

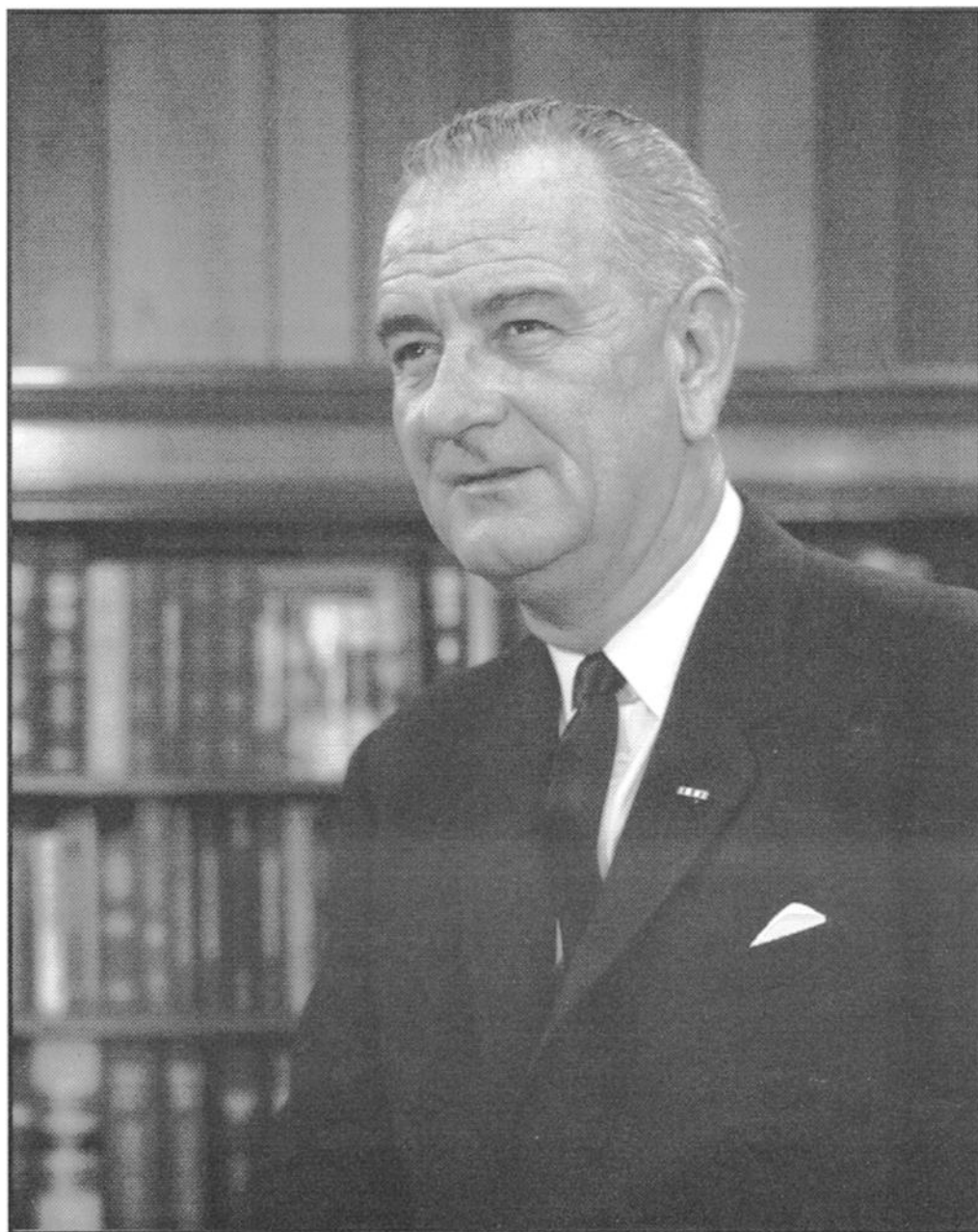
# Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas  
Established 1980

TEXAS JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

November, 2002

## Lyndon B. Johnson: A Friend to the Jews





## From the Prez

The summer Board Meeting in Kerrville was enjoyed by 17

Board Members and 8 guests. Thank you to Mitzi Milstein for chairing the weekend activities. The hill country provided a respite from the city heat. All attended a delicious dutch treat dinner at Patrick's Restaurant on Saturday night. Items discussed at the Sunday morning Board Meeting were: membership (837 families, which includes 58 new members in 2002), book project, new traveling exhibit, Shreveport meeting, winter Board Meeting in Tyler, and the 2003 Gathering. A luncheon was held at the Y. O. Ranch Resort Hotel after the meeting was adjourned.

Those members who traveled to Branson, Missouri on October 20-24, on the tour led by Don Teter, reported they had a great time. Afterwards, they joined with some 60 members of

the Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS) to enjoy a weekend of education and camaraderie with the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) in Shreveport Louisiana on October 25-27. Programing on Friday included a Jewish tour of Shreveport with a stop at the old Jewish cemetery, lunch at Agudath Achim Synagogue, programs on everything from Jewish Confederates with Robert Rosen and TJHS member Gary Whitfield, of Fort Worth, to Dr. Jonathan Sarna, of Brandeis University, very entertaining talk following dinner and services at Temple B'nai Zion. A full day of scholarly programming followed on Saturday, ending with a thought provoking presentation by Dr. Paul Gaston, University of Virginia. After our Quarterly Board Meeting on Sunday, presentations were made, including a panel of authors with TJHS member Rose Biderman of Dallas. We Texans enjoyed true Southern Hospitality and helped make the SJHS annual meeting the largest in their history. I tip my hat to TJHS

member Hollace Weiner, who ran an extraordinary meeting as President of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

"Howdy Y'all," our new traveling exhibit, was displayed for the first time in Shreveport. Thanks go to Helen Wilk and Hollace Weiner for working with the Institute of Texan Cultures on the development of this exhibit. "Howdy 'Y'all," as well as our original traveling exhibit, "Passages," are available for display. Contact Jack Gerrick for scheduling.

I hope to see you at the Winter Board Meeting in Tyler on January 24-26, 2003. Registration information will be mailed later.

### DEADLINE:

The deadline for the next newsletter is **February 1**

## Historical Texas Synagogues

Send Historical Texas Synagogues note cards when corresponding. 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



## Order Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity: \_\_\_ Pack A @ \$10.85 each \_\_\_ Pack B @ \$10.85 each **Discount to shops (40%)**

Shipping: 1-5 packs: \$3; 6-10 packs: \$4; Over 10 add \$ .50 per pack Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make check or money order payable to: **The Texas Jewish Historical Society** and send it with this form to:  
TJHS, c/o Dorothy Harelik, 602 Bell Street, Hamilton, TX 76531. 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.



## Letter From the Editor *or Freedman Slips*

Elsewhere in the Newsletter, I have addressed the problem with the foul up by our *current* printer with the August 2002 lack of last names on the address labels. Well folks, it couldn't have been too great a disaster since we heard complaints from a lot of people who would not have been able to complain if they hadn't gotten their copies!

### SO MANY READ, SO FEW WRITE

What I do find disconcerting is that I hear from so many people telling me how much they enjoy reading the Newsletter and the stories. Disconcerting? Disturbing? Upsetting? All of these adjectives are descriptive of my emotion because so very many are reading – **not writing their own stories!** I thought one of

the premises of this organization was to share our histories. And yet, when I have personally asked members to write their stories, I get some very interesting excuses. (*My father used to tell me that a million excuses are not worth one job well done.*) I have even asked several people to give me leads so I could track down stories on people whose stories deserve telling. Results – *gornisht!*

In this 24 page Newsletter, there are **three** family histories or stories of Jews in Texas. If I went over all of the past issues, I would probably find this is a high average. The rest of the 24 pages are made up of “boiler plate” and non-Jewish histories. The lead story about President Johnson came from Claudia Anderson, Archivist at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum in Austin. I am truly appreciative of her sharing, as I am for the

other three. But folks, we have over 800 members who express their interest in the **Texas Jewish Historical Society** and pay their \$36 for membership. But where are **your** family history contributions to the Society?

While I have enjoyed editing this Newsletter, frustration is setting in. Without help from the members of the **Texas Jewish Historical Society**, the gratification gained from the job is rapidly diminishing. Attaboys are great, but as my dad used to tell me, the foam on an ice cream soda tastes good, but it's not too filling...

*Buddy Freed*

### Dates to Remember:

TJHS Winter Board Meeting  
January 24-26, 2003  
Tyler, Texas

TJHS Annual Gathering  
April 25-27, 2003  
Dallas, Texas

## Texas Jewish Historical Society Website

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

**E-mail address: [txjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:txjhs@yahoo.com)**  
**Web Site address: <http://www.txjhs.org>**

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

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



# President Lyndon B. Johnson: Friend to Refugees

by Claudia Anderson

On December 30, 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird, attended the dedication in Austin, Texas, of the new synagogue built by Congregation Agudas Achim. Afterward, Mrs. Johnson wrote in her diary, "... as we started out of the synagogue, person after person plucked at my sleeve and said, 'I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for him. He helped me get out.' That both frightens you and makes you happy." These words lend credence to stories that have circulated in Austin for years that during the Holocaust Lyndon Johnson helped Jewish refugees enter the United States and settle in Texas. Scholars frequently contact the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, the depository for President Johnson's papers, asking to see other material that will verify the stories, but the Library's files include only cryptic references to Johnson's role, references like the words of Lady Bird Johnson's diary. The Johnson Library is interested in identifying those who were aided, and the Library would like to do oral history interviews with anyone who has information about LBJ's role.

