

Texas Jewish Historical Society



May, 2002

Searching for Our Roots

excerpted from a sermon delivered on March 8, 1985 by Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl

If a person wants to know about his ancestors, one of the best places to gain information, surprisingly enough, is the Mormon Church. The Mormons have the best genealogical records in the world. In the Mormon faith, there is a belief that if one knows his ancestors, one can baptize them, after death, by proxy.

We have no comparable genealogical records in our Jewish community. We know that we Jews have a rich ancestral past. In our prayers, we speak about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekkah, Rachel and Leah. We take pride in the insights of the ancient Rabbis and in the wisdom of Maimonides.

We Jews tend to know more about our distant past than our more recent past. We do not have the sense of urgency that motivates the Mormons. If our ancestors lived incomplete or unworthy lives, there is little that we can do for them to change the character of their years after they die by proxy.

Therefore, while we may have a sense of Jewish History, we have only a vague idea about several of our great-grandparents and those who came before them. One of the problems is that in Eastern Europe, to which 90% of American Jews can trace their ancestry, family record-keeping was imprecise, if not nonexistent.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society is interested in obtaining family histories and memorabilia

for the Archives of the Historical Society House at the University of Texas in Austin.

How, then, does one go about tracing his or her Family History? Arthur Kurzweil, a noted American Jewish genealogist, offers some suggestions:

Begin now. Our most valuable contacts are older people. We don't want to hear: "Aunt Sadie knew all that you are asking. Unfortunately, she died six months ago."

Write down every bit of information you hear, even the least significant, seemingly irrelevant story. Genealogy is like an unsolved mystery. Evidence can be found in the least expected places. For instance, if your great-grandfather happened to be present at the dedication of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, we know that he was in San Francisco at a particular time. That information will lead you to records that you never knew existed.

Be as accurate as you can. Document every name, fact, and date. Also pay attention to legends, which may be fictitious, because every legend has a kernel of truth. Also do not assume every official document is accurate in all details. We know how many name changes occurred at Ellis Island. East European Jewish immigrants and the immigration officials were not able to communicate with each other. Often names were

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**Mark Your
Calendars:**

**Joint Meeting with
Southern Jewish Historical Society**

Date: Oct. 25-27, 2002

Location: Shreveport, LA

**TJHS Board Meeting
Everyone Invited**

Date: 7/21/02

Location: Kerrville, TX



From the TJHS Past President

It has been a short two years since I took the presidency of the Texas

Jewish Historical Society. I had assumed it would be a real easy job because we had a lot of enthusiastic board members with everyone doing a certain job. It would simply be putting together board meetings and making phone calls. Well, without exception, the board did a great job and never hesitated when requested to do something for the society.

Never have I been part of an organization of volunteers and members who were so dedicated to preserving Texas Jewish history. With the great increase in membership, and the Society's increasing reputation nationwide, mainly because of our newsletters, traveling exhibit and web site, we are continuing to grow in stature and number.

Anyway, it almost turned into a full time job, but with no complaints and a great big Thank You to all the officers, board members and committees (especially Merilee Weiner, Beverly Trachtenberg and Mabel Massin.)

We have just finished with the 25th Annual Gathering of the Society in Houston. The programs, panels and speakers were very informative and educational. The weekend started with a bus tour of historic sites and cemeteries in Houston. I think everyone

on the tour was amazed at what the Jewish pioneers had accomplished in making Houston the 4th largest city in the U.S. Everywhere we went, we saw evidence of Jewish involvement in the growth from retailing to real estate and industry, among other businesses.

Friday night after services, we were entertained by the La Porte Junior High Young Historians and musicologist/singer Barbara Loeser. I want to give a big thank you to Bea Svamera who directed the Young Historians, who without rehearsal did a magnificent job in telling about anti-Semitism throughout the ages.

Saturday was a full day starting with Malcolm Slatko of Seven Acres talking about the "Clock of Aging, circa 2002." A very informative and pertinent speech considering the age of the attendees. Next, we were treated to a talk from former Ambassador to the Bahamas, Arthur "Butch" Schechter. The title of his presentation was "Finding Humor in Every Situation."

Later in the morning, a Physicians Panel consisting of Drs. Louis Green, Louis Daily, Ike Rosenthal and Coleman D. Caplovitz presented a picture of what it was like in the medical community in trying to get into medical school and the subtle anti-Semitism that was awash in medicine at the time. We have all heard of what it took to be successful in medicine in the 20s and 30s, however this was a real revelation.

The highlight of the afternoon

session was Monica (Posy) McMillen, who is an evangelical Christian who teaches courses such as Judaism 101 and is co-chair of the Jewish studies program at a major university and selected as one of the "Outstanding Young Women in America." Her topic (Israel and the Palestinians) brought her a standing ovation and a robust question and answer session. She was inundated afterward with compliments and inquiries about places to buy the books she showed. It was certainly inspiring and above all dispelled all the myths and propaganda that is in the media. She basically touched on the subject of anti-Semitism and the Church (which is one of her favorite topics), however time prevented her from continuing. What a pro-Israel speech!

All of us went to Beth Yeshurun Synagogue for services, wine and hors d'oeuvres, dinner and a docent tour of the Judaica Museum Kaplan Collection. I feel everyone had a great time.

Inasmuch as I am now the past president as of this gathering, I want to wish Charles Hart, his officers and board the best of luck and want them to know that I'm just stepping aside, but will continue to work for the Society in any way I can. Shalom!

NOTE:

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

Fay Brachman, 3720 Autumn Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76109

Phone: 817-924-9207, E-mail: leonhb@flash.net

\$100 Reward

For the words to the song,
"Tough Guy Levi is my name and
I'm a Yiddish Cowboy."

Contact Marilyn Jorrie
(bomarketpl@milehigh.net)



Letter From the Editor

or Freedman Slips

After almost two years of being Editor

of the **TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S** Newsletter, I have become confused about what the Society is all about. I have attended the Board Meetings and the Gatherings. I have written this column and I have spoken with many of our members. I have reviewed many of the old newsletters and found that I am not the first to dwell on this subject. Perhaps I should be asking the question "why do we call ourselves a *historical* society?"

