that I get when I think of them. 

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## Luling, Texas: Promise Unfulfilled

by Dr. Stuart Rockoff

*The following article is reprinted with permission from Dr. Stuart Rockoff, director of the History Department, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, CIRCA Newsletter. It is an abridged version of the history of Luling, Texas, and is one of the histories in the Encyclopedia of*

*Southern Jewish Communities on the Institute's website. The Institute is currently working on communities in Texas, with the help of a grant from TJHS. For further details, see the article on page 1 of this issue.*

Luling, Texas, was created

when, in 1874, the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroad terminated its line in a rural area not far from Plum Creek. Developers quickly swooped in, including Thomas Pierce of Boston, Massachusetts, who divided much of the land into lots and sold them to newly

*continued on page 13*

## We need Your Stories!

We are currently looking for stories with ties to Texas Jewish history! Any kind of story about your family history or your Temple's history can fill the pages of our quarterly newsletter. Write your story, and if you have questions or need help, call our

assistant editor.

Everyone has a story to tell, long or short. Your history is of interest to members across Texas and the nation! And you will be able to see your family's history in print. It is a wonderful keepsake and a valuable piece of genealogy for fu-

ture generations.

So what are you waiting for? Send your article to our assistant editor, Davie Lou Solka, at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org), mail it to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, or call her at 512-527-3799.



# TJHS Annual Gathering



*Abbi Michelson, Scott Langston, Joyce Gerrick, and Dorothy Borschow visiting in the hotel lobby.*



*Vickie Vogel, Dorothy Borschow, and Joyce Wormser at Perot Theatre.*



*In the lobby of Perot Theatre. Reflected in the mirror are Jack Gerrick, Mel Kusin, Clare Brooks, and Joyce Gerrick. Standing in front of the mirror are Jan Hart (facing mirror) and Shirley and Bob Gindler.*



*At dinner on Saturday night are Roy Elsner, Marj Cowin, and Rusty, Mitzi, and Amy Milstein.*



*At the Ace of Clubs House is our guide, Sally Drayer, Vickie Vogel, Dorothy Borschow, Ellen Kusin, Mel Kusin, Jack Solka, and Marc Wormser.*



*Mel Kusin speaking on the Jewish History of Texarkana.*



# — Texarkana, Texas, March 25-27, 2011 —



*Jack Solka and Rabbi Jordan Ottenstein.*



*Scott Langston and Amy and Rusty Milstein at Mount Sinai Cemetery.*



*Photo above at left: The Texarkana Host Committee: Theda Friedman, Michael Richardson (president of Mount Sinai Congregation), Ellen Kusin (Annual Gathering Chair), Mel Kusin, Marilyn Glick, and Barbara and Howard Glick. Photo above: Rabbi Jordan Ottenstein speaking at the Saturday night dinner. Photo at left: Jack Solka and Jan and Charles Hart at Ace of Clubs House.*

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# TJHS Winter Board Meeting

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*Marvin and Shirley Rich and Davie Lou Solka in the garden of Ace of Clubs House.*



*Marvin Rich, Charles Hart, and Marc Wormser at Mount Sinai Cemetery.*



*Bob Gindler, Mitzi Milstein, Charles Hart, and Rabbi Neal Katz at the board meeting.*



*Rabbi Neal Katz, Rabbi Jordon Ottenstein, and Ellen Kusin at Havdalah.*



# From Our Archives

## — The Only Jewish Family in Hereford —

by Vickie Vogel

Gaston Baer was born in Paris<sup>1</sup> on August 11, 1898.<sup>2</sup> By the time he was 13, he was working in wholesale houses in Paris, selling ribbons and corsets.<sup>3</sup> The family left France on the “last ship out” in flight from World War I.<sup>4</sup> The year was 1914 and 16-year-old Gaston was living in Paris. His father, Bernard, a German national, feared French hostility toward those who had not been naturalized as French citizens and secretly prepared to evacuate his family. Gaston was working at a department store when his mother called one morning and told him to come home for lunch. This was not his custom, as home was far from work. Suspecting there was a good reason, Gaston took the long trolley ride home and found the family already packed with tickets to America. Gaston left Paris without his last week’s wages.<sup>5</sup>

Gaston remembered that the ship was overloaded. With German submarines<sup>6</sup> all around, they zigzagged their way across the Atlantic. “People stayed up on deck, praying and moaning,” he recalled. Baer bore a scar on his hand from a bayonet wound he received while working for the Red Cross.<sup>7</sup>

When the Baer family reached the United States, they went from New York to Michigan<sup>8</sup> in 1915, where other family members lived, but they soon moved to Vaughn, New Mexico,<sup>9</sup> where two uncles, Julius and Sig Moise,<sup>10</sup> had a brisk retail business. Two of Gaston’s brothers, Adolph and Louie, worked with their uncles. Adolph took over the Vaughn branch of the Moise enterprise when his cousin, Gus Stern, died.<sup>11</sup> Julius had a cattle ranch in Santa Rosa, which he turned over to Gaston’s cousin and



Courtesy of Kay Schacter

*Gaston and Pauline Baer, 1960*

wife, Joe and Marguerite Moise,<sup>12</sup> since Gaston, a large man with a limp, was not cut out to be a cowboy.<sup>13</sup> Two sisters, Martha and Germaine, also settled in Vaughn. Gaston did not speak English, but he picked it up along with Spanish.<sup>14</sup> He already spoke French, German, Italian, Yiddish, and “a smattering of what he claims is Chinese.”<sup>15</sup> Life in Vaughn could be difficult, according to Baer. A drunken cowboy nearly shot and killed him for talking to a waitress. “Life was cheap and times were rough,” he said.<sup>16</sup>

Gaston met Pauline Berg in

*continued on page 8*



Courtesy of Kay Schacter

*Popular Store in 1933. From right to left: a young Gaston with Teddy, age 12, and Pauline Baer*

Vaughn, and they married in Wichita Falls on August 25, 1921, which was Pauline's birthday.<sup>17</sup> Pauline was born in 1901 in New York City but moved to Oklahoma City as a child. She lived in Dallas, and then on a ranch near Santa Rosa, New Mexico.<sup>18</sup> The Berg family was actually named Goldberg, but they dropped the first half of the name to sound more "American." Family lore says they fled Germany with Mrs. Berg's jewelry sewn into her clothes.

With the sale of the jewelry, they were able to get into real estate in Canada and later owned a hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Pauline (who changed her name from Pearl) had two sisters, Rose and Ruth, and a brother, Max.<sup>19</sup>

After a short stay in Tucumcari, Gaston and Pauline moved to Hereford, Texas (200 miles east of Vaughn),<sup>20</sup> in 1921.<sup>21</sup> Pauline later recalled that they came in a stripped-down Ford and low-powered truck. When the heavily laden truck was unable to make it up the hill at Ragland, New Mexico, a part of her new furniture had to be unloaded and was damaged in the process.<sup>22</sup> The newlyweds had been sent to liquidate the inventory of a dry-goods store that Mr. Berg, "a wealthy Eastern merchant,"<sup>23</sup> had bought. After looking it over, Gaston told his father-in-law that he believed that he could make the store work.<sup>24</sup> It became their wedding present.

Gaston named it the Popular Store after a shop in El Paso that he liked.<sup>25</sup> The store sold men's and women's

Courtesy of Kay Schacter



*Gaston Baer family, 1982.*

*Gaston's 84th birthday celebration. Gaston seated with his wife of 14 years, Esther, and their great-granddaughter, Bessie Schacter. From left to right in back: Kay holding son Ben with Cary Schacter, Jason held by his father Sheldon Alexander, Harriet and Irving Alexander, Emil held by Sheldon's wife, Carolyn Alexander.*

clothing and furnishings. In the early days, plenty of brogans, overalls, and print dresses were stocked.<sup>26</sup> Baer's stated goal was to provide for the needs of the local people, since most of his business came from farmers in the area.<sup>27</sup> Baer handled his own alterations, cleaned his own store, and stocked his own inventories. In the 1920s, the big trade day was Saturday, when the farmers would come to town to sell their eggs, cream, and produce.