There is abundant evidence of Johnson's affection for the Jewish community. It was demonstrated clearly in the summer of 1963, when Jim Novy, the chairman of the building committee at Congregation

Agudas Achim, asked Lyndon Johnson, then Vice President of the United States, to speak at the dedication of the congregation's new synagogue. LBJ, a longtime friend of Novy, sent word that he could attend on November 24. Johnson was going to be in Texas accompanying President Kennedy on a whirlwind fundraising trip to San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Austin. Then, on November 22, 1963, during the motorcade through Dallas, the unthinkable happened. President Kennedy was assassinated. Hours later, Lyndon Johnson was sworn in

by Judge Sarah Hughes as the thirty-sixth President of the United States. Congregation Agudas Achim cancelled the dedication ceremonies and joined the stunned nation in mourning the death of President Kennedy.

On December 12, 1963, Novy sent a telegram to Johnson asking when he could come to the dedication and suggesting he plan to attend the ceremony while in Texas for the Christmas holidays. President Johnson agreed to attend the ceremonies on Monday, December 30, becoming the second President to participate in the dedication of a



*Signing of the Immigration Act at Liberty Island, New York. LBJ signs the Immigration Act as Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Lady Bird Johnson, Muriel Humphrey, Sen. Edward (Ted) Kennedy, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, and others look on.*

## The Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter

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



Charles B. Hart (Temple)  
Buddy Freed (Fort Worth)  
Sandra Freed (Fort Worth)  
Charles and Jan Hart (Temple)  
Hollace Weiner (Fort Worth)  
Nancy Polunsky (San Angelo)  
Alexa Kirk (Fort Worth)

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

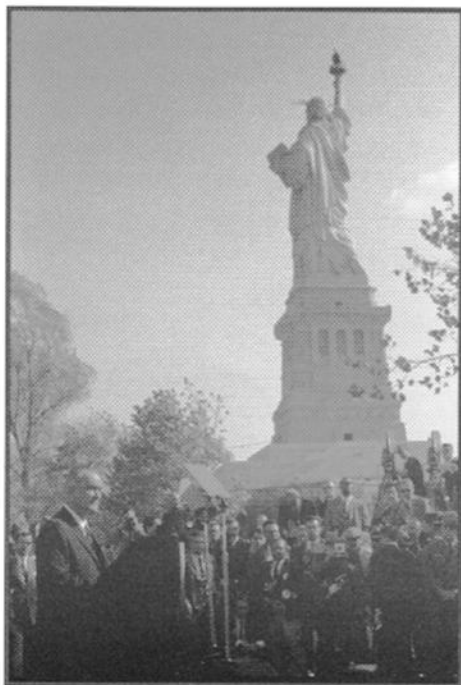
synagogue. President Eisenhower had spoken at the dedication of the Washington Hebrew Congregation temple in 1955.

Johnson's speech at the dedication focused on the need for tolerance and brotherhood. It was appropriate for the occasion and was well received, but the truly remarkable words of the

*continued on page 5*

day were Novy's, not Johnson's. When Novy introduced the President, he first talked about the help he received from Johnson in arranging to bring a number of Novy's family members out of Poland and into the United States. Then Novy went on to make an astonishing revelation. In his heavily accented voice, he said, "In 1940, Mr. Johnson was chairman of the NYA [National Youth Administration] ... and he authorized to bring refugees to Texas. At that time ... Jesse Kellam was representing here ... while Mr. Johnson was the overall chairman.... All I can remember is that we did get a lot of refugees here ... which the State did not allow." He goes on to say that the NYA lodged and trained refugees while the Joint Distribution Committee, an organization that provided refugee assistance, appointed Novy to arrange for their food.

Although Johnson was serving in Congress by 1940, Novy seemed to be saying that Johnson helped to bring Jewish refugees into Texas and



*LBJ speaks to the assembled crowd at the signing of the Immigration Act on Liberty Island.*

arranged for the NYA to house and train them. The NYA was one of the many agencies set up during Franklin Roosevelt's administration to help bring the country out of the Great Depression. It provided assistance and training for young men and women. LBJ became the state NYA

director in Texas in 1935, the youngest NYA state director in the U.S. He resigned in 1937 and successfully ran for Congress in Texas' Tenth Congressional District, the District that includes Austin. Jesse Kellam, Johnson's deputy at the NYA, took over as director, and held the position until 1943. Johnson's office files from that period indicate that Johnson, as Congressman, maintained a strong interest in the Texas NYA, and Kellam frequently reported to his former boss.

Novy's words of introduction went unnoticed until 1989 when a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas, Louis Gomolak, listened to a recording of the speech while doing research for his dissertation. The first half of Gomolak's dissertation focused on LBJ's experience in matters related to foreign policy before and during World War II. These experiences included Johnson's early recognition of the dangers that Hitler and Nazism



*President Lyndon B. Johnson speaks at the Dedication of Congregation Agudas Achim*

posed for the world, Johnson's assistance to Novy and others in getting friends and relatives out of Europe and into the United States, and Johnson's relationship with the Jewish community in central Texas. An article about Gomolak's research appeared in the newsletter of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, Winter 1992.

In his dissertation, Gomolak wrote about Novy's revelation that he worked with Johnson to bring refugees into Texas, lodged them with the NYA, and helped train and integrate them into life in Texas. Gomolak referred to stories that "Johnson endeared himself to the tiny Austin Jewish community and other Jews statewide by slipping hundreds of their persecuted co-religionists into Texas, first by way of Cuba, and when problems arose there, via Mexico and South America." Gomolak coined the term "OPERATION TEXAS" to

*continued on page 6*

describe the effort. Gomolak went on to say that he had not been able to find paper documentation to support Novy's statements, nor was Gomolak able to find any refugees who would discuss Johnson's role. Kellam's NYA office files, which might contain

day after the Johnsons met, a day that they spent together, and the day LBJ is said to have first proposed marriage. Johnson clearly recognized how dangerous Nazism was, and his choice of a gift suggests that he discussed the subject with Lady Bird very early in their relationship.

Four years later, as a first term Congressman, Johnson was helping Jim Novy get his relatives out of Europe. Louis Gomolak, in his dissertation, outlines Johnson's assistance in bringing members of

immigrate to the United States. This is the one successful case that is well-documented at the Johnson Library. The Library has an oral history interview with Leinsdorf, a Jewish refugee who eventually became the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. This story began when Charles Marsh, a very close Johnson friend and political supporter who published the *Austin Statesman* and the *Austin American*, asked Johnson to assist Leinsdorf. Leinsdorf had come to the U.S. on a visitor's visa that was about to expire. While he was in the United States, Germany had taken control of Austria, and Leinsdorf feared returning to his homeland. Although he had a contract to work for the Metropolitan Opera, the Labor Department refused his application for a two-year extension on his visa. At that time, immigration to the U.S. was controlled through a restrictive quota system, and unless something was done, Leinsdorf would have had to leave the country. Johnson arranged for Leinsdorf to go to Cuba, where he received a permanent visa from the American Consul and was able to reenter the United States under the German quota. State Department records show that the American



*Jim Novy, Lady Bird Johnson and President Lyndon B. Johnson bow their heads at the Dedication.*

clues to the operation, apparently no longer exist.

The Johnson Library has only a few pieces of the puzzle. The evidence begins in 1934. At that time LBJ was working in Washington, D.C. as an aide to Congressman Richard Kleberg of South Texas. On a trip home to Austin, Johnson met Lady Bird Taylor whom he courted for eleven weeks before they married. During their courtship, Johnson gave Lady Bird a book of essays about the evils of Nazism. The book, *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization*, edited by Pierre Van Paassen and James Waterman Wise, was inscribed: "9/1/34, To Bird — In the hope within these pages she may realize some little entertainment and find reiterated here some of the principles in which she believes and which she has been taught to revere and respect — LBJ." September 1, 1934, appears to be the

Novy's family to the United States. In 1938, Novy and his son, David, made a trip to Europe. According to Gomolak, Johnson arranged for Novy to have blank visas; Novy could fill in the names of relatives he was able to bring back from Germany and Poland. There are no records at the LBJ Library showing how Johnson was able to get blank visas, but it must be an interesting story.

The same year, Johnson helped the Austrian conductor, Erich Leinsdorf,



*President Lyndon B. Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson greet members of Congregation Agudas Achim.*



Consul, a man named Coert Du Bois, was both sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish refugees who reached Cuba and responsive to requests from Congressmen.

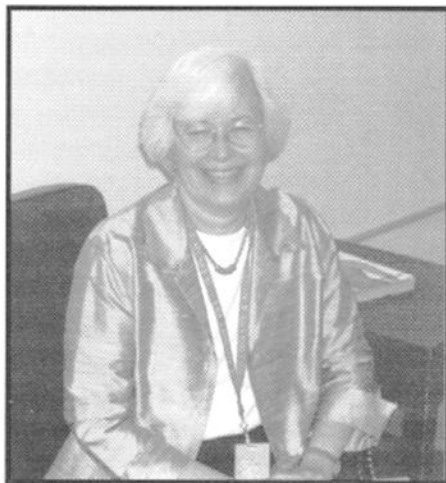
The Johnson Library also has an oral history interview with Rabbi Abram Vossen Goodman who was with Austin's Temple Beth Israel in 1939. In the interview, the Rabbi tells about his efforts to bring his cousin, Herman Winter, to the United States from Germany. Goodman contacted his Congressman, Lyndon Johnson, who arranged passage for Winter on a ship to Mexico in September 1939. Johnson told Goodman that eventually, his cousin would be able to come into the U.S. from Mexico. Tragically, the vessel did not depart from Europe because war broke out between Poland and Germany. Herman Winter died after being arrested and sent to work in a quarry.