To my way of thinking, our organization's purpose is to record and preserve the history of the Jews of Texas. The corporate name would

suggest this. And yet a review of the Newsletters that have been published (they can be scanned on the now available CD ROM) will reveal that very few histories have been published in this journal. I feel quite certain that the reason for this lack is not that previous editors refused to print the histories that were submitted. I think not! Nor do I think that our membership is illiterate or incapable of putting a pen to paper or using a word processor or speaking into a tape recorder.

Much to my surprise, I have seen very few of the histories from even the loyal members who come to the many meetings I have attended. When I have asked you why you don't write your memories, I get the usual answers - I don't have time - I am not a

writer - no one would be interested - and so it goes. And your **Newsletter** becomes a repository for reprinting articles that can be (or could have been) read in many of the Jewish newspapers.

It would be great if future Newsletters could contain stories about Jews in Texas. It is up to the members of this Society to record their stories while we are yet alive. There has been no record of any stories being written by anyone else.

Historical Texas Synagogues

Send Historical Texas Synagogues note cards when corresponding with friends or relatives. Each pack contains color prints, two each of five different synagogues - 10 cards and 10 envelopes.

Package A contains: Temple Beth-El, Corsicana; Temple Mizpah, Abilene; Temple Freda, Bryan; Temple Beth Israel, San Angelo; Schwarz Family Synagogue, Hempstead

Package B contains: B'nai Israel, Galveston; Temple Emanuel, Beaumont; B'nai Abraham Synagogue, Brenham; Sinai Hebrew Congregation, Jefferson; B'nai Israel, Victoria

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Make check or money order payable to: **The Texas Jewish Historical Society** and send it with this form to: TJHS, c/o Don Schlossberg, 4 Cedarwing Lane, The Woodlands, TX 77980. Allow 4-6 weeks delivery.

Retail shops receive a 40% discount with a minimum order of any 10 packs.

A Texas Resale Certificate must be included with order.



Preserving the Stories:

Author Ruthe Winegarten has Dedicated Most of Her Life to Documenting Texas Women

by Marina Pisano

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August 26 is not just another day in August.

It is the anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, the constitutional amendment that, after decades of suffragists' struggles, granted American women the right to vote.

And whether it's a case of the astrological signs being aligned or just a fitting coincidence, it is also the birthday of a woman some call the mother of Texas women's history, the author of about a dozen books who for many years has scoured the state for the untold stories of diverse, often remarkable women, stories that might have been overlooked and lost without her passion for research and history writing.

She is Ruthe Winegarten, 72.

A large group of her friends gathered at the Zilker Clubhouse in Austin to celebrate. Many are contributors to a new book — not by Winegarten for a change, but about her.

"Mum's the Word: A Tribute to Ruthe Winegarten," (Sunbelt Press, \$24.95) contains some 140 remembrances collected by her daughter, author Debra L. Winegarten. It's available through sociosight@aol.com.

From historian Nancy Baker Jones' recollection of Winegarten's brave

support in Jones' discrimination battle against the Texas State Historical Association 10 years ago, to former Texas Gov. Ann Richards' story about the days before consciousness-raising when women just had plain old "righteous indignation" — the book traces the human connections, significant projects and lasting achievements of a woman who "followed her bliss."

That's the assessment of KLRU-TV President and CEO Mary Beth Rogers in the book. "Bliss" in this case consists of writing about women, especially long-neglected women of color.

This year, Winegarten and co-author Jones received the Liz Carpenter Award of the Texas State Historical Association for their book, "Capital Women" Texas Female Legislators, 1923-1999" (University of Texas Press). In 1996, Winegarten won the same award for "Black Texas Women 150 Years of Trial and Triumph" (UT Press). Now in the works is a book co-authored with Teresa Palomo Acosta, also to be published by UT Press, "Empowering Women: A Tejana History, 1700-2000."

"It's the hardest book I've ever done," Winegarten says of the massive Tejana history. "There was so little research out there to draw on.

"I kept waiting for somebody else to do it," she explains from her home

in Austin. "Nobody else was doing it, so I did, and fortunately I found a Mexican-American scholar (Acosta) to work with."

That was the way it was from the beginning for Winegarten — historians weren't writing about women, so she started assembling meticulous files and records.

Scholars often told her a particular project couldn't be done.

Rogers recalls that when she and a team, including Winegarten as a paid researcher, began to work on the Texas Women's History Project in 1979, they proposed to tell the story of women throughout Texas history. Academic experts called it totally unrealistic. They suggested a focus on just five or 10 years in history. Plus, Winegarten wasn't a trained historian, they argued.

The women were undeterred. "Ruthe and I thought, if you wait for the definitive scholarly work, it never gets done. If you sit and wait, you lose these women," says Rogers, who directed the project.

Winegarten and Sherry Smith, another project team member, piled their suitcases in a car and drove to libraries and museums all over the state. When they asked for materials relating to women, they were directed to dusty storage rooms.

Funded by foundations, corporations and private donations totaling about \$250,000 — a hefty amount for a women's project at the time — the project brought diaries, letters and artifacts out of back rooms into the public eye. The project exhibit "Texas Women, A Celebration of History," sponsored by the Austin-based Foundation for Women's Resources,

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The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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opened at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio in 1981. As the exhibit traveled, it connected women all over the state.

"Ruthe was the spine of the history project," says Rogers. The Exhibit, now housed at Texas Woman's University in Denton, was a seminal event in women's history, not only in Texas, but nationally.

It was a seminal event in Winegarten's life as well. There was no stopping her after that.

Her love of books and learning took hold early on. Growing up in a Jewish family in South Dallas, Ruthe Lewin spent long summer hours in the public library across the street from her house. She was raised close to her mother and two aunts, relationships that may have planted the seeds of interest in women's lives, stories and concerns. The environment at home was warmly supportive.