"They'd come and buy a suit, then go on and do other shopping while I did the alterations," Baer recalled. "Many times, they'd wind up going to a movie before picking up the suit, but I would always stay open. Sometimes it would be one o'clock in the morning."<sup>28</sup>

"What I miss most is the time when the wheat harvest was the big event of the year," Baer reminisced in 1965. "I remember when those trucks lined up and somebody would hold the driver's place and move his truck up nearer the elevator so he could come

to Main Street and buy a new pair of boots."<sup>29</sup>

Baer emphasized customer service and took pride in being the first merchant to open in the morning and the last to close at night. He would open after hours or on holidays in an emergency. Gaston's was a meeting place for farmers and ranchers in town for Saturday shopping.<sup>30</sup> Some Deaf Smith County settlers spoke only German or Spanish and were happy to find a store where they could be understood in their own language.<sup>31</sup>

Of the seven similar stores in Hereford during the Great Depression, the Popular Store was the only one to survive under the same ownership.<sup>32</sup> Baer "took about everything you can imagine in exchange for clothing," such as eggs, chickens, old batteries, and radiators. "You name it, and we got it."<sup>33</sup>

For a county historical publication in 1982, the Baers recalled one of the most frightening experiences of their early days in Hereford. A "black dust-er" blew in while they were attending a movie in 1928. Gaston could barely see to drive, and when they finally reached their home, he turned in the wrong driveway. He had driven with his head out the window and was "crying mud tears with his face completely covered in mud." At first, they lived in an apartment in the rear of the store,<sup>34</sup> but they soon moved into the house in which they would live for the rest of their lives. Located at 135 Avenue B, it was remodeled in 1954.<sup>35</sup>

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The Baers had one daughter, Hertha, named after Pauline's grandfather Herth,<sup>36</sup> and they nicknamed her "Teddy." Gaston was sometimes called

Street, was expanded and redecorated in 1953, giving Hereford one of the most modern ready-to-wear stores for men, women, and children.<sup>39</sup> A second

store, called Gaston's, was added in 1965 at Hereford's new Sugarland Mall.<sup>40</sup> Baer continued to manage the downtown store until 1978.<sup>41</sup> The Alexanders opened Alexander's, Inc., in the Western Plaza in Amarillo and also helped Baer manage the two stores in Hereford.<sup>42</sup>

Baer blamed an economic decline in the 1970s on the frequent sales of other stores. Baer believed that sales "spoiled the public" so that their shopping schedules revolved around sales. He also lamented the decline in the quality of clothes made by machine rather than skilled tailors.

"We've been faithful to just a few lines of clothes," said Baer. "I've always tried to

stock the best merchandise at the least cost to the customer. Like at any other store, many people who stop here look for close-out merchandise. People now tend to shop around more than they used to. People who once only shopped at your store, are everybody's customer."<sup>43</sup>

Baer noted that fashions began to change faster than when he started out. As a shrewd observer of fashion, he never got "stuck" with out-of-date merchandise. Shoes, he noted, were the worst item as far as keeping up with changes in style.<sup>44</sup> Granddaughter Kay Schachter, however, recalls going up to the attic of the store as a

child and playing with this non-existent out-of-date merchandise, such as "old galoshes and other weird stuff." She also remembers "Big Papa's" love of sweets, kept in a refrigerator in the back of the store. In the afternoons, he'd share them with anyone working or shopping in the store. "As kids, we would always go check out what was there, knowing that we'd get to have some if we stayed at the store long enough. It used to drive Nana crazy since Big Papa, as you may have noticed, was not a slender man!"<sup>45</sup> Kay also remembers that Gaston bought a new Cadillac every year, and every one of them was named "Feefee."<sup>46</sup>

Pauline Baer died August 1, 1970, after a long battle with cancer. Her funeral was at First United Methodist Church, conducted by Rabbi Maurice Feuer of Temple B'Nai Israel of Amarillo, where the Baers were members. She was buried in Amarillo's Llano Cemetery. Her husband and daughter survived her, along with grandchildren Kay Lynne and Sheldon Alexander.<sup>47</sup>

Gaston used to say that as Hereford's only Jewish family, they never planned to stay there very long. "That's why my wife never would let me buy any land. I wish that I had now, considering how valuable it has become."<sup>48</sup>

When Pauline died, Gaston realized that they could never have left Hereford because of the people there. They were different from city folks.

"When my wife died, we received a stack of letters, and cards and telegrams this high," he said, holding his palm about eight inches above the polished desk top of his office in the rear of the store.<sup>49</sup>

Gaston Baer, with Pauline's help, operated the store for almost sixty years. Daughter Teddy hosted a party for his 84th birthday, and it was written up in the *Amarillo Daily-News*. "Old friends and customers last night

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Courtesy of Kay Schachter

*Gaston, Germaine, Martha, Bernard Baer,  
France, 1912*

"Papa Baer" or "Big Papa" by his grandchildren.<sup>37</sup> Teddy married Irving Julius Alexander on November 21, 1948, and in 1949, he joined the family business. Born in New York City, Irving met Hertha at a resort in the Catskills, and they fell in love. Their son Sheldon was born on July 24, 1951, and daughter Kay arrived November 22, 1952. At first, they lived in New York, as Teddy did not want to return to Hereford, but the opportunity to learn dry goods and open a store of their own was a compelling reason to go back. Irving's previous experience had been in jewelry and dry cleaning.<sup>38</sup>

The Popular Store, on Main

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When you honor or memorialize a friend or a loved one with a donation to the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Endowment Fund, you help support important programs. Send the honoree's full name, type of honor (memorial, congratulations, or occasion—birthday, anniversary, award, new child or grandchild, etc.) and your name, along with a check in the amount of your choice, to

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Your support of the Texas Jewish Historical Society's programs is greatly appreciated and will be recognized in an issue of the quarterly news magazine. Thank you.

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

## *Jewish Family, continued from page 9*

continued to marvel at his uncannily accurate memory—not just the names and family connections of people he may not have seen in years, but even such information as shirt sizes and preferences in merchandise. Most Hereford oldtimers have a store of 'Gaston' stories." Many of the stories were about the Depression, and Gaston was praised for his ability to adapt to the times.

Hereford Postmaster Nolan Grady told about buying a jacket as a youngster. He worked at the local movie theater and paid off his bill at 25 cents per week. Hereford was a small town of 2000 when the Baers arrived, and Gaston was seen as "an exotic addition"<sup>50</sup> and Hereford's "flamboyant polyglot." ("Se Habla Español" read the sign in his window).<sup>51</sup>

After Pauline died, Gaston's friends urged him to take a Caribbean cruise. He missed the boat. He booked

the last cabin on another ship and enjoyed visiting Haiti, where he could speak French with the locals and sing "La Marseillaise" with a cab driver. At a party for singles on the ship, he met Esther Hauser of Los Angeles (a former teacher<sup>52</sup>), and they married in 1971.<sup>53</sup> Baer told reporter Bob Davis, "I'm a fast worker, aren't I?"<sup>54</sup>

Esther spent her first few days in Hereford looking for trees.<sup>55</sup> "She is still looking," Gaston quipped, "But just to cheer her up, sometimes I take her down to the creek [Tierra Blanca] so we can look at some trees." When Gaston met Esther, "She thought that since I was from Texas I had oil wells, but my oil wells turned out to be socks."<sup>56</sup> Esther assisted with activities at the Hereford Senior Citizen Center.<sup>57</sup>