Archivists at the Johnson Library have also talked to members of the Schmidt family. Jacob Schmidt, the founder of the Yaring's stores in Austin, asked Johnson's help in bringing his wife's sister, Lea Deutsch, her husband, Andor, and their son, Michael, to the United States from Hungary in 1939. The Deutschs entered the United States through New York and came to Texas, settling in Seguin where they operated Deutsch's Department Store.

As President, Johnson made it a priority to change the immigration laws of this country and rid it of the restrictive quota system that kept many Jewish refugees from entering the United States during the Holocaust. October 3, 1965, at the foot of the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, President Johnson signed Public Law 89-236, an act amending the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. This landmark law ended the quota system that began with the 1921 Quota Act, and

established new criteria for admittance to the United States. Beginning in 1965, immigrants would be admitted based on their skills and their close relationship to those already here. At the signing, President Johnson said of the Act, "...it does repair a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American Nation." The President asked Erich Leinsdorf to come to Liberty Island, and he was among the guests assembled by the White House to witness the signing of the historic Act.

Because of the lack of evidence, particularly for "OPERATION TEXAS," some historians have suggested the stories that Johnson helped hundreds of people escape Hitler are an exaggeration, an unsupported legend. If the stories do have substance, hopefully the evidence still exists. The Johnson Library is collecting material, including oral histories, in an attempt to document Johnson's actual role. The staff at the LBJ Library would appreciate any information about Johnson's efforts to promote Jewish immigration, including the role that the National Youth Administration and Jesse Kellam may



*Claudia Anderson, Archivist at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library & Museum in Austin, Texas*

have played. Those with information can contact Claudia Anderson at 512-916-5137, extension 259. Any information that the Library receives will be added to the Library's files and made available to scholars studying Lyndon Johnson and Jewish immigration in the 1930s and 1940s.

## Museum Needs Your Artifacts

**The Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust**, in New York City, is planning an exhibition about Jewish GI's in world War II. We are seeking artifacts [not photographs] that show how local Jewish communities offered assistance, hospitality and friendship to the Jewish GI's who trained at bases in Texas. We are interested in USO materials, Jewish Welfare Board materials, or materials from personal collections.

"Ours to Fight For: American Jews in World War II," is planned to open in September 2003, and remain on view for a year. There is a possibility that the exhibition will travel after that.

We look forward to hearing from you about material that you might be willing to lend.

From: Bonnie Gurewitsch, Archivist/curator.

Please contact Don Teter with whatever materials you have regarding this request, and he will coordinate the project for the TJHS.

Don Teter  
5013 Glenhaven Drive  
Baytown, TX 77521  
281-424-5829  
donte@hal-pc.org

# The Markman Family

by Dan Markman

Probably my father's proudest moment occurred in 1947 when the judge presiding at dad's naturalization ceremony in Waco said, "Mr. Markman, the United States needs more citizens like you."

Dad left home in 1924 when he was 18 to join two sisters already in Texas. From Kalankovitch, Belorus, he traveled to Riga, Latvia, and then by rail to La Harve, France. Dad sailed from France to Cuba. Immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States had essentially been closed three years earlier.

Dad supported himself for three years in Cuba as a cobbler. Because of his limited Spanish he subsisted the first few weeks on milk and bananas. Throughout his life he remembered his introduction to mosquitoes the first night he spent there.

He left Cuba via British Honduras and made a perilous journey to New York City where he entered the United States. After six weeks there he made his way to Texas to join his sisters and cousins already there.

My dad, Phillip, met Mom, Ruby Ginsburg, on a blind date at a 1935

New Year's eve party in Houston. They married six weeks later. Mom was active in extracurricular activities while in public school and was a championship level speller. She married Dad when she was 21. Like Dad, Mom was the youngest of eight siblings. She had one sister and six brothers and Dad had one brother and six sisters.

Their first child, Marilyn, was born in Houston in 1936. (Marilyn died from cancer in 1984). Soon after she was born, the new family moved to Hamilton in central Texas where dad worked for his brother-in-law, Isaac Commer, in a feed store and hatchery. Isaac was married to dad's sister, Mamie. Another sister, Fruma Fridkin lived in Tyler, cousins Jack and Sadie Smith were residents of Richmond as was another cousin, Sam Reinke.

In 1938 Dad, Mom and Marilyn moved to Meridian, the county seat of neighboring Bosque County, 47 miles northwest of Waco. Three sons, Dan, Mickey, and Jack were born there. Mickey died at age 13 months from polio. For most of our 22 years in

Meridian we were the only Jewish family in the county. Mike Novy operated a dry goods store in Meridian for a few years in the 1950s.

Dad built a thriving business in Meridian. In 1942, he built a store that eventually extended the length of the block. The front part of the

building housed a retail feed, seed, and fertilizer operation. The middle portion contained a chicken hatchery and broiler pens. A seed processing plant was in the back part where mostly oats were processed for sale to wholesale seed houses in east and southeast Texas.

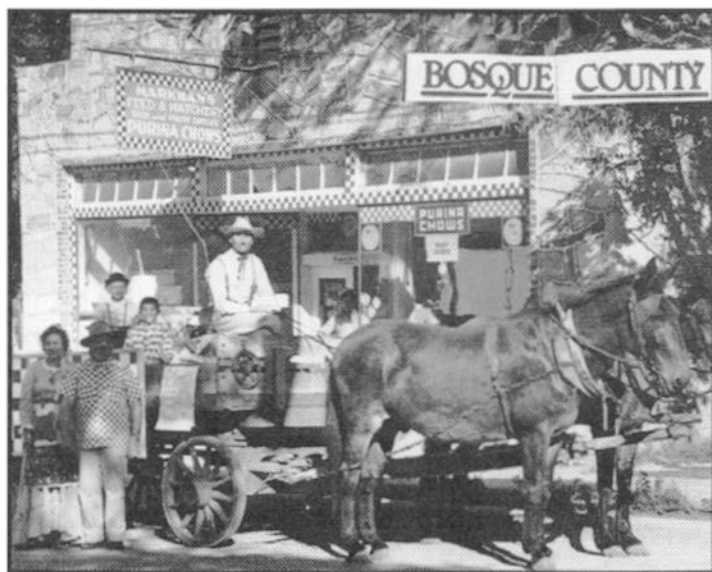
The family was very respected in the community and county. Dad was honored by the local Civic Club as an "Outstanding Citizen." He was an active Mason and Mom was a leader in the local Eastern Star.

Marilyn graduated Salutatorian of the 1954 Meridian High School class. I was selected as the "Outstanding History Student" and was All-District and Captain of the 1959 Meridian High School Yellow Jacket football team. Jack was an outstanding baseball player.

We were a totally assimilated and essentially secularized Jewish family. While we were members of Agudath Jacob synagogue in Waco and, as children we did attend Sunday school for three years and Marilyn was confirmed, but our only other identification with Judaism was attendance at High Holy Days services. There was nothing in our home that would have identified us as Jewish. Indeed, it was not unusual for the children to attend services at the local Baptist and Methodist churches with our friends.

In 1960, with the children grown, Dad sold the business and moved with Mom back to Houston. They owned and operated apartment houses until retirement.

Mom's dad, Harry Ginsburg, and his eldest brother left Belorus for Galveston in 1907. Her mother, Rose Kesselman Ginsburg, and five siblings arrived two years later. They were



Markman's Feed and Hatchery

continued on page 9



---

---

# Was President Lyndon Baines Johnson a Righteous Gentile?

*Reprinted from the Winter, 1992 edition of the TJHS Newsletter*

*As we enter into the Presidential primary season, it is a nice idea to take a look back. In a recently published biography of LBJ, author Robert Dallek (professor of history at UCLA) sheds some light on a little-known aspect of the Texas politician. Much of this information was taken from a review and report by Tom Tugend, a reporter of the Texas Jewish Post who also made contact with Professor Louis Gomolak at SWTS.*

As a provincial Texas politician the 1930s, Lyndon Baines Johnson clearly foresaw the danger facing European Jewry and, ignoring regulations, clandestinely arranged for the entry of hundreds of Jewish refugees in the United States.

Louis S. Gomolak, a former journalist and now a professor of diplomatic and Middle East history at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on LBJ's early foreign affairs background, and in doing so, shed some astonishing, light on Johnson's relationships with Jews.

Why did Johnson, a highly pragmatic and often ruthless politician, take such an early interest in the fate of the Jews? (This is evidenced by a book that he gave Lady Bird as an engagement gift - *Nazism: An Assault*

*on Civilization* published just one year after Hitler assumed power. The book contained chapters by 18 authors and uncannily predicted the eventual gassing of the Jews, and that Germany would attack Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, USSR and the USA in that order.)

Historian Dallek says that something in Johnson made him sympathize with the underdog. Gomolak said that it may have had something to do with his grandfather who: "...drilled it into his grandson that to bring about the Second Coming of Christ, the Jews had to return to Israel, that Jerusalem must be their capital and that the boy must always help the Jews."

Johnson's father served in the Texas legislature and was a bitter opponent of the Ku Klux Klan, at a time when such stands took a great deal of courage. The pro-Semitism of his grandfather and the anti-racist stand of his father did much to mold his outlook, Gomolak believes.

After the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938, Johnson, a freshman senator, helped a visiting 25-year-old Austrian Jewish musician gain permanent residence in the United States.