"Ruthe once told me that her mother never said a discouraging word to her; and always encouraged her," recalls close friend Frieda Werden, a radio producer who worked on the Texas Women's History Project. "And Ruthe's the same way with her friends."

Winegarten's maternal grandfather emigrated from a troubled corner of Europe that, over the centuries, went back and forth between Russian and Polish control. Her paternal grandfather came from Germany. Theirs were the familiar stories of immigrants pulling themselves up by hard work and making their way in small businesses. At one time, the Lewins had the only kosher meat market in Dallas.

Debra Winegarten thinks her mother's Jewish heritage and the mandate for social justice in Judaism shaped her. "In terms of how you live your life, being an advocate for social change and the oppressed, it's just such a strong theme for her," she says.

An outstanding student,

Winegarten won a scholarship to Southern Methodist University and from there went to UT at Austin where she earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology in 1950. Marriage and family followed. Currently single, she has been divorced several times. Besides Debra, she has a son, Marc Sanders, and another daughter, Martha Wilson.

In 1970, Winegarten received a master of science degree in social work from UT-Arlington. A doctorate was the next logical progression, but after taking 48 course hours in social history and women's studies at UT-Dallas, 1976-1978, she was ready to move on. Hands-on history, not a Ph.D., was more important to her.

Harvey J. Graff, then teaching at the Dallas campus and now a professor of history at UT-San Antonio, influenced her decision. He was convinced that her interest in women's issues and social activism were moving her "through other doors," toward a wide readership, not toward traditional academic scholarship.

"The longer she would have stayed studying for the Ph.D., the less she would have prepared herself for what she wanted to do. She really didn't need the credentials, and her success since then shows that," says Graff, who taught Winegarten the oral-history-gathering skills that form the heart of her work.

Winegarten worked as Southwest regional director for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, served as director of the community relations council of the Jewish Welfare Federation of Dallas and as research director of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. After moving from Dallas to Austin in 1978, she became acting director of the Austin Women's Center for a time.

So in mid-life, Winegarten crafted a life and a career that brought an outpouring of exhibit materials, videos, books, even a musical written

with Naomi Carrier based on her 1983 oral history, "I Am Annie Mae: The Personal Story of a Black Texas Woman." The UT Press reissued Annie Mae Hunt's story of hardship and family in 1996.

With her book-length inventory of women's history sources, Graff says, "Ruthe showed a path for historians of women in Texas that no one had before."

In 1987, Winegarten, co-editor Judith N. McArthur and essayist A. Elizabeth Taylor wrote "Citizens at Last: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Texas." With Cathy Schecter she wrote "Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews," in 1990. She produced not just one book on black Texas women, but four, including "Black Texas Women: A Sourcebook" in 1996 and, with Sharon Kahn, "Brave Black Women: From Slavery to the Space Shuttle" in 1997 for young readers.

In 1998, she and daughter Debra wrote "Strong Family Ties: The Tiny Hawkins Story," about the enterprising black owner of a South Dallas nursing home. Always, Winegarten was drawn to finding and telling the little-known stories of women of color.

Over the years, the women's history specialist filled three Rolodexes with source names and attracted an army of admirers. Friends say she is relentless and tenacious in pursuit of information.

The scope of her work often has been so enormous that Jones and other friends have had to intercede with reality checks. "We'd say, 'OK, Ruthe, we can't do all that in one lifetime. Let's figure out what we can do.'"

"Mum's the Word," which was self-published by Debra, and her 72nd birthday party were supposed to be surprises. But Debra worried about overwhelming her mother, so

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she let her know. "She just had the second anniversary of her heart attack, and I wouldn't want to shock Mom with this," she says.

It's likely Winegarten will still be overwhelmed by the generous words from colleagues and friends, many of whom she mentored and encouraged.

Werden cites Winegarten's powerful nurturing impulse. "If you go over to her house to work on something, the first thing she asks is, 'Are you hungry?' She's not a bad cook, either — chicken soup, noodle kugel (pudding)."

Melissa Heild, yet another Texas Women's History Project alumna, recalls that when her mother was dying of cancer, Winegarten and Werden held a kind of healing ceremony for her and prayed over a Jewish medallion. "When I gave the medallion to my mother, she said she could feel the energy. It was tingling."

With all she has achieved, is Winegarten thinking about retirement? "No," she replies. "But I'm taking a respite after the Tejana book. I'm a little tired."

Author, editor and longtime friend Jan Humphrey ventures that, like the tireless suffragists whose efforts are celebrated, this woman's work is not done yet.

"Ruthe won't retire. She has a lively mind. And there are still lots of women's stories to be told."

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.

incorrectly recorded because of the language barrier.

Be prepared for a rejection. Some members of your family will think that you are crazy. Some will not want to give you time. Some have lived through a past which is too painful and they don't want to recall it. You may write letters and get no response. You may get a cold reaction on the telephone.

Be patient. Genealogical research takes months, even years. Sending for information, receiving answers to inquiries, and putting all the pieces together can be very time-consuming.

Decide whether you want to do a family history or a genealogy. There is a distinction. A Genealogy begins with you and works backward in time. A family history starts with an ancestor and works forwards. Genealogies tend to limit one to tracing grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and other parentally related family units. The family history includes cousins, aunts, and uncles. Ideally, one should do both a genealogy and a family history.

Interview properly. Start at home with parents, then grandparents. They may know very little, but they can recommend others who know more. Ask specific questions. Don't ask: "Tell me about my great-grandfather." Rather say: "What was my great-grandfather's name? What was his occupation? Where was he born? When did he die?" Don't ask leading questions. Do not ask "Did he live in Poland?" But "Where did he live?" Some people may resent you for asking these personal questions. Don't be discouraged. The majority love center stage and the opportunity to talk about themselves. They will not regard your questions as prying. Finally, write thank-you notes to those whom you have interviewed and assure them that you'll share your findings with them.