Gaston Baer was active in Rotary Club and was a charter member of the Hereford Country Club (at Pauline

and Teddy's insistence<sup>58</sup>), as well as a member of B'Nai Israel in Amarillo.<sup>59</sup> He received a special award from the Distributive Education Department for his role in hiring high school students when that program was started.<sup>60</sup> He was known for his generosity to local charities, and, for many years, he sent the store's overstocks to an orphanage in Colorado.<sup>61</sup> After his nominal retirement in 1978,<sup>62</sup> he still came to the store a couple of times a week to check on business. Thelma Mercer, who had worked with the Baer family for thirty years, and her husband Robert were the new owners. Thelma said, "We're doing our very best to follow in the traditions set by Mr. Baer. We believe we have the best teacher on earth..."<sup>63</sup>

Thelma Mercer was more than an employee. Starting as a maid at the downtown store at the age of 16, she

*continued on page 11*



became a family friend and confidante, babysitting the grandchildren when the grownups went to market in Dallas or New York. In her 20's, Thelma became a saleslady at the store and, later,



Courtesy of Kay Schachter

*Thelma Mercer, who took over the stores when Gaston Baer retired, inherited the family home.*

the manager. Irving Alexander helped her to get a bank loan to buy out the inventory around 1990. His daughter, Kay Schachter, sold the building to Thelma in 2005 after Irving's death. Gaston left the family home to Thelma in his will, knowing his grandchildren would not be living in Hereford.<sup>64</sup>

Gaston attributed his success in taking a bankrupt clothing store and making it profitable to his dogged determination. "One must have his heart in what he is doing to be a success. Otherwise, you'll probably fall flat on your face unless you're very, very lucky."<sup>65</sup>

When Orville Howard interviewed him for a newspaper feature around 1989, Gaston said, "Let's see, you wear about a 46 coat...and we have a selection that's just right for you."<sup>66</sup>

The Baer's grandson, Sheldon Alexander, operated the store at the Mall for a time,<sup>67</sup> closing it in the late 1980s. Teddy died on January 21, 1986,<sup>68</sup> and Esther on May 4, 1989.<sup>69</sup> Gaston moved to the Golden Plains

Care Center for the last two years of his life. In 1991, he died at the age of 92 at Deaf Smith General Hospital and was buried in Llano Cemetery in Amarillo.<sup>70</sup> Just before his 92nd birthday, Gaston was heard to say, "Clothes may not always make the man, but sometimes it sure may help."<sup>71</sup>

### References

<sup>1</sup>"Mall Store," unidentified, undated newspaper clipping from Kay Schachter. All newspaper articles (except this one and Naomi Hopson's) are found in Box 3A 168, Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.legacy.com/Obituaries.p?Page=OBITFINDERSSIREULTS>

<sup>3</sup>Naomi Hopson, "Baer is Oldest Main St. Firm," Hereford Brand, July 25, 1965.

<sup>4</sup>His older brother had come three years earlier, having missed the boat on his first attempt to immigrate. That ship was the Titanic. Bob Davis, "Clothing Store Wedding Gift Launched 50-Year Career," Amarillo Globe-News, May 23, 1971.

<sup>5</sup>"Mall Store," op cit.

<sup>6</sup>German U-Boats (unterseeboot) were used in World War I against unarmed civilian merchant ships, including the Lusitania and even a ferry. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U-boat>

<sup>7</sup>Davis, op cit.

<sup>8</sup>Some accounts say that Gaston went to New Mexico, then Michigan, then back to New Mexico. See "Mall Store," and Hopson, op cit.

<sup>9</sup>Population 539 in 2000. Vaughn was at a junction of the railroad at the turn of the last century. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaughn,\\_New\\_Mexico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaughn,_New_Mexico) See also <http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/nm/vaughn.html>

<sup>10</sup>The Moise family is prominent in the history of New Mexico. S. S. and J. J. were both active in the political and public life of the area. S. S.'s son Irwin became a district judge in 1937. <http://books.google.com/>

[books?id=HoPeuOvwZ1IC&pg=PA161&lpg=PA161&dq=santa+rosa+NM+jewish+history&source=bl&ots=IKlXLYgwkv&sig=gGqJbNP2d8wxDRgaPDswtnj90AY&hl=en&ei=u-UcTH-98AaY7ejIDQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CDQQ6AEwBA#v=snippet&q=moise&f=false](http://books?id=HoPeuOvwZ1IC&pg=PA161&lpg=PA161&dq=santa+rosa+NM+jewish+history&source=bl&ots=IKlXLYgwkv&sig=gGqJbNP2d8wxDRgaPDswtnj90AY&hl=en&ei=u-UcTH-98AaY7ejIDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CDQQ6AEwBA#v=snippet&q=moise&f=false)

<sup>11</sup>Noel Pugach, Moise Family History, New Mexico Jewish Historical Society publication, p. 9. Email dated January 2, 2011.

<sup>12</sup>Their son Steve Moise went to the University of Colorado with Gaston's grandson Sheldon Alexander. Email Kay Schachter, January 4, 2011.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Orville Howard, "Gaston Baer: a part of business community for almost 70 years," Large print photocopy, c. 1989, Hereford Brand.

<sup>15</sup>Davis, op cit.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 4, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>"Pauline Baer Dies; Rites Held Friday," undated and unnamed newspaper (probably Hereford Brand re Kay Schachter email January 4, 2011) article photocopy.

<sup>19</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 4, 2011. Ruth married Jacob Lewin and, after living in Amarillo, they moved to Wichita, Kansas and opened their store, Lewin's.

<sup>20</sup><http://www.randmcnally.com/mileage-calculator.do?from=Dallas%20TX&to=Little%20Rock%2C%20AR>

<sup>21</sup>"Baer, 92, pioneer businessman, dies Friday." The Hereford Brand, Sunday, May 23, 1991.

<sup>22</sup>"Pauline Baer Dies; Rites Held Friday," op cit.

<sup>23</sup>Davis, op cit.

<sup>24</sup>Howard, op cit.

<sup>25</sup>Davis, op cit.

<sup>26</sup>Untitled newspaper invitation to Gaston's 84th birthday party.

<sup>27</sup>"Baer Knows Hereford after 50 Years of Selling," The Hereford Brand, Thursday, April 8, 1971.

<sup>28</sup>Howard, op cit.

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- <sup>29</sup>Hopson, op cit.
- <sup>30</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>31</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20baer>. John Henry Behrends tells about shopping at Gaston Baer's store for shoes, where "they could talk their native language." <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/221/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>32</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>33</sup>Howard, op cit.
- <sup>34</sup>The Land and Its People, 1876-1981: Deaf Smith County, Texas, Deaf Smith County Historical Society, 1982. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20baer>.
- <sup>35</sup>"Pauline Baer Dies; Rites Held Friday," op cit.
- <sup>36</sup>Not liking the name "Hertha," she changed her legal name to Harriet when she came of age. Email Kay Schachter, January 6, 2011.
- <sup>37</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 4, 2011.
- <sup>38</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 6, 2011.
- <sup>39</sup>Bessie Patterson, A History of Deaf Smith County, 1964, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16011/m1/138/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>40</sup>The store name of Popular was changed to Gaston's Popular Store and later just Gaston's, like the new store. Untitled newspaper invitation to Gaston's 84th birthday party, and Howard op cit.
- <sup>41</sup>"Baer, 92, pioneer businessman, dies Friday," op cit.
- <sup>42</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>43</sup>"Baer Knows Hereford after 50 Years of Selling," The Hereford Brand, Thursday, April 8, 1971.
- <sup>44</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>45</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 7, 2011.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup>"Pauline Baer Dies; Rites Held Friday," op cit.
- <sup>48</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 7, 2011.
- <sup>49</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>50</sup>"Longtime Hereford businessman honored," Amarillo Daily News, Thursday, August 12, 1982.
- <sup>51</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>52</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/219/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>53</sup>"Baer, 92, pioneer businessman, dies Friday," op cit.
- <sup>54</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>55</sup>Davis, op cit.
- <sup>56</sup>Gaston Baer: a part of business community for almost 70 years," by Orville Howard. large print photocopy, year unknown, presumably Hereford paper.
- <sup>57</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/219/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>58</sup>Email Sheldon Alexander, January 7, 2011.
- <sup>59</sup>"Baer, 92, pioneer businessman, dies Friday," op cit.
- <sup>60</sup>Howard, op cit.
- <sup>61</sup>"Baer Knows Hereford after 50 Years of Selling," The Hereford Brand, Thursday, April 8, 1971.
- <sup>62</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20baer>
- <sup>63</sup>Howard, op cit.
- <sup>64</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 6, 2011.
- <sup>65</sup>Howard, op cit.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup><http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth16010/m1/623/?q=gaston%20>. Baer says that he left Hereford in 1979 and the Alexanders managed it.
- <sup>68</sup>Email Kay Schachter, January 7, 2011.
- <sup>69</sup>texashistory, op cit. Alexander's in Amarillo closed in January 1989. Irving moved to Boca Raton, Florida, near his cousin, Marion Beren. His last months were spent with Kay in Dallas, where he died in 2003. Email Kay Alexander Schachter, January 4, 2011.
- <sup>70</sup>"Baer, 92, pioneer businessman, dies Friday," op cit.
- <sup>71</sup>Howard, op cit. 