Some years earlier, Johnson had become friends with Jim and Louis Novy, two Jewish brothers who, in

1913, had arrived in Austin from a small town in what was then Czarist Russia. In July 1938, LBJ learned that Jim Novy was planning a trip to Poland and Germany and, according to Gomolak, the congressman phoned Jim, the scrap dealer and told him, "I want you to get out as many Jews as possible, because they are going to be killed."

Johnson, using his later legendary pressure and persuasion tactics, was able to provide Novy with 40 pre-approved but nameless visa blanks, a totally illegal procedure.

His largest and most complex of the Johnson-Novy projects, dubbed *Operation Texas*, was undertaken between 1939 and 1943, when several hundred Jewish refugees were routed - by questionable legal means—via Cuba, Mexico and other Latin American countries to the port of Galveston.

This is hardly the end of the story. Both Dallek and Gomolak are preparing separate books on Johnson's career for the period spanning his vice presidency and presidency, including his actions during the Six Day War in 1967. Although each man is reluctant to reveal his research at this point, Gomolak predicts that many new details of President Johnson's role in aiding Israel will be made public.

*Markman, continued from page 8*

part of the well-known Galveston Movement. Mom and one brother were born in Galveston. Her father owned food service and dry goods stores in, first, Galveston and later in Texas City and Houston.

Dad died in 1985 in Houston. We celebrated Mom's 90th birthday in January 2001. The real estate business started by Dad evolved into

"Markman Brothers Investments" owned and operated by Jack in Houston. I spent 38 years in the Air Force Reserve and retired as a Lt. Colonel. I have been in the insurance business in Houston since 1974.

The story of our family is unremarkable in that it is so similar to the stories of so many other Jewish families who lived and

thrived in small Texas towns. The curious thing about it all, however, is that even though a strong identity as Southerners and Texans was nurtured in the small towns, we still knew that our essence was Jewish and that knowledge persisted and, invariably, was passed on to the succeeding generation.

---

---

# The Ongoing History of Texas Jews

by Ima Joy Gandler, TJHS Archivist

The Barker Texas History Center is now known as the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. It is one of the Nation's premier historical research institutions and is a repository for memorabilia of Texas Jews.

## THIS MEANS YOU!

The current Texas Jewish Historical Society records inventory includes more than the history of the Society. You will find family histories, people by occupation, communities, Texas Jewish organizations, religions, rabbis and cantors, congregations, cemeteries, photographs, audio cassettes, videocassettes and sheet music.

The types of materials, originals or copies that you may add to the Texas Jewish Historical Society Records are as follows:

### Personal Papers

- Family trees, histories, letters
- Diaries or journals
- Passports
- Naturalization papers
- Birth certificates
- Death certificates
- Records and certificates of marriage, circumcisions, consecrations, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and confirmations
- War records
- Scrapbook materials, such as report cards, graduation certificates, programs, invitations, other documentary mementos, obituaries, newspaper clippings
- Recorded or written oral history interviews or memoirs
- Legal records, such as wills, estate materials, deeds, court records, contracts
- Photographs and photo albums, identified or unidentified

### Business papers

*(no active records that are needed to operate)*

- Correspondence
- Ledgers or record books
- Classified files
- Financial records, such as receipts or invoices and inventories
- Legal records, such as contracts, deeds, court records,
- Flyers, calendars, schedules, posters, memos, business cards
- Photographs or photo albums, identified or unidentified

### Printed Materials

- Newspapers
- Books
- Pamphlets
- Posters
- Broad sides
- Maps
- Printed documents

### Literary Productions/Writings

- Essays, poetry and fiction
- Reminiscences or memoirs
- Oral history interviews on cassette tapes or narratives
- Speeches

### Organizational Records

- Charters
- Membership lists
- Minutes
- Yearbooks
- Programs
- Press releases
- Correspondence
- Newsletters or newspapers
- Brochures

### Religious Materials

- Synagogue records: minutes, programs, brochures, bulletins, record books, membership lists
- Prayer books
- Hymn books
- Photographs or photo albums, identified or unidentified
- Cemetery records

### Sound Materials

- Music on disc, cassette tape, or as sheet music
- Oral history interviews

### Artistic materials

- Posters
- Drawings
- Photographs

Within the next year, items in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Records will be online. Not included in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Records inventory are selected archives and manuscript collections in Texas Jewish Collections. To obtain list in this category log on to [www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/Jewish.html](http://www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/Jewish.html).

If you wish to visit the Center for American History Research and Collection Division, it is located in Sid Richardson Hall 2.101 by the LBJ Library. Follow LBJ Library signs to LBJ Library parking area. Sid Richardson Hall is a long white building parallel to Red River and 1-35. From the parking area, walk to fountain side of building, go through set of double glass doors, turn left and enter the first door where someone will help you.

For further information regarding placement of items in the Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, please contact the Center for American History Registrar, Stephanie Malmros, 512-495-4557, FAX 512-495-4542 or e-mail her at [smalmros@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:smalmros@mail.utexas.edu). Prior to donating items, please contact Ima Joy Gandler, 3001 Wooded Acres, Waco, Texas 76710, (254) 772-5717.

Now and in the years to come, those doing research will find that there were Jews, businesses, congregations, and cemeteries in the small and large cities of Texas. It's up to you to document information and to perpetuate the contributions that Jews make to the great state of Texas. Please keep this article for future reference.

# The Wolens Family

By Jerry Wolens

The story of the K. Wolens Company is both amazing and fascinating. The story of the man, Kalman Wolens, is warmhearted and intriguing. Together, the stories tell a tale of the struggle and the realization of a dream of an unskilled religious immigrant to America.

Kalman and Ida Wolens were born in Drohichan, Poland and married at an early age. Like others of the Jewish faith, they were denied the usual rights and privileges of citizenship and their schooling was thus limited to Jewish lore and the study of the Old Testament. Meanwhile, Mr. Wolens' parents worked in a soap factory, accumulating funds for a hopeful family exit to a friendlier promised land.

When the dream was finally realized, they were headed for New York, but because the city was seething with new immigrants, the group was suddenly rerouted to Chicago. With their limited working experience in Poland, Kalman and his boys pooled their assets and entered the soap manufacturing business. But, being no match for the mechanical competition, they were insolvent within months with no funds and limited hopes.

To the rescue came a Jewish social agency in the Windy City. Attempting to settle the refugee problem by sending immigrants to southern and western states, K., Ida and their three sons were given free tickets on the Missouri Pacific to Corsicana, Texas. Here, help came from a benevolent Jewish clothing wholesaler in Chicago who, impressed with the Wolens team, supplied them with "improper" tailored suits and small stores were opened in Palestine, Calvert and Corsicana. But when the ultra-religious Kalman Wolens realized Sabbath observance was almost

impossible in the South, he closed the stores and the family moved back to Chicago.

In 1896, the family once again moved back to Texas. With the kindly financial help of Mrs. Abe Hayman, they started selling spectacles on Corsicana sidewalks, and their success led to their start in the mercantile field.

The very first K. Wolens store opened in Corsicana next to the Woods & Bright grocery on the corner of Beaton and East Fifth Avenue.

In 1914, the young firm was tested when the emerging merchant giant J. C. Penney rented out these facilities from under K. Wolens. Fearless of this competition, Kalman and his sons were determined to make life miserable for the national chain, and after three years of fierce competition, Penney's moved and

*continued on page 18*



*Left to Right: K. Wolens and Jerry Wolens*

## Letter to the Editor

*(One way for an editor to know if his work is read is to make a planned mistake. The absence of your last name on your address label on the August 2002 issue was not intended. Our printer, who also handles the mailings, made the mistake. I have met with Ben, discussed his error and explained that if it happened again he might be hospitalized even longer... His limp will remind him to check all future mailings more closely.)*

*This is an excerpt from a letter I received from Jerry Wolens, one of our members:*

Yesterday I received a copy of the TJHS and as usual I enjoyed reading the contents, that is until I read the address on the cover!

Buddy, I offer one of two suggestions: one, leave out the street address as EVERYONE in Boca Raton (Florida) knows where Jerry and Sylvia live....or, you might include

our last name.

Come to think of it, you might start a fad....of just using the first names (and no last names) on all mailings...such as Leonard & Rose Marie, Fort Worth, Texas, Jack and Joyce or even I.L. & Sandra.

Just a thought.....

(signed) Jerry



---

---

# Marshall, Texas was home to anti-Semitism

*By Ralph Marks.*

*This story was submitted to the Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage Writing Competition. To submit a story to the competition, send c/o the Texas Jewish Historical Society, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193*

A statement in *Time* magazine dated April 3, 2000 (more than 2 years ago) brought back with a memory rush something I experienced at our first High School reunion. Our class graduated from Marshall (Texas) High School in 1938. Our first reunion for some reason was 43 years later, in 1981. Time passes, and at this present year's 2002 writing, there are only a few Jewish persons I know left in Marshall. Two of those are the Kariels. Virtually everyone at Texas Jewish Historical Society knows Audrey Kariel and her husband Louis in Marshall. This writer is older, was ahead of Louis in school. The remote chance of any non-Jewish Marshall person's reading what I write here, leaves me free to speak plainly.

This is about the small but focused anti-Jewish atmosphere my brother and I experienced during the late 1920s and the 1930s. And this also ties in with the article which appeared in *Time* Magazine. A brief digression to one additional tale when my wife, Kayla, young son, Tevin and I attended my 1981 high school reunion. During the reunion visit, I had an on-site flashback, a second example of Marshall's same anti-Semitic mood. A mood certainly not widespread, but which did exist as my brother and I were passing through the public school system. Here is the side-story.