What is it that we want to know in doing these investigations. First, what were their names? Make sure to record the maiden names of all married women. Otherwise it will be patrilineally based. Use middle names. Also Hebrew, Yiddish and English names should be used. If your great-grandfather was called Morris, Moshe and Moishele, record all three. By examining these details, we will be able to detect many naming patterns in your family and how closely subsequent generations adhere to the original name. Pay attention to dates. The most important are dates of birth, death, marriage, and immigration from country to country, especially to the United States. Learn about the place of birth. This can be discovered by reading history books on that place at that time. Note the place of death. Gravestones give excellent information. Discover their occupations. How did they make a living? Why did they immigrate to the States? Why did some of the family remain in Europe and some come here? Why did they stagger the pattern of immigration so that the father could come first and then send for his wife and children a year or two later? What were their religious and political affiliations? Were they of the Hasidic or Mitnagid Milies? Were they religious Jews or Marxist socialists? And in Germany, were they Orthodox or Liberal? Also which language did they speak?

There are many places that one can look for this information: city directories, census records, citizenship records, birth certificates, death certificates, wills, steamship passenger lines, cemeteries, obituaries and military records.

Why bother with all this research? It will give a sense of rootedness. We will become acquainted with our past. We will realize that we are not orphans of history.

President taps Fred Zeidman to lead U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

by Aaron Howard, Reprinted with permission from the Jewish Herald-Voice, March 14, 2002

Calling the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum “the single most important Jewish institution outside Israel,” Houston entrepreneur Fred Zeidman has assumed leadership of the Washington, D.C., institution.

President George W. Bush appointed Zeidman chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council on March 8. The council is directly responsible for operating the museum located on Washington’s Mall. The museum hosts two million visitors annually and has a \$65 million operating budget.

Since the White House leaked a short list of possible appointees to Jewish newspapers in September, many people, especially among East Coast academics, have asked, “Fred who?”

“In my mind, I knew it might not work out,” Zeidman says. “I’ve not been part of the East Coast establish-

ment or the eastern philanthropic community. And there was a lot of lobbying to maintain that.”

“We must prepare to move forward past the survivor generation. Soon we’re not going to have anybody who bore witness to the Holocaust. We have to put the Holocaust on a footing where it can survive without the survivors. You do that in part by keeping the importance and vibrancy of the museum alive.”

Zeidman’s parents were born and raised in the United States. They taught him about the Holocaust. Zeidman also says conversations with Elie Wiesel have affected him deeply.

Zeidman says his primary objective, in the short run, is to keep the museum politics and bickering out of the media.

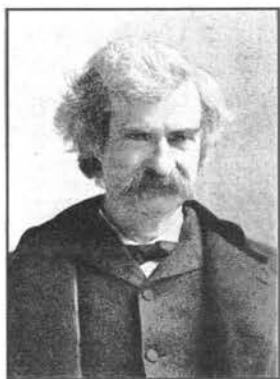
He is expected to launch a campaign to create a \$250 million endowment.



Zeidman expects to be in Washington at least half time. “I’m fervently hoping that I’ll be able to maintain my business, but I can’t tell you how that will play out,” he says. “I can’t tell you how appreciative I am that the president has given me this opportunity. My family is extremely supportive. They know what an honor is to have been asked by the president to take on this challenge.”

Essay on Jews

By Mark Twain, *Harper’s*, September, 1899



“If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a

nebulous, dim puff of star lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other

people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the smallness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream stuff and

passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Hello. It's been a few months since I wrote to the TJHS, concerning my search for information about two WWII servicemen from Texas.

I had my "hunch" confirmed for one of the airmen in question: Second Lieutenant Joseph Faverman. Yes, he was Jewish. Within the very same week that my last letter was published in your newsletter, I received an informative letter from Don Teter. Don wrote that the book *Texas Jewish Burials* specifically lists Lt. Faverman's uncle Mandel as being buried in the Lubbock Jewish Cemetery. Similarly, Mary Ann Plaut phoned me from El Paso a few days later, also confirming that the Lieutenant and his family were Jewish. So, in this case, my intuition paid off hand-

somely, with your help, and the help of these kind members of the TJHS.

Sincerely,
Michael G. Moskow
54-12 Revere Road
Drexel Hill, PA 19026

Dear Editor

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has files set up at the Scottish Rite Temple in Houston. We are now going through this material to set up some kind of order so they can be available to the membership when needed.

These files are mostly the business end of the Society and contain correspondence of TJHS presidents, information on books that have been published, Treasurer's reports, Board

meetings and Gatherings material. We are also keeping the work of Gertrude and Don Teter on Jewish Cemeteries in Texas and photo albums of meetings and trips taken by Blanche Sheiness.

We are trying to complete the files up to the present times and would appreciate any materials from past Presidents or members that would bring our files up to date.

Please note that all historical material is kept in Austin and should not be sent to the Houston location.

You can write or call if you have any material for the Houston files to:

Selma Mantel
9251 Burdine #354
Houston, Texas 77096
713-723-1584

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

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

Texas Jewish Historical Society Website

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

E-mail address: txjhs@yahoo.com
Web Site address: <http://www.txjhs.org>

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

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

The Laves Family



This picture of the Laves Family was sent in by Davie Lou Solka from Corpus Christi. It is a photo of her grandparents and their 9 children before they left Russia, approx. 1912. Rebecca (Victor), the youngest was not yet born, she was born in Fort Worth.

Back Row: Mitchell (who died last July at age 99), Sam, Harry "Izzie" and Sarah (Sack)

Sitting: Louis, Abe, Harry "Buckshot," Leah, David, Ben holding Dora (Ettelman) - Davie Lou's mother

Hey! I Know Him!

By Jerry Wolens

In our travels, Sylvia and I have met and pictured with many famous celebrities: a king, two prime ministers, a Wimbledon champion, a Nobel Prize winner. But the one who stands out was famous for a most alarming reason. He was one of the most publicized killers in world history.