## Does TJHS Have Your Current Email Address?

Is your email address current? Has it changed since the 2010-2011 directory was printed? Have you changed email providers? If so, please send Marc Wormser an email at [marc.wormser@att.net](mailto:marc.wormser@att.net) so that he can update your information in the database. To reduce postage costs and printing delays, we are going to be sending electronically as much mail as possible, so don't be left out or behind—send your current information today!

Please put "email change" in the subject line and with your name in the text of your message, and send it today! Thank you.

## Save the Date

**June 25-26, 2011**  
Summer Board Meeting in  
Dallas

**October 14-16, 2011**  
Fall Board Meeting in  
Gainesville

**January, 2012**  
Winter Board Meeting in  
Del Rio

**April, 2012**  
Annual Gathering in San  
Angelo



arriving settlers. Many of these settlers came from nearby small towns that had been bypassed by the railroad.



Luling quickly became a little boom town, reaching a population of 2,000 by the end of 1874. Among the earliest settlers of Luling were a handful of Jewish merchants who set up shop along the newly formed streets flanking either side of the train tracks.

A list of people who bought Luling's original lots from Pierce contains several Jews, including Joseph Josey, who was perhaps the first Jew to live in the area. A native of Bavaria, Josey moved to Texas in 1861. By 1870, he lived in Lockhart. Four years later, he moved fifteen miles south to the burgeoning town of Luling and opened a grocery and hardware store. Polish-born B.J. Kamien and Louis Lichtenstein, a Prussian native, also bought lots from Pierce in 1874, with both opening retail stores in Luling.

In 1879, Charles Wesolowsky, a correspondent for the *Jewish South* newspaper, visited

Luling and reported that there were ten Jewish families living in the town. He remarked at how quickly the town and the Jewish community had developed. Indeed, Luling Jews established a Jewish cemetery in 1875, with its first burial taking place four years later, after local peddler William Finkelstein was murdered while on the road. In 1879, Luling Jews founded a Hebrew Benevolent Society that oversaw the cemetery and dispensed charity to Jews in need. The society also held services for the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In 1878, the local newspaper noted that "the Hebrew merchants of Luling" closed their stores for two days for Rosh Hashanah and held services in a downtown building.

By 1888, Luling Jews were holding High Holy Days services in the local opera house, which attracted numerous Jews from neighboring town. Luling Jews continued to hold these services as late as 1900. These services were likely Orthodox, since they celebrated Rosh Hashanah for the traditional two days. Nevertheless, the merchants regularly kept their stores open on Saturday, since that was their biggest day for business.

By the 1880s, Jews played a prominent role in the local economy. In 1882, they owned fourteen of Luling's sixty-nine businesses, or twenty percent. Three of these retail businesses were run by

women, including Rachel Finkelstein and Sarah Marx, who both owned grocery stores, and Sallie Cohn, who ran her family's general store. Of these fourteen businesses, half were grocery stores and four were general dry-goods stores. According to the 1880 census, eighteen Jewish families (a total of sixty-two Jews) lived in Luling.

One of the most prominent members of the Luling Jewish community was Reuben Jacobs, who had left his native Poland in 1867. After living in upstate New York, Jacobs began to peddle his way southward, eventually settling in Atlanta, Texas. When Luling became the railroad terminus in 1874, Jacobs moved to the new town, opening a dry-goods store

with another Jewish immigrant, Hyman Kleinsmith. Later, Jacobs took over sole control of the store, renaming it R. Jacobs. According to family lore, Reuben once sold goods to the notorious outlaw John Wesley Har-

gold. Reuben became a respected and successful local businessman. His department store occupied two buildings in downtown Luling. Reuben's son, Ben Mark Jacobs, joined his father in the store, which became known as R. Jacobs & Sons. Ben Mark was elected mayor of Luling in the 1930s.

Reuben Jacobs was the exception among the first wave of



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# The Brenner and Zack Families

## Texas Connections

by Susan Zack Lewis

Nicholas (Nick) Brenner was from Tukums, Latvia. He was born in 1875. Little is known about his early life or family, except that he served in the Russian army and deserted. He rarely spoke of his experiences in the army.

We do know that he knew Abe Rosenthal and was introduced to Abe's sister, Leah (Lena) Rachael Rosenthal. The Rosenthal family was from Riga, Latvia, and, in the late 1800s, experienced a devastating development. The father deserted the family and fled to Harbin, China. The rumor was that he left with another woman. The family was devastated. Abe immigrated to the United States and was a sponsor for Nick, who immigrated in 1904.

In 1885, Leah was born in Riga. In 1905, she and her mother, Augusta, arrived in New York via Ellis Island. Unfortunately, Augusta died within six months of their arrival. Nick & Lena were married in 1905, probably in the New York area. A daughter, Lillian, was born in New York in 1906. Nick worked on Long Island as a fabricator. He made a set of copper pots for his family—only one survived and is owned today by his granddaughter, Susan Zack Lewis. Nick was an intelligent man and self taught in philosophy. He spoke some Hebrew, Yiddish, and German. At one time, he may have been able to converse in Russian since he served in the Russian army when Russia occupied Latvia.

Nick had a cousin in Hominy, Oklahoma, who brought him and the family to Hominy shortly after Lillian's birth. They stayed there until after the birth of another daughter, Clara Augusta Brenner, on June 17, 1912. Nick then moved the family to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, where he worked as a plumber for quite a few

years and had his own shop. Nick was not a good businessman and because he carried so many accounts that did not pay for his services, the business failed.

Meanwhile, another child was born, and because the doctor was drunk during the delivery and cut the cord too close, the child died. The family suffered greatly.

Lillian graduated from high school in Pawhuska and went to a secretarial school in Tulsa. She then went to work for an oil company and met William Hubert Curry, who was known as Bert. They secretly married (he was not Jewish), and when they finally worked up the nerve to confront the family with the news, there was a second wedding. Lillian always celebrated two anniversaries!

She and Bert moved to Pampa, Texas, where Bert opened an appliance store. The Brennens had friends who had moved from Oklahoma to San Angelo, Texas. These friends, the Robinsons, told them that there was work in west Texas. The Robinson family helped them to re-settle in Big Spring. Lena came first and opened a dry-goods store in the 200 block of North Gregg. She owned a half-block that held a gas station and the dry-goods store. There were living quarters behind the store where she and Bert lived.

Lena was a beloved member of the North Side community. She spoke some English, some Spanish, some Yiddish, and some German—and usually all in the same sentence. Everyone understood her. The salesman who came to Big Spring to call on her at Brenner Dry Goods tried to time their visits around the noon or evening meals because they were always invited to join the family to eat. Lena

was a great cook.

She also helped women deliver their babies in a hospital where they received good care. She never forgot the perils of dealing with an incompetent doctor. Many stories were told of her paying for doctors and delivery charges.