While attending my 1981 reunion, I left my wife and son in the motel a short while and toured Marshall; past my house, drove toward the former high school. Halfway between my home and where the high school (it is now a Junior High) used to be, there

had been in those long-ago days, and still remained this day in 1981, a Gulf service station. The brown brick building itself stood closed, abandoned, as I parked the car. This was the place where two young school-mates used to harass me and pick on me as we converged there almost daily coming from school. I would work magic tricks for the habitués of this station, and was a well-liked young character, except for my two adversaries, Clarence and Robert. For some reason, they never liked me.

Finally, one day in the winter of about 1938, snow was on the ground around this service station building. Surprise! Only one of my two harassers was there. This was the first time Clarence had been alone without his cohort Robert bullying me. I remember that day in 1938 Clarence called me a "dirty Jew." By ourselves, I confess I might have laughed it off with a shrug. In those days, I dreaded getting bones in my face fractured. But in front of an audience of admirers I met with almost every weekday, I couldn't let the "dirty Jew" remark go. I told Clarence "step outside and say that." We wrestled in the snow, and I rubbed snow in Clarence's face, and told him, "take back what you called me." He shouted from beneath me, "I take it back. I'm sorry." The men inside had been watching through rubbed-off frost circles in the cold window panes.

So here, more than 43 years later, in 1981, I was standing at that same, now-closed service station having a flashback. I have since thought of it as a "Clarence catharsis," finally half-shedding that long-remembered Jew-

baiting which had often been received by both my brother and me. The brunt of Myron's bullying had come from a boy named James, while my own scary intimidation had come from Clarence and Robert. I don't think the anti-Semitic feeling existed in most of Marshall's population, but a little goes a long way.

I later picked up wife Kayla and son Tevin (who was only 4 at that time), and we attended lively functions of my 43-year reunion. I made a speech there and won the prize for having the youngest child. (Two of my fellow '38 graduates had great-grandchildren.)

But I digress from my story about the Pope and the 2001 *Time* Magazine article. Attending the 1981 reunion was a lady from my class, who had the brother, James, mentioned above as Myron's tormentor. James sometimes chased Myron home from school. He seemed to pick on my brother at least weekly. So as I talked to Mary, who sometime during the 43 years had married a minister, she said this to me, "Ralph, do you know why James always picked on your brother Myron? Because he is a Jew, and as you know, the Jews killed Christ." I told her, "Mary, you're married to a minister. He certainly should know that is not correct. If your brother James still thinks that, he is dead wrong. It was not the Jews who ordered anyone put to death. If you also think that to be fact, you're badly misguided." That's about all I said, as there was no sense spoiling a pleasant reunion arguing with an old school mate.

*Continued on page 13*

# Texas Jewish Historical Society Donor Cards

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

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

The Texas Jewish Historical Society  
gratefully acknowledges your gift to our  
Endowment Fund

of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
in \_\_\_\_\_ of

An acknowledgement has been sent to the party you specified.

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

## Traveling Exhibit Expands

Due to the popularity of the traveling exhibits and the many miles it has traveled to schools, synagogues and meetings, we have had to refresh and improve our first exhibit. Secondly, in order to keep up with the statewide demand, a second exhibit has been produced in cooperation with the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio.

Exhibit #2 is completely different from the first and brings a totally different insight into the contributions of Jews in the building of Texas. Both exhibits depict the

journey of Jews in tiny villages and shtets in Europe to America and their eventual settlements in the communities of Texas. It shows families, businesses, homes, children, religion, holidays and individuals who made their mark.

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



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

*Marks, continued from page 12*

But Mary's statement bothered me. I couldn't wipe it out physically as I had done with Clarence in the service station's snow. Secondly, it was almost a relief to unearth the reason for James' long-ago dislike of my brother. I had attributed it to Myron's having been the smart kid who wrecked the grading curve, and

that studious sort is often resented. But it had been simply because Myron is Jewish. "The Jews killed Christ," Mary and James believed.

So, the *Time* magazine article which brought Mary back to mind, along with her brother James, dated April 3, 2000, page 31, said "Pope John Paul II is credited with helping draft the Vatican II language *that the*

*Jews did not kill Jesus* recognizing that the Jews *did not kill Jesus* and then as the pope who pushed through the Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Israel in 1993—making a state visit possible."

There, have a bagel, Mary from Marshall. And show that to your brother James!

---

---

# Justice on the Battlefield

By Gerard Meister

Anti-Semitism takes many forms. For the past two millennia the scroll of history documents the virulence of that bigotry from the Crusades to the Pogroms to the Holocaust. It is all there in plain, bloody sight.

But there is another "Gentleman's Agreement" type of intolerance prevalent in our society; a subtle sort of a thing, quiet and not life-threatening. We all know about the restricted country clubs, the gated communities and not pitching to Hank Greenberg when he reached the plateau of fifty-eight home runs. But the battlefield? Weren't all American soldiers fighting the same enemy? Of course they were. Were the Doughboys of World War I and the GI Joes of World War II and Korea all treated the same when it came time for our nation to honor the bravery of its fighting men? That answer is, sadly, a resounding no.

During World War II, some 550,000 Jews from all walks of life served in the armed forces. In fact, although Jews represented only 3.33% of the citizenry, the makeup of the military was 4.23% Jewish. And more than 61,000 Jewish American servicemen were decorated for valor.

In the Great War (World War I) there was even a greater disparity of Jews in the services (5.73%) as opposed to the general population (3.27%). Yet despite the strength of such numbers, in the entire span of the 20th century, only eight (possibly nine) Jews managed to garner our nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor. (Military experts now suggest that about 170 Medal of Honor awards would be a fair statistical extrapolation based the extent of Jewish service.)

Congress has begun looking into this issue with the passage of H.R. 606, popularly called the Leonard Kravitz Jewish War Veteran's Act of

2001. The bill, sponsored by Robert Wexler, D. Fla., directs that "the Secretaries of the military departments conduct a review of military service records to determine whether certain Jewish American war veterans including those previously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross or Air Force Cross, should be awarded the Medal of Honor." (A similar bill passed in 1996 on behalf of Asian Americans yielded 21 Medals of Honor!)

So justice is finally on the way for men like Leonard Kravitz and Barney Ross (yes, that Barney Ross, the boxing champion) and the myriad of other unsung Jewish heroes who served in World War II and Korea. And that's the catch-22 for my quest to get America's "Forgotten Hero," Samuel Dreben, the fighting Jew, the Medal of Honor he deserves. Because Dreben served in the First World War and H.R. 606 looks back only as far as the Second World War, his record will *not* be reviewed. I think it should. Let's take a look at the record and specifically compare Sam Dreben to an American hero and Medal of Honor winner who is familiar to everyone, Sgt. Alvin York.

The battlefield exploits of both men are eerily similar. Both incidents took place in early October on the front lines in France; Dreben's entry on the scroll of history came on the 7th, and York's a day later on the 8th.

Sam's story: The American and French armies were stalemated at St. Etienne by a nest of four German machine guns. Sam, an expert machine-gunner himself, knew those guns would have to be put out of action before his regiment could move forward. Here is the official citation describing Dreben's heroism: "*He discovered a party of German troops going to the support of a machine gun*

*nest in a pocket near where the French and American lines joined. He called for volunteers and with the aid of about 30 men rushed the German positions, captured four machine guns killed 40 of the enemy, captured two and returned to our lines without the loss of a man.*

York's story from an essay by Dr. Michael Birdwell, Assistant Professor of History at Tennessee Technological Institute and a leading authority on Sgt. York: "[his] role as hero went beyond his exploit in the Argonne and continues to both inspire and confound. On October 8, 1918, Corporal Alvin C. York and sixteen other soldiers under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early were dispatched before sunrise to take command of the Decauville railroad behind Hill 223 in the Chatel-Chehery sector of the Meuse-Argonne sector. The seventeen men, due to a misreading of their map (which was in French not English) mistakenly wound up behind enemy lines. A brief fire fight ensued which resulted in the confusion and the unexpected surrender of a superior German force to the seventeen soldiers. Once the Germans realized that the American contingent was limited, machine gunners on the hill overlooking the scene turned the gun away from the front and toward their own troops. After ordering the German soldiers to lie down, the machine gun opened fire resulting in the deaths of nine Americans, including York's best friend in the outfit, Murray Savage. Sergeant Early received seventeen bullet wounds and turned the command over to corporals Harry Parsons and William Cutting, who ordered York to silence the machine gun. York was successful and when all was said and done, nine

*continued on page 15*



# Howdy Y'all: The Texas Jewish Experience

*Creating a second traveling exhibit, by Helen Wilk*

The success of the TJHS traveling photo exhibit, *Passages*, influenced our Board to approve the creation of a second traveling exhibit. The focus of the new exhibit would be the Texas Jewish experience and with that charge I began the search for photos with a unique Texas flavor. The Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio (ITC) had produced the first exhibit and during the recent renovations of the Jewish exhibit at the museum I became aware that they had collected a large number of photographs. With the help of Board member Walter Fine I spent a day going through their files of photos from the Jewish collection and came up with a number of possibilities. During our Houston Gathering Hollace Weiner and Sherry Zander helped me narrow down the selections.

A request in our Newsletter brought some additional photos from TJHS members and Hollace added a few from her own collection. Now I began the research to write captions that would enlighten the viewers. I discovered how difficult it is to produce an interesting, informative, concise caption. Using e-mail communication I turned to Hollace Weiner's journalistic skills for help. Together we wrote and rewrote each caption. A number of phone and e-mail sessions with the members of the staff of the ITC dealt with issues of photo sizes, print colors and fonts, display board materials and sizes. The staff was patient and most helpful and shared their knowledge and expertise to help me make good decisions.