But first, I must set the scene. Our

Texas company specialized in precut choice steaks and to help our salesmen, I gave each man a stereoptic box-viewer and a set of stereoptic slides of our steaks: raw, boxed and on the plate. Customers would hold the viewer to their eyes as our men would slip in the various slides.

As a gimmick...to add spice to

their presentation, I gave each man an additional set of "nudies" with the warning that they use discretion as to where and when nude slides could be used.

In early November 1963, our company had a display booth in the convention hall of the Texas Restau-

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The Girls of AEPHi



This photo came from Gladys Rosenwasser Schaffer of Corpus Christi, and was published in our Winter, 2001 newsletter. Gladys was an undergraduate of UT Austin from 1932-1936 and this is her Sorority, AEPHi. Thanks to Muriel Phillips, who joined AEPHi in 1938, and Frances Tocker, we have identified almost all of the women in the picture.

1. Ruth Blaugrund of El Paso; 2. Frances Feinberg (Tocker) of Texarkana; 3. Elfrda (Sugar) Schepps (Cerf) of Dallas; 4. Frances Levy (Kahn) of El Paso; 5. Carolyn Rosenberg of Houston; 6. Jane Munzesheimer of Houston; 7. Evelyn Handelman (Levy) of Marlin; 8. Jean Nussbaum (Schwartz) of Galveston; 9. Ruth Levy (Kempner) of Galveson; 10. Gladys Rosenwasser (Schaffer) of Corpus Christi; 11. Helen Ruth Brooksaler (Stern) of Dallas; 12. Sammy Frelich (Simon) of Houston; 13. Jackie Alexander; 14. Helen Berman Schulman of Houston; 15. Doris Rossinger of Beaumont; 16. Harriet Hirsch (Monroe) of Corpus Christi; 17. Bernice Rosenwasser (Davis) of Shamrock (?); 18. Ruth Ellen Beaird of Dallas; 19. Mary Hirsch (Stern) of Marshall; 20. Lois Schwartz (Rotterman) of Hempstead; 21. Myra Caplan (Ravel); 22. Marian Gunst of Corpus Christi; 23. Pauline Straus Zeman (Plantowsky) of Houston; 24. Regina Cohen (Braunig); 25. Teresa Rose Burgower (Eichenbaum) of Dallas; 26. Rosetta Levy (Elmer) of Shreveport; 27. ? Rosine of Dallas; 28. Jane Stone (Sanger) of San Antonio.

Synagogue Closes After 100 Years

Wharton Congregation Sees End to 'Small-Town Jewry'

By Tara Dooley. Copyright 2002 Houston Chronicle Publishing Company.

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WHARTON— Engraved in the cornerstone of the original Shearith Israel Synagogue are the names of 17 men dedicated to the task of inspiring a Jewish center of worship and learning in an improbable Southern town.

They arrived from Eastern Europe mostly, men who chose to make lives in this agricultural county of economic promise in the shrinking shadow of the Civil War.

Among this first generation was Joe Schwartz, who opened a clothing store on the county courthouse square and, as vice president of the synagogue, worked to foster Jewish community life in Wharton and nearby towns.

More than a century later, his grandson, Larry Wadler, is among the last of the synagogue members.

Today, Wadler and the other 38 remaining members of the once vibrant Shearith Israel pray together at a final Sabbath service.

They gather one last time in the red-brick synagogue, shaped like a Star of David and planted right by the green marker that reminds travelers that Wharton is home to about 9,000.

They will be joined by many of their children — baby boomers who transplanted their small-town roots into the urban centers of Texas and the world, taking with them the future of the Jewish community of their youth.

"This isn't just the history of Joe Schwartz and family," Wadler said. "... I think it has been the history of small-town Jewry."

Throughout Texas and the South, towns such as Corsicana, Schulenburg, Brenham, Marshall and Wharton had thriving Jewish communities that have dwindled in recent decades, said Stuart Rockoff, historian at the Goldring/

Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, Miss. Some of these town's synagogues struggle to stay open, with few members and resources. Many have closed.

"A lot of it has to do with different generations," Rockoff said. "... Small-store-owning, entrepreneurial Jewish immigrants have given way to the third generation of Jewish professionals.

"I would imagine that Wharton would be among the last generation that is still around in small towns," Rockoff said.

But the legacy of these towns continues in the Jewish lives and practices of the children who were raised there, said Fred Zeidman, a grandson of Schwartz and a Houstonian whom President Bush recently appointed to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

"I have deep roots, great roots (in Wharton)," Zeidman said. "Our family obviously had been there forever."

Not quite forever, but since the latter half of the 1800s.

Shortly before the end of that century, Schwartz arrived to find an active Jewish community in Wharton, El Campo and Bay City.

The Jews from these cities began meeting for worship services in the 1890s. They gathered in homes and in the Masonic Lodge.

"The community grew and prospered because the gentile community welcomed them," Wadler said. "You don't have to go far from here to find that, that is not what always happened."

The congregation incorporated in 1913 with the goal of hiring a rabbi "because education was very important," Wadler said.

By 1921, a brick building with an arched entry opened its doors on South Rusk Street, a block from the courthouse square. Eventually, it would be sold, destroyed and replaced to accommodate hundreds of worshippers. The Jewish cemetery took shape on North Alabama Road.

A synagogue was a visible coming-of-age for any nascent Jewish community, said Hollace Weiner, president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

"A building gives the Jewish community visibility and a sense of permanence and prominence," she said.

The synagogue was not the Jewish community's only brick-and-mortar evidence of prominence. The majority of businesses that lined the square around the county courthouse were owned by Jewish retailers, said Merle Hudgins, a longtime member of the Wharton County Historical Commission and history columnist for the Wharton Journal Spectator and El Campo Leader News.

Maureen Staller's family history is perhaps more typical.