Clara Brenner was sent to Pampa to attend school, and she spent her junior year in high school living with her sister. While there, she was quite popular and was voted the school beauty. She had such a good time that her mother insisted that she move to Big Spring to complete her education. In 1930, Clara graduated from Big Spring High School, where she had the lead in the senior play, "The Brat." She told of the perils of living in a small town, and one of her stories was of a time when she was riding in a convertible with some friends smoking a cigarette. Before she could arrive home, her mother already knew about it, and Clara was in trouble before she walked in the door.

After graduation, Clara was packed up and sent to New York City to live with her Uncle Abe and his family while she attended NYU.

She had a job in a five-and-dime store, which had a restroom on the second floor. One day, she tripped on the stairs and was caught by the linen delivery man, whose name was Jim Zack. He asked her out, and she accepted. They had their first date on Valentine's Day and were married on July 9 of that same year.

Clara often spoke of the small wedding and the wine and cake served afterward. Lena and Nick were not present for the wedding, but Lena later made the trip by train to visit her daughter and new son-in-law. She

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wrote a letter to Clara about the importance of marrying a man who would earn a good living for her. (That letter was found in Clara's personal belongings after her death.) Clara was 19 and Jim was 32. They were married thirteen years before the birth of their only child, Susan, who was born on September 13, 1944.

Jim Zack was born on July 30, 1899, in Ekaterinberg, Siberia, as Isadore Zack, to Sarah Etta Broomstein Zack and Yakov (Jacob) Zack. Jacob was a widower with seven children when he married Sarah Etta. They had five children: Sarah, Bertha, Max, Louis, and Jim. Ekaterinberg was the location of the summer home of the Russian Tsar's family. A parade was held each year to honor the "royal" birthday of the Tsar's son, which happened to be July 30. For years, Jim thought that the parade was for him!

Although the family was Jewish, they were allowed to live in the city because Jim's grandfather had served one of the Czars and had been given permission to live in a place other than a shtetl (ghetto). The shtetls, on the outskirts of a town, were subject to periodic pogroms (murders, rapes, destructive fires, etc.) that terrorized the population. Still, the family members were required, like all Jews, to obtain from the police, permits to travel from one community to another. When Jim was four years old, Jacob suffered from an attack of appendicitis. The doctor operated on him on the kitchen table in the family home, but he did not survive the surgery. When the father died, the family's soft-drink company was taken over by the oldest son from the first marriage. Sarah Etta then married Israel Goldberg. They had a son, Gerson.

Times were hard and Israel wanted to immigrate to the United States. There wasn't enough money to bring the whole family, so Jim was sent deeper into Siberia to learn the watch-

making business. Just before the family was to leave, enough money was gathered to bring Jim along. He was 13 years old.

Jim, his mother, and six of his brothers and sisters made the trip to Brantford, Ontario, Canada. They traveled in steerage on a crowded ship. His mother died of heart problems within six months of their arrival to Canada.

Israel took his son, Gerson, with him and sent the Zack children to live with relatives in Canada. Jim was on his own by the time that he was 15. He worked for an uncle who owned a distributing business, delivering movies to theatres. He later sold picture frames in the rural areas of central Canada, and one summer, he worked on a farm, pitching hay. The farmer had two daughters who gave him the name "Jim." When he immigrated to the United States, he took the name legally and was Jim from that point on.

Jim and Clara were married in 1931, during the Great Depression. Life was hard in New York. One day, a package from Texas arrived. In it was an angel-food cake surrounded by popcorn. Nestled in the center of the cake were three fresh eggs, and tucked between them was a one-hundred-dollar bill—a fortune! Clara and Jim took that as a sign that they needed to move to Texas, where the depression was not as severe.

They made the move, and Jim and Clara worked with Lena in the dry-goods business. They worked out of a store front in Lubbock. Each week, they took merchandise from Brenner's dry-goods and sold it in Lubbock. They slept on a cot in the back of the store and had only cold water for bathing and a hot plate for cooking. At the end of the week, they went back to Big Spring, paid Lena, got more merchandise, ate Lena's good cooking, and took a bath! This cycle went on for several years. Jim heard that the

government was going to build a huge army base in Killeen, Texas. They had saved enough money to start a store, and they decided to take a chance on the new base. They began a new business, selling army surplus, that was a storefront next door to an existing army surplus store. It was a success from the beginning. They lived with the Curry family because housing was so difficult to find at that time. It was during this period that Clara's sister and her family were living near Killeen and decided to join them in Killeen.

Jim soon developed a reputation for being a fair merchant, and they made many friends who were stationed at the base. After waiting thirteen years to become a citizen, Jim finally achieved his dream. He always held that moment as one of the best days of his life. He was outspoken about the importance of the unique freedoms that the United States of America affords its citizens, especially the freedom to speak and to move about from town to town. But the most important and most frequently mentioned statements that he made were during family gatherings—they concerned the freedom to worship God as a Jewish person without fear of one's life.

In 1944, after Clara discovered that she was pregnant, she approached Jim about moving back to Big Spring to be close to her mother. They sold the business and returned to west Texas, where Clara and Jim became active in the secular community.

They had Jewish friends from time to time, but because of the differences in their ages, most of their friends were closer in age to Clara, and most of them were not Jewish. These were people whom Clara knew from school and people who were active in the arts. Clara was the treasurer of the Concert Association, she was a volunteer Grey

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Lady at the Veterans' Hospital, and she did china painting for many years. She was also appointed to a fashion advisory board for the Apparel Mart in Dallas.

When their daughter Susan was old enough, Clara and Jim established a Sunday school to begin Jewish studies. There were eight or ten Jewish families in town at that time. The Veterans' hospital, Webb Air Force Base, the local Jewelry stores, and men's stores attracted Jewish families. The Sunday school lasted for over twelve years, until the youngsters grew up or their families moved away.

Clara and Jim played poker and bridge and were involved in a square-dancing club until Jim developed back trouble. They belonged to the country club, which was important to Jim, because in many towns, Jews were barred from belonging to the local country clubs. Their secular circle made for some disapproval from some in the Jewish community.

Jim worked for Adolph Swartz

(who owned a ladies' clothing store) until 1952. At that time, Jim bought into Margo's—a ladies' ready-to-wear owned by the Glickman family out of Dallas. At first, it was named Zack's of Margo's, then, later, Jim and Clara remodeled the store and re-named it Zack's. The location was 204 Main Street, where the building still stands today. Jim and Clara stayed at that location until 1965, when they moved to Main and Sixth. At the time of the move, Jim was 66.


Jim and Clara's daughter, Susan, married Bobby Smith Lewis, who later established a statewide radio program, "The Sound Of Texas." He uses the name Tumbleweed Smith in his business, which includes a syndicated newspaper column and an advertising agency.

Susan worked in the store with her parents for eight years. In 1972, Clara suffered a heart attack and was advised that stress was the cause. The business was a social center, clothing store, and a vital part of the community. She just

couldn't stay away, so, after more than thirty years, the business was sold.

Jim and Clara officially retired in 1977 and enjoyed their two grandsons, Robert Kevin Lewis and Brian Zack Lewis (BZ), who grew up in Big Spring.

More than a few times, stories about Jim opening the store after hours for a bereaved family, providing a piece or two of a trousseau for a bride, allowing payout of clothing at a dollar a week, making donations to charitable organizations, and doing other acts of kindness have drifted back to the family. The store existed at a time when personal service and a spotless reputation was the most important aspect of the business.

Jim died in 2002 at the age of 103. Until he was past 101, he made breakfast every morning for himself and Clara, drove to the post office and country club every day, went by to visit his daughter and son-in-law, and played dominoes. Clara died in 2004. She was 92. 

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*Luling, continued from page 13*

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Jewish settlers in Luling, most of whom left the town within a few years. By 1890, only six Jewish businesses remained in Luling, down from fourteen just eight years earlier. The great expectations for Luling's growth just after the railroad was built did not pan out. The early 1880s were the apex of Luling's Jewish community, and for the next century, the Jewish population underwent a long, slow decline. In 1920, there were only five Jewish families (a total of twenty-three Jews) in Luling. By the early twentieth century, Luling Jews no longer held religious services. Instead, they traveled to nearby Lockhart

for the High Holy Days. Some also joined congregations in Austin and San Antonio.