Our plan was to complete the exhibit so that it's first showing would be at the Southern Jewish Historical Society meeting in Shreveport,

Louisiana where the Texas Jewish Historical Society would be participating in their program along with conducting our fall board meeting. Noted photographer, Bill Aron, was scheduled to speak about his new book, *Shalom Y'all Images of Jewish Life in the American South*. The goal of our exhibit, *Howdy Y'all- The Texas Jewish Experience* was to provide a brief view into the contributions of the Jewish citizens to the development of Texas.

Along with underwriting the cost of the creation of the new exhibit the board authorized the funds to renovate the first exhibit, *Passages*, since it's travels all over the State of Texas had taken a toll on it's physical condition. TJHS now offers the use of two interesting exhibits to schools, synagogues and organizations. Please see the ad on page 13 for scheduling information.

*Dreben, continued from page 14*

men had captured 132 prisoners." (In York's autobiography, the crack marksman admits to killing more than 20 German soldiers during the action. Clearly, and in no way, should the deeds of Sgt. Alvin C. York ever be minimized. He was a true hero.)

But there are some significant differences in the Dreben/York comparison.

- Dreben *volunteered*, York was ordered into action
- Dreben was the *sole* non commissioned officer in his group, York had *four* other "non coms" with him: Sgt. Parsons, Acting Sergeant Bernard Early, and Corporals Murray Savage and William Cutting
- Dreben was the *only* member of his force that received the

D.S.C., while in York's engagement *both* Early and Cutting also received a D.S.C., albeit, not until 1927! (My guess is that someone felt slighted and complained to the Army higher-ups. Perhaps a reader could help out.)

If anything can be done to get Samuel Dreben's record reviewed, the drums would have to start beating in Texas. His ties to the Lone Star State are well documented:

- He lived in El Paso for thirteen years and it was the only place he ever owned a home. His only child was born there, died as an infant and is buried there.
- He entered service in World War I as a member of the Texas National Guard.
- In 1921, General Pershing asked Sam to lead the Texas Delegation as an Honorary Pallbearer in the

entombment of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

- In 1925, upon learning of Sam Dreben's untimely death the Texas State Legislature lowered its flag to half-staff and adjourned for the day. A unique tribute indeed for the man that the world called the fighting Jew.

It is for these reasons that a committee of Texans might be successful in getting a local Congressman to sponsor "The Samuel Dreben World War I bill. As General Pershing said in a letter to Sam's widow: "*Sam Dreben was the finest soldier and one of the bravest men I ever knew.*" After all is said and done, we can truly say that America is the land of the free because it is *also* the home of the brave. And Sam Dreben was one of its bravest.

---

---

# An Historical Narrative of Temple Beth El, Corpus Christi, Texas

*This Historical Narrative was for an application for an historical landmark designation.  
by Charles "Les" Henne*

## Introduction

The first Jewish congregation in Corpus Christi worshiped in Temple Beth El on Craig Street for forty-six years. It is a rambling and spacious Spanish Colonial Revival structure tucked away in a former middle-class neighborhood only three miles from the old downtown business district and ten blocks from the Bluff Balustrade on Corpus Christi Bay. After being vacated by Temple Beth El in 1983, it was co-occupied by the Unity by the Sea congregation and the Montessori School for three years and until 1991 by the Montessori School alone. In 1991, the building was purchased by the Metropolitan Community Church of Corpus Christi, which now uses it for a variety of congregational and community outreach activities. The building has been the gathering place of people who have made lasting and memorable contributions to the city and region in business, government and community service. For forty years it was in the care of the towering Rabbi Sidney Abraham Wolf, who became synonymous with it, and whose special place in South Texas history will be discussed below.

## The First Jewish Arrivals in Corpus Christi

Corpus Christi was founded in 1854 on the site of a trading post that provided a commercial connection between shipping in the Gulf of Mexico and markets in the interior as far away as Mexico. In the mid to late 1800s, Jewish immigrants came to Corpus Christi from Europe and the eastern U.S. by circuitous routes, drawn by the promise of opportunity. The earliest and most memorable of

them included Julius Henry, Moritz Lichtenstein, Charles Weil and David Hirsch.

By the time that Julius Henry started his grocery business in Corpus Christi in August 1865 at the age of 26, he had traveled from his native Posen, Prussia to Liverpool, England, Patterson, New Jersey and Key West, Florida. He had worked in a New York City restaurant, a Bowery clothing store, the salt mines in Pennsylvania and as a potato trader in Schenectady, New York. From Key West, where he had gone in search of warmer weather, he sailed to Indianola, Texas, and then overland to El Paso, where he was wounded in a scrape with Indians. Henry became the first Jew in Corpus Christi when a \$4 per month job as a farmhand lured him there in 1858. He found a job in a bakery and then as a shipping clerk for a salt collection operation on the Laguna Madre in nearby Flour Bluff. During the Civil War, he ran a bakery for the U.S. Army in Brownsville and saved enough money to start his own business ferrying groceries from Ingleside across the Bay to Corpus Christi. He served as Alderman and became the Postmaster in 1897.

Moritz Lichtenstein traveled from Germany to Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1852 and then on to Texas in 1857. He fought with Sibley's Brigade during the Civil War. He worked as a store clerk in Galveston and then opened his own stores in Mission, Victoria, Goliad and, in 1870, Indianola. He left Indianola in 1874, one year before it was devastated by a hurricane, and opened a clothing store in Corpus Christi that would become the Lichtenstein's Department Store. His sons, grandsons and at least one

great-grandson continued to work in the Corpus Christi stores that would become a landmark institution endeared to generations of local residents. A. Albert Lichtenstein, a grandson, was drafted to serve as mayor of the city in 1953, a job "he never wanted and didn't campaign for, but which he accepted with the same zeal that marked his life as a private citizen."

Emanuel Morris came to the U.S. from Germany in 1859 at the age of 18. He became a successful entrepreneur in ranching, export-import and retail, operating stores in South Texas in Corpus Christi, Alice, San Diego, Laredo and in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. He kept an office in New York City to support his purchasing activities.

Charles Weil was born in Surbourg, Alsace, France in 1847. He arrived in the U.S. on his nineteenth birthday, February 5, 1866, and in Texas in 1869. He joined a brother-in-law, Emanuel Frank, in a grocery business called Frank and Weil. They imported goods by ship to Corpus Christi, and then to inland ranching communities and on to Mexico by heavily guarded caravans of large, lumbering, high-wheeled Spanish carts. In 1888, Weil branched into ranching, first near Bishop, Texas, and later near Hebbronville. By 1940, the family operation was raising white-faced cattle, horses and mules on 25,000 acres with an additional 15,000 acres of leased land. The Weil grocery business at Lawrence and Mesquite was to become the oldest business in the city until it was closed in 1945.

David Hirsch was born in

*continued on page 17*

Grafensausen near Darmstadt, Germany, on April 15, 1834. He arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1848 and was drawn to Corpus Christi in 1868 by stories of opportunity. He began working in a wood brokerage business and in 1890 founded the Corpus Christi National Bank, of which he was the first president, serving until his death on March 26, 1902. He also served as the president of the city school board and the former David Hirsch Elementary was named after him. His first wife, Jeanette, was the sister of Charles Weil. Their son Joseph, born in 1873, eventually became president of the bank and was active in the local insurance and real estate business and state and national government. During World War I, Joseph founded the Texas Four Minute Speakers (volunteers who spoke at civic events to promote U.S. participation the War) and was involved in the funding for the deepwater port and the University of Corpus Christi, now Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. He was president of the YMCA and Temple Beth El. He was the first local recipient of the B'nai B'rith citizenship award.

In the late 1800s, the Jewish immigrants came from Western Europe, drawn by stories of cheap land, oil booms and opportunity. They traveled by steamer and rail and were diverted in the early 1900s from the congestion of Ellis Island in New York by the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau, popularly known as the Galveston Movement. It was financed by Jacob Schiff, a New York philanthropist, and directed by Rabbi Henry Cohen of B'nai Israel in Galveston, Texas, who sponsored and assisted the immigrants when they arrived in Texas. They settled in the towns along the rail lines to the interior and became part of the development boom that would provide them with the opportunities they sought. Eventually, they came to Corpus Christi and became

part of a growing Jewish community there. Their names and the names of those who followed, increasingly from Central and Eastern Europe, would become associated with the established businesses and professions in the city. The early pioneers of Corpus Christi included the Weils, Hirsches, Cohns, Lichtensteins, Gunsts, Wormsers and Gugenheims. As they were joined by new arrivals, the Grossmans, Goltzmans, Nelsons, Simons, Wolfsons and later the Braslaus, Katzs and Solkas, together they formed a congregation of members who would become "widely known in business and as civic leaders."

### The Congregation Forms

By 1875, the local Jewish community numbered eleven families of forty-five individuals, most of whom had arrived in the previous five years. In a letter that year to the *American Israelite*, a weekly newspaper published in Cincinnati, a local correspondent reported the first *Brit Millah* (ritual circumcision) in the city and the intention to form a Hebrew Benevolent Society, "being the stepping stone to the erection of a Temple." The Jewish population of 1875 was too small to support a Temple, but it was able to establish Hebrew Rest Cemetery on land deeded to Morris and Hirsch, trustees of the Hebrew Benevolent Society, by Captain Richard King. Still, it was not until 1912 that Rabbi Cohen was invited to travel from Galveston to Corpus Christi to organize a congregation, and not until 1913 that there is a record of a "Synagogue" of one hundred members. There is no record of where it met before an item in the newspaper in 1925 mentions the Woodman Hall and then, in 1927, Mueley Hall. It is possible, because of the small size of the congregation and the mix of traditional and reform members, that services were not held on a regular

basis.