Staller's grandfather, Max Bishkin, came to El Campo in 1905 and set out to earn his living on a horse and buggy, peddling wares and news from town to area farmers, Staller said. Eventually, he opened a store in El Campo, and his son, Abe Bishkin, Staller's father, went to work as a cotton buyer.

Staller married a young Jewish Army officer from Philadelphia stationed at Camp Hulen, Sol Staller. After World War II, the Stallers remained in El Campo and became increasingly active in synagogue life.

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Annual Gathering, 2002

*The Society held it's Annual Gathering at the Galleria Doubletree Hotel, April 19-21.
Here are some photos from that event.*



Sandra Freed, Jack Gerrick and Joyce Gerrick, all of Fort Worth, during a break.



Sandra Freed with speaker Posy McMillen and Dorothy Harelik.



Historic tour of a Jewish Mausoleum near downtown Houston.



*Charles Hart of Temple, TX:
New President of TJHS*



*Davie Lou Solka installing the new
board and officers*



*Hollace Weiner - TJHS member and
president of the Southern Jewish
Historical Society*



Partial Gathering of the 23rd Annual Gathering of the TJHS in Houston.



Posy McMillen speaking to The Gathering



The La Porte Junior High Historians and their sponsor, Bea Svamera



Jack Gerrick receives Past President's pin from Charles Hart, incoming President



Ambassador Arthur Schechter making presentation to the TJHS during the Gathering.



The New Officers.

Synagogue, continued from page 13

"I wanted to live in a small town, whether it was Minnesota or Texas, and she was here, so that was it," said Sol Staller, who is the longtime president of the synagogue.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Jewish community grew with new members, new babies and new traditions.

The congregation's signature event was the annual barbecue, which drew thousands in its heyday, said Adine Holland, who has been a synagogue member since her family moved to Wharton in 1926.

The 1960s were the heydays of the congregation, with 77 families on the synagogue membership rolls. The new synagogue building was completed in 1956, and at least a hundred children filled the classrooms for Sunday religious education classes.

Rabbi Israel Rosenberg was the spiritual leader of the congregation and educator of a generation of children, traveling to residents' homes in nearby towns where his congregation lived.

On Tuesdays he was in El Campo, Staller's daughter Sue Peixotto remembered.

"We would sit around the dining room table, and Rabbi Rosenberg would give us our Hebrew lessons," she said.

As a member of a much larger congregation in Austin, Peixotto has been able to provide her children with a selection of opportunities for

Jewish learning. But Shearith Israel also offered an experience she cannot replicate for them, she said.

"What you miss is the feeling that you know everybody and are an intimate part of their lives," she said.

After Rosenberg died in the late 1970s, the number of families slowly began to dwindle as children moved away from town. In 1987 there were only 70 families and few children, Peixotto said.

A succession of rabbis followed Rosenberg. Eventually, services were held biweekly, then monthly. The congregation could no longer afford to pay a full-time rabbi. The religious education classes ceased, and the classroom building was eventually razed.

The remaining 39 members of Shearith Israel plan to sell the synagogue and vote to decide on a Jewish organization to receive the proceeds. The group that accepts the money will be charged with upkeep of the cemetery, Wadler said.

In addition, the Torahs and Torah breastplates will be donated to Jewish organizations in need.

Congregation members have various plans for future worship. Still, they feel bereft by the closing of Shearith Israel.

"I feel when it is over and done with, we are going to feel a loss, and I think our children will feel that way even though they don't live here anymore," Maureen Staller said. "It has been a part of our lives, and it will be something missing."

I Know Him, continued from page 9

rant Association, where, in a large freezer case, we displayed boxes of our delicious steaks.

One day, two gentlemen entered our booth. When they admired our display, I went into my routine with the stereoptic slides and of course, slipped in a nude or two. The headman went wild! He loved the presentation! Not the steaks, but the nudies! In fact, he insisted that I furnish him with a set of these slides.

The gentleman asked that I bring them to his dinner club and he handed me his card. The name on the card was JACK RUBY!

When I delivered the slides several days later, Jack Ruby had his chef make sandwiches and we sat and talked for about an hour. Since we were both from Chicago, we talked about the Cubs, the White Sox, the Bears, the outer drive and Chicago politics. He did give me a small order...this time for steaks, no slides. When I brought them by several days later, he was nice and polite but did not serve lunch.

Scene changes. It was three weeks later (in fact, November 24, 1963). I am driving to our plant in Fort Worth when they interrupt the radio program with the announcement that Lee Harvey Oswald had been shot and that...(and I certainly wasn't ready for this), the killer's name was Jack Ruby.

"HELL," I yell, "I KNOW JACK RUBY!!!!!"

Photos Needed

We are looking for photographs to be used in the TJHS travelling exhibit. The photos should be uniquely Texan and Jewish such as Jews dressed in cowboy/ranching clothes, Jewish ranchers or anything that distinguishes the picture as Texan. Pictures must be labeled. Please send photos to: Helen Wilk, 260 Cape Aron, Corpus Christi, TX 78412 All photos will be returned.

Jewish History Month

A Jewish History Month celebration will be held in Shreveport and Bossier City, Louisiana during the month of October, 2002. Highlights include a performance by Israeli superstar Chava Alberstein, an exhibit from the Museum of Southern Jewish Experience, a Jewish Film Festival, a book signing by Leonard Nimoy and the joint meeting of the SJHS and TJHS. For more information, contact Susan Gross at 318-798-7759 or bookisha@aol.com

Austin's Helen Smith, Outspoken Leader, Benefactor, dies at 86

Helen Smith, 86, longtime member of the TJHS and an outspoken leader and benefactor of national Jewish organizations, passed away February 13 in Austin, Texas.

Born March 10, 1915, in Brooklyn, N.Y., the oldest daughter of Josephine and Henry Gross, Helen graduated from Brooklyn College and attended Brooklyn Law School. She married Milton T. Smith on March 27, 1938, at the Brooklyn Jewish Center in New York which was founded by her father.