Max and Goldye Finkel were among the last Jews to live in Luling. Max had left Lithuania in 1909 and spent time in New York City before moving to Texas in the 1910s. After World War I, he opened a dry-goods store in Luling. According to a feature published in the local newspaper in 1936, "The store grew in prominence and became one of Luling's better established firms." Finkel was joined in Luling by his older brother, Louis, and his family. Louis opened the Popular Dry Goods Store, which he ran with

his sons, Harry and Larry Finkel, who later took over the business on their own, operating it through the 1960s.

Max Finkel was a longtime member of the conservative congregation Agudas Achim in San Antonio. When he died in 1975, he left money to both Agudas Achim and the Reform congregation, Beth El, in San Antonio. He also gave money to the National Jewish Hospital in Denver, the Jewish National Fund, and the B'nai B'rith Charity Fund. Finkel's will reflects the fact that although he lived in a tiny Jewish community that never had a syna-

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# History of Texarkana

## by Mel Kusin

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What I am about to relate to you may often sound like fiction—"Oh! How could that be?" These stories are all taken from reliable sources of facts—specifically and foremost, the *Centennial Journal of Mt Sinai Congregation*, edited by Barbara Glick and Dianne Lindsey. Other sources include *Understanding Jewish History*, by Steven Bayme; *Images of Texarkana: A Visual History*, published by the *Texarkana Gazette*; and *A Corner of the Tapestry*, by Carolyn LeMaster, which is a history of the Jewish experience in Arkansas that covers the years in which Mt Sinai was located on the Arkansas side of the city.

History is a series of stories—not fiction, but actual occurrences. Judaism itself has been described as a succession of stories of the human spirit. The history of immigration of Jews into America—and into Texas—is a procession of moving and inspirational stories. As we know, the earliest Jewish communal settlement in North America dates from 1654, when twenty-three Jews, fleeing the fall of Recife, Brazil, from Dutch into Portuguese hands, left South America and landed in New Amsterdam. They immediately campaigned for their rights as colonists. Asser Levy, in particular, led the struggle to secure Jews the right of military service—an important symbol of Jewish equality in the struggle for emancipation.

Now, fast-forward through the American Revolution and to the broad immigration of German Jews in the 1830s and 1840s and the Reform Jewish movement. Here, we see the fast growth of Reform Judaism in contrast to the earlier Orthodox practices. It quickly became institutionally strong. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was formed

in 1873, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1875, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1889. Among Jewish religious movements, Reform Judaism quickly became the best-organized institutional body.

After the Civil War, immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe increased exponentially. By 1900, an average of 100,000 Jews were settling each year in the United States. The Jewish community grew from 250,000 in 1880 to over three million in 1914. By and large, Jews settled in large cities, and a number entered the Southern states through the new immigration center in Galveston, Texas. Jewish communities in smaller cities like Texarkana began to grow.

Texarkana was an unusual city in the country, as it sat squarely in two states. It was an important railroad city in the days when the railroad was coming into full bloom as a guarantor of prosperity. Texarkana was connected to four railroads in 1873-1874, and because of those four railroads, it attracted many travelers—including a high proportion of beggars. Jewish beggars, affectionately called "schnorrers," were in a class by themselves. Witty! Resourceful! And above all—persistent.

In 1874, a man named Bero Belinger, a Jewish veteran of the Confederacy, arrived in Texarkana. He encouraged the establishment of a Jewish "federation," and a Jewish cemetery was consecrated at that time by Berlinger, Marks Kosminsky, Joseph Deutschmann, Joseph Marx, and Sam Heilbron. By 1876, enough Jews had settled in the area to celebrate the High Holy Days, and Mount Sinai Congregation was formed. That fall, a local newspaper noted that the Jews of Texarkana had formed a synagogue for

the first time. And in January 1878, the first Jewish child was born—Leonce Joel Kosminsky. (A personal side note—that child became Dr. Leonce Kosminsky, and, in 1926, he delivered me.)

Another example that history is a succession of fascinating stories is the story about the initial religious leadership of Mt. Sinai congregation. It was unlike any other Jewish congregation in the state (or perhaps any other in the nation). What made it unique was the leadership of Rev. Charles Goldberg, pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Texarkana. Goldberg, who had been trained as a rabbi in Germany, came to America in the 1840s. While peddling through Missouri, he became ill, and a Presbyterian family nursed him back to health. During his stay, the family members shared their faith with him, and he subsequently converted to Christianity, becoming an ordained minister in 1847. He later served as a chaplain in the Confederate Army and filled several pulpits before coming to Texarkana in 1874.

When the Jews of Texarkana planned the High Holy Days services in 1876, they had no spiritual leader to officiate, and they asked Reverend Goldberg to conduct the rituals. This he did, to the satisfaction of both Jews and non-Jews who attended, according to a local newspaper article. But when the same notice appeared in the Jewish paper, *The American Israelite*, the editor noted, "There appears to be a mistake somewhere." Although Rev. Goldberg gained the respect and love of all segments of the Texarkana community, some Jewish visitors to the town were offended by his efforts for the Jews. Charles Wessolowsky, a representative of a Jewish newspaper, visited Texarkana in 1879 and later

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wrote a scathing denunciation regarding Reverend Goldberg. Incensed that the Jews of Texarkana selected “an apostate Jew” as their leader, he said that he hoped that “such hypocrites with their deceptive countenances... would not be allowed in either church or synagogue.”

Despite such criticism, Reverend Goldberg continued to gain respect by preparing some of the young Jewish boys for their Bar Mitzvahs. It was said that he never tried to convert the Jews to Christianity. And when he was on his deathbed, he requested a rabbi and asked to be buried in the Jewish cemetery.

By 1885, things settled down to a kind of rhythm. The Jews of Texarkana called on Rabbi Friedman, the leader of Camden, Arkansas, to hold High Holy Days services. From the very beginning of the congregation, services were held in English. A Texarkana Hebrew Benevolent Association meeting was held in 1885, with services held in Kosminsky Hall. In 1890, the congregation purchased a vacant Episcopalian church at Eighth Street and State Line, located on the Arkansas side. A new constitution was adopted in 1893, with thirty members listed. Less than two years later, their remodeled synagogue burned, and a new one was built and dedicated in 1894. Like other Jewish facilities statewide, this one was lent to other religious groups as needs arose.

Mt. Sinai’s early leaders included Joseph Deutschmann, H. Brown, B. Fain, Sol Feinberg, Louis Josephs, Marks Kosminsky, Leo Krouse, Morris Sandberger, Ike Schwartz, and Max Wexler. Although the congregation was without a full-time rabbi at intervals, those who did serve were outstanding spiritual leaders who helped establish a rapport between the Orthodox and Reform Jews and between the Jews and non-Jews.

The women of the congregation

functioned under the title of Ladies Aid Society and Ladies’ Cemetery Society, the predecessor of today’s Temple Sisterhood. In 1917, the Jewish community established a Zionist Association and Jewish War Relief organization. In 1919, more than \$11,000 was collected from Bowie County, Texas and Miller County, Arkansas, for a World War I relief fund. Non-Jews, as well as Jews, often contributed to these drives.

The religious practice of those days in Texarkana was a classic example of how small Jewish communities handled religious differences in order to survive—and, in fact, to thrive. Among the East European Jews who settled in Texarkana was Zalmin Wexler, who arrived through Galveston with his wife and family. Their presence in this Arkansas-Texas border town bolstered the number of Orthodox in the community, but there were never enough to make a minyan. There was an easy and warm rapport, however, between the Orthodox and the Reform. Those who preferred a more traditional service met early at the Reform Temple, Mt Sinai, on Saturday mornings for services. Reform members of the Temple, including David Kusin, Leon Arnold, Gus Zimmerman, Sam Shuman, and others, cooperated by filling in the needed number for a minyan. Some of the Orthodox, besides Wexler, included Victor and Ben Schiff, Sam Garber, Ben Friedman, Jack Scherer, W.M. Moss, and M. Silverman. But by the 1940s, a number of the Orthodox had passed away and there were no longer separate services.