On September 30, 1928, a congregation was formally established as Temple Beth El (House of God). It held services in the Max Goltzman home at 1021 Kinney Street, on the deck of the Plaza Hotel, and on the second floor of the Meuly Building (also known as the Labor Temple, now the Pinson Building) at 221 South Staples Street. The congregation raised \$875.20 to purchase a site for a Temple at Craig and Eleventh Streets that was close to the members' homes.

In the spring of 1930, construction began on a wooden Tabernacle, and the Goltzman, Braslau and Grossman families are given much of the credit for the success of the undertaking. On March 7, 1932, the congregation, consisting of approximately sixty families, adopted the Reform ritual with the provision that more traditional members could wear the *Yarmulke* (skullcap) and *Tallis* (prayer shawl), if they wished. Some Orthodox members conducted additional services on High Holy Days in Meuly Hall and the Goltzman residence.

In 1932, because of the "severe financial dislocations" of the Great Depression, construction of a permanent structure was postponed in favor of hiring a permanent rabbi for the congregation. The Hebrew Union College referred the recently ordained Rabbi Sidney A. Wolf with recommendations from congregations in Hamilton, Ohio and Dallas, Texas. From 1924 to 1929, he had attended, simultaneously, the University of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and Hebrew Union College where he was ordained in 1932. He was hired to serve the sixty families in Corpus Christi and subsequently to travel to the small congregation in Victoria once per month.

continued on page 18



*Beth El, continued from page 17*

Rabbi Wolf became the first rabbi to serve in Corpus Christi and at that time the only one to serve the communities in South Texas, south of San Antonio. He was also the first rabbi ever seen in many towns in the region. When he went to speak to the residents of Bishop, Texas, which included four Jewish families, the entire town gathered in the Methodist Church to hear his remarks and attend the service. Rabbi Wolf would become an ecumenical and interracial leader in Corpus Christi and would serve Beth El and other South Texas congregations for forty years.

The discovery of oil in the Saxet Field in 1930 boosted the population

of Corpus Christi and, with it, the size of the Jewish community. In the 1930s, the Corpus Christi congregation numbered about seventy-five families and included members from the surrounding towns of Alice, Kingsville, Amata, Sinton, Robstown, Falfurrlas, San Diego, Aransas Pass, Bishop and Refugio.

In March 1936, Congregation President Alex Weil announced plans to build a permanent sanctuary and Sunday School. Dexter Hamon was selected as the architect and Ira Goldring of Pioneer Construction Co. as the contractor. The new Temple was dedicated on April 5, 1937 with the participation of the Texas *Kallah*

of Rabbis (a gathering of all of the rabbis in Texas) and the choir of the Agudas Achim Synagogue from San Antonio. The place of the Jewish community in Corpus Christi was secure in a tangible expression of its commitment to itself and to the city.

*Editor's note: This has been edited from an article written by Les Henne of Corpus Christi entitled "An Historical Narrative for An Application for an Historical Landmark Designation for TEMPLE BETH EL, 1315 Craig Street, Corpus Christi, Texas". The full narrative will be forwarded to our records in "The Barker."*

*Wolens, continued from page 11*

subleased the location back to the family.

The successful confrontation with a mercantile giant gave Wolens the courage to branch out. With Max heading the ready-to-wear department, Louis heading the men's department and Joe in charge of shoes, the firm opened a store in Wortham and later in Waxahachie, Palestine, Kaufman and Athens. Daisy's husband, Jay Silverberg supervised financial matters.

Ida Wolens, a devoted mother and wife, had an inspiring role in the life of K. Wolens and their four children. Her moral code and fairness left its mark on the family, the Jewish community and Corsicana, itself. Perry McCammon, president of the school board eulogized her as a saint who knew no bounds in helping others. A victim of diabetes, she passed away at the early age of 63.

Throughout their lives, Kalman and Ida remained orthodox and devoted their activities to assist Jews and Judaism in their adopted home in Texas. Early High Holiday services were held on the second

floor of the I.O.O.F. building on Third and Beaton Street and later moved to a small brick structure on Twelfth Street between Collin and Fifth Avenue. Finally, the Wolens played a major role in the building of a new synagogue, Agudas Achim, on North Nineteenth Street across from Halbert City Park.

In the meantime, the company grew in numbers and in stature to where it operated twenty-five K. Wolens Department Stores, fifteen "K's Thrift Centers," four "Bottom Dollar Stores" and two "Fabric Shops."

Mr. K., as he was called by Texans throughout the state, was loved and respected by all who knew him. Like Ida, he delighted in helping others and thrilled in watching their successes. Denied the opportunity in Poland, he invested in East Texas land and was rewarded with an oil hit on the fringe of the Powell oil field. As a result, he was enabled to contribute still more liberally to the needs of his community and hundreds of worthwhile organizations. In 1951, shortly before his demise, he was honored as the Corsicana Man of the Year. One

year later, the community established the K. Wolens Distinguished Service Award, citing a Navarro County citizen for unusual contributions and services.

Thousands of people are indebted to Kalman Wolens and to the social service agency that pointed him to Corsicana Texas.

*Editor's Note: Jerry Wolens was for years, a Fort Worth resident and associated with E. M. (Manny) Rosenthal's Standard Meat Company. Fort Worth was all the poorer for his having moved to Florida. Jerry was very active in our community and was President of B'nai B'rith, the Dan Danciger Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation. He chaired very successful fund raising campaigns and involved himself in many other activities, including teaching at T. C. U. Additionally, Jerry was B'nai B'rith's 1959 Man of the Year. After moving to Florida, Jerry recruited one of the largest missions to Israel, ever. Mr. K. Wolens was Jerry's uncle, his father's brother, who ran the Waxahachie "K. Wolens" store.*

# Sickser's Baby Store Employed Secretary of State

By *Babette Samuels*

The South Bronx in 1950 was the home of a large and thriving community, one that was predominantly Jewish. In the 1950s, the Bronx offered synagogues, mikvas, kosher bakeries and kosher butchers—all the comforts one would expect from an observant Orthodox Jewish community.

The baby boom of the post-war years happily resulted in many new young parents. As a matter of course, the South Bronx had its own baby equipment store. Sickser's was located on the corner of Westchester and Fox, and specialized in "everything for the baby" as its slogan ran. The inventory began with cribs, baby carriages, playpens, high chairs, changing tables and toys. It went way beyond these to everything a baby could want or need.

Mr. Sickser, assisted by his son-in-law Lou Kirshner, ran a profitable business out of the needs of the rapidly expanding child population. The language of the store was primarily Yiddish, but Sickser's was a place where not only Jewish families but also many non-Jewish families could acquire the necessary paraphernalia for their newly arrived bundles of joy.

Business was particularly busy one spring day, so much so that Mr. Sickser and his son-in-law could not handle the unexpected throng of customers. Desperate for help, Mr. Sickser ran out of the store and stopped the first youth he spotted on the street.

"Young man," he panted, "how would you like to make a little extra money? I need some help in the store. You want to work a little?" The tall, lanky black boy flashed a toothy smile back. "Yes, sir, I'd like some work." "Well then, let's get started," said Mr. Sickser. The boy followed his new employer into the store. Mr. Sickser was immediately impressed with the boy's good manners and demeanor. As the days went by and he came again and again to lend his help, Mr. Sickser and Lou both became increasingly impressed with the youth's diligence, punctuality and readiness to learn. Eventually Mr. Sickser made him a regular employee at the store. It was gratifying to find an employee with an almost soldier-like willingness to perform even the most menial of tasks, and to perform them well.

From the age of thirteen until his sophomore year in college, the young man put in twelve to fifteen hours a week, at 50 to 75 cents an hour. Mostly, he performed general labor: assembling merchandise, unloading trucks and preparing items for shipments. He seemed, in his quiet way, to appreciate not only the steady employment but also the friendly atmosphere Mr. Sickser's store offered. Mr. Sickser and Lou learned in time about their helper's Jamaican origins, and he in turn picked up a good deal of Yiddish. In time, the young man was able to converse fairly well with his employers, and more

importantly, with a number of the Jewish customers whose English was not fluent.

At the age of seventeen, the young man, while still working part-time at Sickser's, began his first semester at City College of New York. He fit in just fine with his, for the most part Jewish, classmates—hardly surprising, considering that he already knew their ways and their language. But the heavy studying in the engineering and later geology courses he chose proved quite challenging. The young man would later recall that Sickser's offered the one stable point in his life those days.

In 1993, in his position as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—two years after he guided the American victory over Iraq in the Gulf War, General Colin Powell visited the Holy Land. Upon meeting Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in Jerusalem, he greeted the Israeli with the word "Men kent reden Yiddish" (We can speak Yiddish). As Shamir, stunned, tried to pull himself together, the current Secretary of State continued chatting in his second-favorite language.

General Colin Powell never forgot his early days working at Sickser's in the Bronx.