The couple met in Texas when Helen, a national officer of the Jewish sorority Delta Phi Epsilon, visited the chapter on the Austin campus. During that first trip to Texas, she met Milton Smith on a blind date. A fairy tale romance followed, with a rapid courtship culminating in a 63-year marriage.

Helen became a vital part of the family business, Economy Furniture Industries, and was active at the firm until the day she died.

In Jewish affairs, Helen was instrumental in starting the Bnai B'rith Women's Chapter in Austin and later served as International President of Women's Bnai Brith. She also served on many civic and charitable organizations, both locally and nationally. She was an active member of Austin's Congregation Beth Israel, chairing its Building Committee and serving a number of terms on its Board of Directors.

Helen and Milton have been long

time supporters of the University of Texas. They were responsible for bringing the Leon Uris collection to the campus's Harry Ransom Center and were instrumental in other academic studies and programs, having contributed academic and athletic scholarships.

Fiercely loyal to UT athletic teams, Helen developed personal friendships with many coaches and players. The Saturday before her death, she attended a UT basketball game, cheering the team to victory. Beginning with the tenure of Coach Darrell Royal, Helen sent limericks written in orange ink to coaches prior to each game. All of her checks, both personal and business, were signed in orange ink.

Because of her daughter, Tina, and son-in-law, Paul's affiliation to Texas A&M University, Helen generously contributed to the Hillel Foundation at College Station.

People from all walks of life, both here and abroad, from dignitaries to the humblest of people, enjoyed receiving letters from Helen. She wrote to whomever she felt "deserved" to hear from her. She signed these letters "Me," and everyone knew who "Me" was.

Rabbi Neil Borovita described Helen as "one of the great Jewish women of our time."

Helen is survived by her beloved husband Milton T. Smith; daughter Lonnie Karotkin and her companion, Albert Taub; daughter Tina Gardner

and her husband Paul Gardner; grandchildren Brian Karotkin and wife Mary; Leslie Karotkin of Denver; Michael Karotkin and Todd Gardner; great-grandchildren, Wesley and Jennifer Karotkin; sister and brother-in-law, Shirley and Ted Weinberger of Great Neck, NY; and nieces and nephews. The family thanked Donna Walker and her daughter, Sharika for the loving care they gave Helen and to the emergency staff at the Austin Heart Hospital.

Funeral services were held at Congregation Beth Israel with interment at Temple Beth Israel III Cemetery in Pflugerville. Pallbearers were Paul Gardner, Albert Taub, Bernard Snyder, Brian Karotkin, Michael Karotkin and Todd Gardner. Honorary pallbearers were Irving Ravel, Louis Hirschfeld, Danny Fleschman, Marvin Kanter, Sam Shanblum, Irwin Salmanson, Joe Reichman, Sam Rosenfield, Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, and the past presidents of Congregation Beth Israel.

To honor Helen's memory, the family requested donations to the Moshana Foundation at J.P. Morgan Chase Bank, c/o Marc Irvin, PO Box 550, Austin, TX, 78789 or to a charity of your choice.

The obituary notice in the *Austin American-Statesman* ended with the following postscript: "Let everyone know, till the very end, that she was in control and did it her way. Helen, we love you and will miss 'Me.'"

Needed: Veterans' Stories

Many stories have been written about Veterans of all the wars in our history. Many have been written about the heroics of Jewish war Veterans. However, not many have been written about Texas Jewish war

veterans. The Museum of Jewish Military History in Washington D.C. has a great many stories of Jews in WWII, however, we have found it to be incomplete. These stories are incomplete and are not personal,

unless someone forwarded their story to the museum or the veteran received the Medal of Honor.

Mr. Howard Leavitt of Riverside, California, has attempted to list as

continued on page 18

Miracles Still Happen

By Fay Brachman

My Brother, Melvin Rosenthal, was inducted into the US Army in 1941. After he completed his basic training course he was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky to join a tank destroyer battalion.

His special buddy at Fort Knox - and overseas - was a fellow soldier named Gross. During the course of their training they gave each other the names and addresses of their closest family members. They thought that if their 'outfit' was slated to be in dangerous situations, they could inform each other's families if such an event happened.

Melvin's tank destroyer battalion was a part of the invasion of North Africa. They were involved in many clashes with the troops of Rommel and his Afrika Corps.

When we read about the invasion of Italy by the Allied Forces we suspected that Melvin's battalion was a part of it. We had not had mail from Melvin for several weeks, and that made us even more suspicious.

Leon and I had moved back from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Fort Worth. We had finally found an apartment in Fort Worth. However, we were unable to attain a telephone.

I received a letter from Melvin's soldier/friend - Gross. The letter explained that the tank destroyer that

they occupied in the invasion of Anzio was hit by direct fire. Melvin was wounded. The tank destroyer was badly damaged. Water was rising higher and higher inside the tank destroyer.

Gross wrote that he held Melvin's head out of the water until the medics arrived. He wrote that although Melvin was unconscious, he was mumbling. Therefore, he was still alive.

He asked me to give the 'news' to my parents.

What to do? I did not have a telephone to call my parents. Leon had taken our car to work that day - it was his day to take the carpool group.

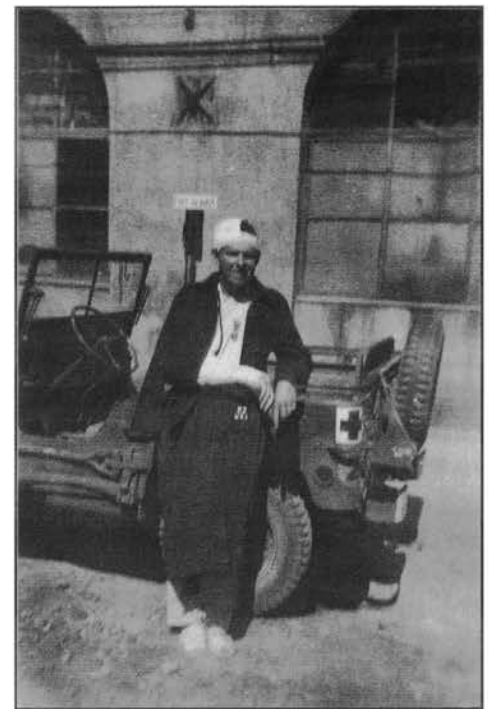
I went across the street to a neighbor with a telephone to call my Mother. Frankly, I did not know how to break the news. I said things like, 'Good morning, and how are you.' About that time Mother's doorbell rang. She asked me to wait a minute because the mailman always rang the bell when he had a letter for her from Melvin. A moment later she read me the letter. It was from my cousin, Manny Rosenthal.