Fast-forward to World War II—the global conflict that America entered after December 7, 1941. Young men of the congregation who served in the military during World War II included Stern Feinberg, Ralph Wexler, and Melvin Kusin. After World War II, the nation engaged in the Korean War and,

still later, in the Vietnam War.

In 1947, Texarkana’s Mt. Sinai Congregation sold its property, located on the Arkansas side of the city, and bought new property at 1310 Walnut—on the Texas side. At that time, the congregation was composed of about forty Texarkana families and seven families from the surrounding area. During construction of the new Temple, the congregation used a room in the Miller County Courthouse for regular meetings. High Holy Day services were held at the next-door Congregational Church. The new Temple, with its modern architecture and low-pitched roof, was dedicated in March 1949. Additional classrooms were needed within five years, and several were added in 1956.

Spiritual leaders who served Mt. Sinai Congregation after World War II were Rabbis Moses M. Landau, from 1946 to 1950, Avery J. Grossfield, from 1951 to 1954, Harry B. Ettinger, from 1954 to 1956, and Joseph Levine, from 1958 to 1981.

Rabbi Levine, Mt. Sinai’s last full-time spiritual head, became an outstanding leader in Texarkana’s religious and civic life. During his twenty-three years in the city, his scholarly teachings and his warm, loving personality were poured out on his adopted community. Son of an Orthodox rabbi and the youngest of thirteen children, he espoused Reform Judaism and its liberal teachings.

He was a popular speaker and his frequent lectures were well received, as evidenced when he was given a prolonged standing ovation after a talk, in 1917, to the Texarkana American Legion post. His speech was described as “one of the most masterful addresses ever to be heard” within the city. His concern for the citizens of Texarkana did not go unnoticed. A full-page article in the *Texarkana Gazette* on Easter Sunday, April 4, 1974,

*continued on page 19*

was headlined “Brotherhood: Rabbi Joseph Levine Spreads His Love.” It was noted that the Rabbi had displayed brotherhood “equal to no other” in the city’s area. After his death, the Greater Texarkana Ministerial Alliance honored him by dedicating its 1981 Brotherhood Service award to him.

After Rabbi Levine’s death in 1981, and continuing through today, students from Hebrew Union College serve the congregation. Throughout the 1980s, between the student’s visits, Leo Walkow served as lay leader and prepared youngsters for their bar mitzvahs. His services were given permanent honor when the Temple’s social hall was rededicated as the “Leo A. Walkow Hall.”

During these years, the ways that Mt. Sinai members made their livings had totally changed from the early years. From 1910 to the mid-1930s, the majority of members were downtown retailers on Broad Street. But as they passed away, they were not replaced by other retailers, but rather by professionals. A group of Jewish lawyers assembled in a firm called the Friedman firm. Founded by Harry Friedman, it eventually included Harry’s sons Errol and Michael, his nephew Don Friedman, and Sherman Kusin. One of Harry’s favorite stories was of Judge Louis Josephs, who was a Jewish municipal judge of Texarkana, Arkansas. Judge Josephs was bitter toward a certain Jewish culprit who was charged with petty larceny. Josephs did not like to see a member of his religion arrested and brought to court. He therefore spoke sternly to the defendant. “Is this your first offense? Have you stolen anything before?” “Yes,” replied the culprit. “So this is your second offense! What did you steal the first time?” thundered Judge Josephs. “The affikomen on Passover,” said the culprit. When Harry told that story, we would sigh, “Oh, Harree-e-e-e !”

Dedicated people who served as President of Temple Mt. Sinai through the years included Max Wexler, Leo Walkow, Jeff Steinhart, Joe Ruskin, Ed Pearlman, Jake Meyers, Sherman Kusin, Melvin Kusin, Henry Kaufman, John Hearn, Mordecai Glick, Howard Glick, Ruben Gilden, Leon Friedman, Harry Friedman, Don Friedman, Ralph Brody, Leo Bishkin, and Leon Arnold. In 1987, the congregation elected its first woman president, Mrs. Leo Bishkin. B’nai B’rith Women of Texarkana, which was established in 1947, continued through the years, meeting on the same night as the men’s B’nai B’rith lodge.

Ralph Brody, a pillar of strength among Mt. Sinai’s membership, promoted the development and transformation of the congregation’s cemetery from its badly neglected condition to a beautiful memorial park. In 1974, it was re-named Mt. Sinai Memorial Park. Brody was assisted by Leon Friedman in landscaping the area. They were both, along with the entire congregation, aggrieved when, in 1980, twenty-seven monuments were vandalized. Brody himself was laid to rest in his beloved park in October 1986.

Membership in Mt. Sinai has remained static through the years. About forty people, from Texarkana and the surrounding area, were members in the late 1980s. From what we know of changing profiles of America’s Jewish population, changes in Texarkana’s Mt Sinai congregation pretty well match the pattern. A nationwide survey shows that fifty-two percent of Jews in America are unaffiliated—belonging to no synagogue—and it covers all three main branches of Judaism, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Of those who are affiliated, there is a high growth of mixed couples and of Jews-by-choice. We think that, unlike the survey, just about every Jewish person in Texarkana is

affiliated. But regardless, the changes in the complexion of Mt. Sinai are an accurate reflection of the national picture of Jewish practice.

Barbara and Howard Glick re-searched the congregation’s files for changes over the years in its population profile. Below are the changes that they found between 1985 and 2011, a twenty-six-year time span.

In 1985, there were thirteen couples who were both Jewish, six couples in a mixed marriage, and two singles, for a total membership of forty people, not counting children.

In 2011, there are five couples who are both Jewish, compared with thirteen in 1985. There are eleven intermarriages, compared with six in 1985. There are seven Jewish singles, compared with only two in 1985.

And finally, there are four Jews by choice, compared with none in 1985. Mt. Sinai’s total population today is forty-three, compared with forty in 1985.

During that time span, the combined population of both the Texas and the Arkansas Texarkanas grew from 48,000 to approximately 52,500. The tiny Jewish population during that period averaged a little over forty, which was 8/100 of a percent. Yet children of the congregation—never more than one in any high-school class—achieved far beyond their numbers. In the latter part of the twentieth century, to mention just four of many, Dorothy Zimmerman was president of the hon-


*continued on page 20*

**The deadline  
for the  
July, 2011  
TJHS News  
Magazine is  
June 17**

# Cemetery Book

The Cemetery Book that was published by the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1997 is being updated. We have had cooperation from many people and most congregations in Texas, but there are still a few cemetery listings that need to be updated. Also included are the burials that are in non-Jewish cemeteries, so if you know of

one that took place after 1997, please contact Charles Hart at 254-778-2676 or [cbhart635@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cbhart635@sbcglobal.net)

The deadline for updating listings is December 30, 2011. After that date, the updated book will be printed. If you have a question concerning an update, please contact Charles Hart. 

## WANT THIS NEWS MAGAZINE BY EMAIL?

Would you like to save paper and instead receive this News Magazine by email? You will be able to read the latest TJHS news in your inbox days before it is scheduled to arrive in your mailbox. Please send to [alexa.kirk@gmail.com](mailto:alexa.kirk@gmail.com) an email saying that you would like to be on the email list. (The usual size of the News Magazine is 2 MB.)