**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

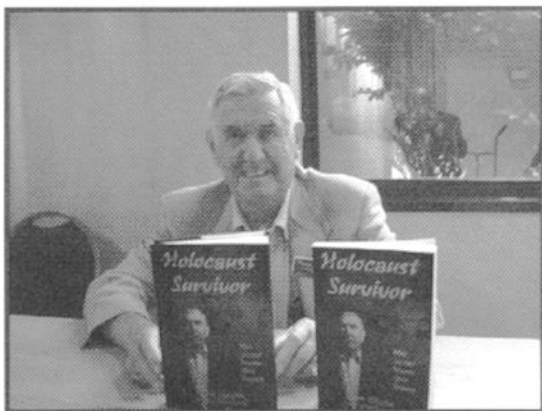
# The Meeting with SJHS in Shreveport



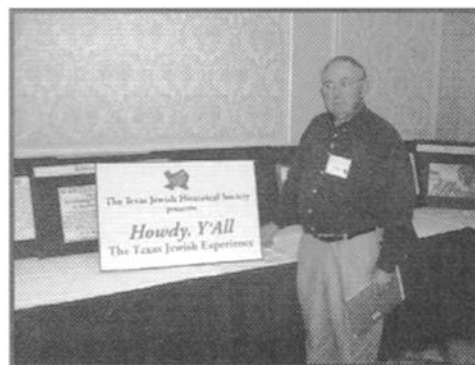
*The bimah of the Shreveport Temple.*



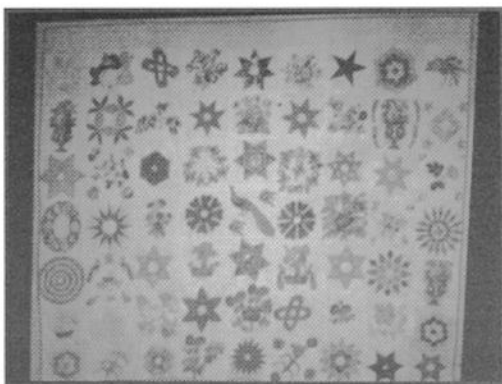
*Fay and Leon Brachman, membership chairs with Howard and Annette Lackman enjoy dinner with others.*



*Mike Jacobs, selling his book Holocaust Survivor.*



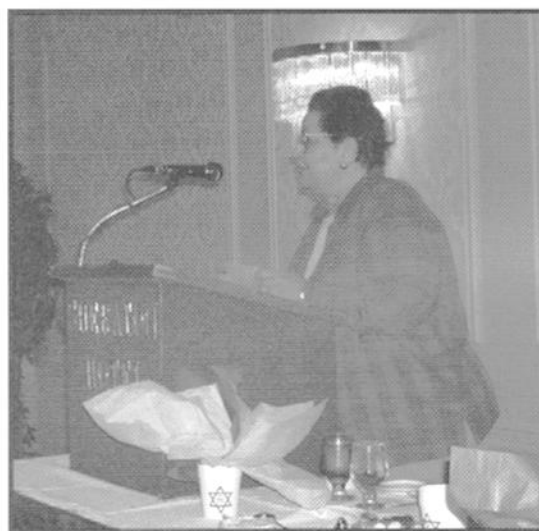
*Jack Gerrick beside one of the cards for the Traveling Exhibit.*



*A quilt made in the 19th century, on display in an exhibition called "A Portion of the People, 300 years of Jewry in the Carolinas."*



*President Charles Hart, Fay Brachman, Don Teter and Marvin Rich. Behind them is the TJIHS flag, displayed for the first time at the meeting.*



*Sandra Freed expressing her thanks to the Southern Jewish Historical Society for their gift of \$1,000 toward the costs of publishing Temple Beth El's Centennial Book.*



---

---

# Texas Jewish Historical Society 2002-2004



## Officers



Charles B. Hart (Temple) .....	<i>President</i>
Marvin Rich (Houston).....	<i>Vice-President</i>
Mitzi Milstein (Longview) .....	<i>Vice-President</i>
Beverly Beck (Houston) .....	<i>Vice-President</i>
Ben Pfeffer (Houston) .....	<i>Treasurer</i>
Vickie Vogel (La Grange).....	<i>Recording Secretary</i>
Selma Mantel (Houston).....	<i>Corresponding Secretary</i>
Blanche Sheiness (Houston).....	<i>Historian</i>
Rusty Milstein (Longview).....	<i>Parliamentarian</i>
Ima Joy Gandler (Waco).....	<i>Archivist</i>

## Board Members 2001-2003



Elaine Albin (Rockport)  
Dorothy Borschow (El Paso)  
Roy Elsner (Odessa)  
Dorothy Harelik (Hamilton)  
Ruth Heidenheimer (Cisco)  
Rosalind Horwitz (Beaumont)  
Ed Katten (Waco)  
Sylvia Gayle Klein (McAllen)  
Sherman Kusin (Austin)  
Annette Lackman (Arlington)

Marvin Leshin (Corpus Christi)  
Melissa Mantel (Houston)  
R. D. Moses (Fort Worth)  
Louis Pink (Houston)  
Nancy Polunsky (San Angelo)  
Ralph Robinowitz (Dallas)  
Don Schlossberg (The Woodlands)  
Merilee Weiner (Houston)  
Sherry Zander (Dallas)



## Board Members 2002-2004



Norma Albert (McAllen)  
James Alexander (Dallas)  
Walter Fein (San Antonio)  
Buddy Freed (Fort Worth)  
Mickey Graubart (Houston)  
Noel Graubart (Houston)  
Gladys Leff (Dallas)  
Goldye Levi (Dallas)  
Mabel Massin (Houston)  
Greg Meyer (San Antonio)

Allen Mondell (Dallas)  
Shirley Ragusa (San Antonio)  
Berta Schlesinger (McAllen)  
Leta Schoen (Houston)  
Louis Sokol (Houston)  
Davie Lou Solka (Corpus Christi)  
Max Stool (Del Rio/San Antonio)  
Mimi Toubin (Brenham)  
Hollace Weiner (Fort Worth)  
Edward Winkler (Fort Stockton)



# Welcome New Members!

*August 2, 2002 - November 1, 2002*

**Anderson, Dan & Claudia**  
9100 Heatherwood Drive  
Austin, TX 78748

**Berman, Bernie & Phyllis (Bumar)**  
15523 St. Cloud  
Houston, TX 77062

**Fenberg, Renee A.**  
431 Prestwick Court  
Houston, TX 77057

**Freeman, Jane**  
11710 Timberknoll  
Houston, TX 77024

**Gardner, Paul & Tina (Smith)**  
3002 McElroy  
Austin, TX 78757

**Hart, David W.**  
2701 Northwest 23rd Blvd. #D-31  
Gainesville, FL 32604

**Hecht, Ed and Bernis (Sabine)**  
429 Colony Drive  
Corpus Christi, TX 78412

**Jewish Historical Society of  
Memphis & Mid-South**  
6603 Bramble Cove  
Memphis, TN 38119

**Karotkin, Lonnie**  
7904 Mesa Trails Circle  
Austin, TX 78731

**Laufman, Elsa D.**  
11706 Flintwood  
Houston, TX 77024

**Leff, David M.**  
7827 Oakington Drive  
Houston, TX 77071

**Reichenthal, Max & Susan**  
9111 Cliffwood Court  
Houston, TX 77096

**Roberson III, Major & Mrs. John  
W.(Trey)**  
12303 Beartrap  
Austin, TX 78729

**Sternberg, Mrs. Rosalie (Kaplan)**  
P. O. Box 25211  
Dallas, TX 75225

**Sugerman, Charles & Sondra  
(Weiss)**  
110 Sheraton Drive  
San Antonio, TX 78209

**Weimer, Dr. & Mrs. Michael B.**  
614 Yorkshire Drive  
College Station, TX 77845

**Wiese, Charles & Janice Rubin**  
705 East 16th Street  
Houston, TX 77008

## 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

## Has Your Address Changed?

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

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



## In Memoriam

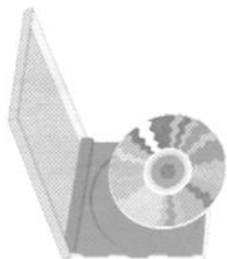
*Frances Stein  
(Mrs. Marvin)  
(Galveston)*

TJHS extends  
condolences  
to her family.

## 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.

# NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE NOW AVAILABLE



*All available past issues of the Society's Newsletters are now available on CD-Rom.*

**This is perfect for:**

- all new members who haven't read past issues
- referencing for local historians
- preserving the story YOU had published about your family
- libraries, researches, etc.

**The cost is only \$15 to members and \$25 to non-members.**



*(detach and mail)*

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

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

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**TJHS Members:** \$15 x \_\_\_\_\_ CD-Roms = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**non-TJHS Members:** \$25 x \_\_\_\_\_ CD-Roms = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Send orders w/checks to:** I. L. (Buddy) Freed, 4208 Warnock Court, Fort Worth, Texas 76109



# Texas Jewish Historical Society

P.O. Box 10193  
Austin, Texas 78766-0193

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
FORT WORTH, TX  
PERMIT 4161



\*\*\*\*\*AUTO\*\*5-DIGIT 78411  
MILLE ZALIM 6  
4101 BRETT ST # 1-01 43  
CORPUS CHRISTI TX 78411-4500

## Texas Jewish Historical Society Annual Membership

YES! I am enclosing my dues payment to the Texas Jewish Historical Society for the 2002 membership year.

I am a  New Member  Renewing Member

\$36 - Annual Member  \$50 - Supporting Member  \$100 - Sponsor  
 \$250 - Sustaining Member  \$500 - Benefactor  \$1,000 - Patron

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_ Maiden Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Home telephone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address(es): \_\_\_\_\_

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