Manny was an officer in the quartermaster division near Anzio. One of his group had been in the army hospital nearby. On his return to his job he asked Manny if he had a

relative from Fort Worth named Melvin Rosenthal! Melvin was in the same ward with him!

Manny immediately got permission to visit the hospital. He took his camera along. Therefore, the very same day that we got the letter from Gross saying that Melvin had been injured we got the letter from Manny. The pictures that were enclosed showed Melvin walking around - swathed in bandages but alive and walking!!!

Yes, miracles still happen.



Veterans, continued from page 17

many stories as he could find on a national level in his books, first on *American Jews in the U.S. Marine Corps* and the second entitled *Footsteps of David: Common Roots, Uncommon Valor*. Some of his stories included Texas Jewish War Veterans, but there are probably hundreds more that have not been documented.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society in our attempt to preserve some of this history is requesting that all Texas Jewish war veterans (of any

war) write their personal stories, any awards or decorations, where you served, how long in the armed services and anything you feel might be of interest to your personal history.

Realizing that a lot of veterans are approaching the age whereby a lot of the events are being forgotten, it is imperative that we get these stories in any format that feels comfortable to you, and even if you want to record it on tape orally. Your stories will either

be published in our newsletters, put in our archives or published in a book that is now in the planning stages. Future generations will know what you accomplished for the United States and for the Jewish people.

Anyone who would like to contact Howard Leavitt may do so at 909-682-2547 or by e-mail at lefty@aol.com.

"God gave us burdens - also shoulders. Service is the rent we pay for living in a free society."

Texas Philanthropist is Guest Author at TJHS Fall Board Meeting

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Bernard Rapoport, former president of the University of Texas Board of Regents, will be among the guest authors featured at the Fall Board Meeting of the TJHS during the last weekend of October in Shreveport, Louisiana. Rapoport, whose autobiography was published this spring by the University of Texas Press, will appear on a book-and-author panel Sunday morning, October 27, 2002, at the Shreveport Sheraton Hotel. The meeting coincides with the annual gathering of the Southern Jewish

Historical Society, which is planning a weekend of joint programs for the combined groups.

Rapoport's memoir, called "Being Rapoport: Capitalist with a Conscience," begins with his father's radical activities in revolutionary Russia. Bernard, born in poverty in 1917 San Antonio, had a youthful acquaintance with Marxists and New Deal economists that shaped his outlook and his conscience. In 1951 he founded the American Income Life Insurance Co., which grew into a multi-million dollar enterprise. Using

his wealth to support education, social justice, and liberal political causes, Rapoport was named one of *Fortune* magazine's 40

most generous philanthropists. "Being Rapoport" is co-authored by Texas historian Don Carleton with an introduction by Bill Moyers.



Jewish Heritage Writing Competition

The Texas Jewish Historical Society announces the initial start of the Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage Writing Competition that offers adults, ages 50 and over, to pass on reflections on the Jewish heritage to the generations of tomorrow. The competition is open to both amateur and professional writers. Each participant receives a Certificate of Achievement, plus the top three winners will receive a monetary prize.

The contest was started by TJHS member Jerry Wolens of Boca Raton, Florida in honor of his wife Sylvia and is now in its 11th year in Southern Florida. The contest has received a great amount of publicity and recognition by both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. In the last competition, over 200 poems and short stories were submitted from all over the country and Canada. They include tales of "Jewish love, respect, bravery and family, as well as Jews helping other Jews."

Entries may be as a single paragraph, or as long as 2,000 words — but no longer. Each entry should have a word count listed and handwritten work will be accepted, as long as it is legible.

Each entry should also include a four to six line biography of the writer. Entries sent for submission will be judged on originality and content and may be edited for publication in the TJHS Newsletter and/or local media.

Every entry must include the name, age, address and telephone number of the author and be titled on each page.

Up to four entries may be submitted, however the materials will not be returned, so it is suggested that the author retain a copy of the submission. The winners will be announced at the annual Gathering of the Society in the spring of each year and the deadline for submission is FEBRUARY 1ST OF EACH YEAR. The Texas Jewish Historical Society will compile all entries and submit them to our archives at the University of Texas.

All entries should be sent to:

Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage

Writing Competition

c/o Texas Jewish Historical Society

P.O. Box 10193

Austin, TX 78766-0193

For further information, contact Jack Gerrick at 817-927-8765.

New Book About Jews in Dallas

An important new addition to Dallas' rich cultural tapestry was written by former archivist and director of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, Rose G. Biderman. *They Came to Stay, The Story of the Jews of Dallas 1870-1997* (Eaton Press, \$29.95) focuses on the growth and contributions of the city's Jewish community. "In the beginning came the 'German Jews,' " the author notes. "They came as pioneers, along with everyone else, but sometimes they brought something extra: more scholarship or entrepreneurial instincts and urban skills. Jews left the restrictions of Europe and came for freedom and economic opportunity." Then other Jews arrived from Eastern Europe and also made Dallas their home. The author shows how these immigrant groups helped shape businesses, cultural and civic affairs and urban life in ways that continue to define Big D.

Texas Jewish Historical Society 2002-2004

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Waco, TX 76714

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Tyler, TX 75701

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Houston, TX 77005

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Waco, TX 76798

Texas State Historical Assoc.

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Austin, TX 78712

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Fay Brachman

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