## Welcome New Members!

### Dena Kahan

2812 Bishops Gate Circle  
Bryan, TX 77807  
Ph. 979-822-5510  
Cell 979-777-3098  
[dbkahan@gmail.com](mailto:dbkahan@gmail.com)

### Mel Kusin

7239 Park Lane  
Dallas, TX 75225  
Ph. 214-739-8890  
[mkusin@swbell.net](mailto:mkusin@swbell.net)

### Rabbi David Rosen

4525 Beechnut  
Houston, TX 77096  
713-666-3931  
[drosen@bethyeshurun.org](mailto:drosen@bethyeshurun.org)

### Rena and Bud Silverberg

4808 San Gabriel  
Dallas, TX 75229

### Malcolm and Elizabeth

(Blake) Steinberg  
1 Towers Park Lane, #1707  
San Antonio, TX 78209  
210-829-4687

## Has Your Address Changed?


If you have any changes in your information, please send them to **Marc Wormser, 1601 S. Riviera Ct., Pearland, TX 77581, 832-288-3494, [marc.wormser@att.net](mailto:marc.wormser@att.net).**

*Texarkana, continued from page 18*

orary Blue Jackets in Texarkana College, Gary Kusin and Jim Bishkin were presidents of their respective student bodies at Texas High School, and Howard Glick served as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce.

Now, it's time to conclude the story of this persistent little Texas Jewish congregation, a tiny group of Jews who have managed not only to survive for 135 years, but to thrive and be healthy today. I know that the members of Mt. Sinai join me in feeling a great sense of pride when we realize what we have accomplished.


Probably reflecting the real secret of Mt. Sinai's endurance and strength is a thoughtful quotation by an American Catholic priest named Walter Elliot, written in 1876—the very year that Mt Sinai was founded. He wrote,

*Survival and success are the products of simple perseverance. Perseverance is not a long race; it is simply many short races one after the other.* 

*Luling, continued from page 16*

gogue or formal congregation, he still maintained a strong Jewish identity and supported national Jewish causes.

Finkel continued to run his downtown store until his death, when the business was closed. The closing of Finkel's, which was the town's last Jewish-owned business, marked the end of a century of Jewish merchants in Luling. The building that housed Finkel's burned down in 2000. The semi-enclosed lot is now used as an arena for the Watermelon Seed Spitting Contest that is held each year during Luling's famous Watermelon Thump Festival.

Today, the small Jewish cemetery north of downtown remains the only vestige of Jewish life in Luling. While Jews were among the earliest settlers in a town that seemed to hold such promise, most soon moved on to other cities and towns that offered greater economic opportunities. The few who remained set down roots and became fixtures in the local community for a large part of the twentieth century. 



## Please Note:

*If you are sending a check to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, please indicate the purpose of the check—dues, gift, contribution, etc.*

## Contributions

The following donations have been received by the Texas Jewish Historical Society

**In Memory of Mabel Massin**  
**From**

*Selma Mantel*  
*Mr. and Mrs. Robert Goodmark*

**In Memory of Dorothy Katz**  
**From** *Mitzi and Rusty Milstein*

**In Honor of Abbi Michelson & Candy Gardner**  
**From** *Rabbi Sam and Lynn Stahl*

## In Memoriam



**Rosalie Ackerman Goldberg**, TJHS member, died on October 1, 2010, in Houston, Texas. She is survived by her children and their spouses,

Diane & Mitch Levy, Mark & Kathy Goldberg, Frank & Sally Goldberg, and Rick & Paz Goldberg; ten grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

**Adolph Otis Susholtz**, TJHS member, died January 22, 2011, in Houston, Texas. He is survived by his wife, Bettiruth Buck Susholtz; his children, Devon Susholtz & Stephen Purvis, Lynn Susholtz, and Rodney Susholtz; daughter-in-law, Gail Susholtz; and three grandchildren.

**Mabel Segell Massin**, former TJHS board member, died on February 1, 2011, in Houston, Texas. She is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Michele & Bob Goodmark; daughter-in-law, Susan Massin; four grandchildren and their spouses; and four great-grandchildren.



**Joe Samuels**, TJHS member, died on January 19, 2011, in Houston, Texas. He is survived by his wife, Jeanne; his children

and their spouses, Marc & Maylee Samuels, Maurene & Michael Bencal, and Vicki & Lawrence Levy; eleven grandchildren and their spouses; and seven great-grandchildren.

**Irving Schecter**, TJHS member, died on February 5, 2011, in El Paso, Texas. He is survived by his children and their spouses, Erline & Bruce Gordon and David & Susan Schecter; and two grandchildren.

**Phyllis Ruth Kadish**, TJHS member, died on November 25, 2010, in Austin, Texas. She is survived by her husband, Herbert S.; her children and their spouses, Sanford & Susan Kadish, Glenn & Jenny Kadish, Barry & Leslie Kadish, and Benjamin & Julie Kadish; five grandchildren and their spouses; and two great-grandchildren.

**May their memories be a blessing.**

**Visit us on the web at [www.txjhs.org](http://www.txjhs.org).**

**THIS WILL BE THE ONLY NOTICE OF THE SUMMER MEETING.  
THERE WILL BE NO SEPARATE FLYER.**



## **Texas Jewish Historical Society Summer Board Meeting June 25-26, 2011, in Dallas, Texas**

at the **Doubletree Hotel**, Campbell Centre, 8250 N. Central Expressway • Dallas, Texas 75206  
Reservations 1-800-245-8918 or 214-691-8700. *Ask for the TJHS rate of \$89 per night.*  
*No airport shuttle will be provided.*

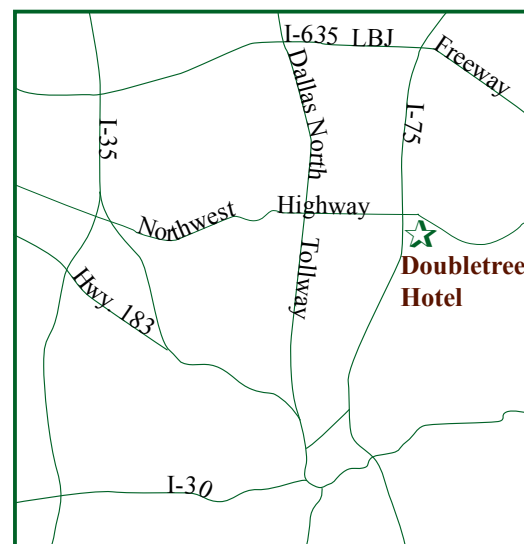
**Deadline for Hotel Reservations is June 8, 2011**

### **Saturday, June 25, 2011**

2:00 - 5:00 PM Registration in hotel lobby. Hospitality Room open.  
5:45 PM Meet in hotel lobby to carpool to dinner.  
6:00 PM Dinner at Cindi's N.Y. Delicatessen, 11111 N. Central Expressway (between Northaven and Royal, west side of the freeway). **Dutch Treat.**

### **Sunday, June 26, 2011**

8:30 - 9:30 AM Continental breakfast outside the Cowboy Room.  
10:00 AM Board Meeting in the Cowboy Room



## **Summer Board Meeting Registration Form**

**Deadline for Registration is June 8, 2011**

Please list name of each person attending:

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee: \$30 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(number attending)

Mail form and check (made out to TJHS) to  
David Beer, 2828 E. Trinity Mills Rd., #121, Carrollton, TX 75006-2312.

*If you have any questions, contact Sally Drayer at 972-458-7289 or [sdrayer@yahoo.com](mailto:sdrayer@yahoo.com).*



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## TJHS Traveling Exhibit

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has compiled two museum-quality photo exhibits, with explanations, depicting early Jewish life and contributions. Both exhibits highlight the lives of Jews in Texas since the early part of the century.

Each exhibit is comprised of approximately thirty-six photographs that can be either self-standing with an easel back or hung on a wall. There is no charge for the exhibits, and they will be shipped, prepaid freight via UPS in waterproof boxes, to

your location. The only expense to the borrower will be the shipping of the exhibit back via UPS ground.

The exhibits have been displayed in various locations in Texas and other parts of the United States, including Rhode Island and California. They are an excellent program for schools, congregations, and other organizations. To schedule the exhibits, please contact Jack Gerrick at 817-927-8765 or email him at [texbed@aol.com](mailto:texbed@aol.com).

