

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Established 1980



Fall 2003

A MESSAGE FROM THE PREZ



The Texas Jewish Historical Society Fall Board of Directors Meeting was held in Temple, Texas on October 25 and 26, 2003. We enjoyed dinner Saturday in the Dynasty Oriental Restaurant. Our guest speaker was TJHS member, Dr. Sheila Dobin, PhD, Texas A&M School of Medicine, Scott and White Hospital. Dr. Dobin presented a very interesting talk on the Jewish perspective of ethics and morality in genetics.

Our Sunday morning meeting was in the new country home of Jan and Charles B. Hart. Reports were given and discussions were held on a number of topics. Those present agreed there is a need to develop a new tri-fold membership application that can also be used as a membership campaign brochure.

We are gearing up to print a new, updated membership directory in a few weeks. If your zip code or mailing address have changed, or if you have a new phone number, email address or fax number, please email your information to Fay and Leon Brachman at leonhb@flash.net or call them at 817-924-9207. Please do this today!

Make plans now to attend two wonderful TJHS weekends! Rusty Milstein presented a review of the planning for the Winter Board Meeting, to be held on South Padre Island February 6-8, 2004. Max Stool reported on plans for the TJHS Silver Anniversary Celebration & Annual Gathering, slated for April 30-May 2, 2004 in San Antonio. We are looking forward to a large turnout at these events, which promise to be interesting, fun and informative.

In closing, Jan and I would like to wish you and yours a warm and wonderful Chanukah, and a safe, happy and healthy 2004.

Charles B. Hart
President, TJHS

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Happy Birthday to 90-years-young Blanche Sheiness. Blanche is a model for all of us and an exemplary definition of staying young by staying active. Blanche has been a TJHS member,

and currently serves as Historian. We wish Blanche many years of continued happiness and good health, and hope she will share with us her secrets of the fountain of youth!

HONOR LOVED ONES WITH TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY DONOR CARDS

The card below 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 the acknowledgment. To the members who have sent in funds in the past, thank you on behalf of the 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 acknowledgment has been sent to the party you requested. Your gift will further the efforts to record, preserve and disseminate historic information about Jewish culture in Texas.

Gainesville's Morton Museum of Cooke County Needs Your Help

An Open Letter

I am the curator/director of the Morton Museum of Cooke County in Gainesville, Texas. From at least the time period of the 1880s through the 1920s, a Jewish community existed in this town. A synagogue was built, and several members became prominent business owners, etc. I am beginning a study of this community and am trying to acquire as much information as possible about the synagogue, its members, and their activities. Do any TJHS members have information concerning the synagogue in Gainesville? I am also trying to find a good photograph of it. We have only a photocopy of one photo. I would appreciate any suggestions. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Shana Powell, Curator/Director, Morton Museum

If you have information or photographs, please contact Shana Powell directly at P.O. Box 150, Gainesville, TX 76241, phone 940-668-8900.

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS: ISRAEL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Submitted by Don Teter

The Israel Genealogical Society is pleased to invite proposals from potential speakers for the 24th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. The Conference will be held July 4—9, 2004 in Jerusalem. English will be the official language of the conference. A number of lectures will be presented in Hebrew, with simultaneous translation into English.

Submission Guidelines: Authors wishing to present a paper at the Conference are encouraged to visit the website at www.ortra.com/jgen2004 for proposal format and submitting information.

Authors are invited to submit an abstract either by e-mail as an MSWord attachment, to jgen2004@ortra.com or mail on a diskette in MSWord format, together with three original copies. Material should be sent Airmail in a padded envelope marked "Do Not Fold." Proposals, whether accepted or declined, will not be returned. Make sure to retain a copy of your proposal. FAX submissions *will not be accepted*.

Important: To be included in the final program, at least one presenter from each accepted proposal must register for the Conference.

Deadlines:

Dec. 31, 2003 - Submission of abstracts

Feb. 15, 2004 - Notification of acceptance

Conference Secretariat:

Ortra Ltd.

1 Nirim Street, P. O. Box 9352

Tel Aviv 61092, Israel

Tel: +972-3-638-4444

Fax: +972-3-638-4455

Email: jgen2004@ortra.com

DAVIE LOU SOLKA NAMED TJHS ASSOCIATE EDITOR

TJHS President Charles B. Hart is happy to announce that Davie Lou Solka has graciously agreed to serve as Associate Editor/Liaison to TJHS Newsletter Editor, Susan Elsner Furman. To continue having a quality newsletter

for our members, please assist us by sending your items to Davie Lou at davielou@solka.net or mail them to Davie Lou Solka, 501 Bermuda Place, Corpus Christi, TX, 78411, phone 361-852-5815. She will then prepare and submit newsworthy articles for publication in the newsletter.

Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage Writing Competition Deadline is February 1st

Submitted by Jack Gerrick

It is time for the Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage Writing Competition. Developed as a way to pass along reflections of the past to the generations of tomorrow, the competition is in its 12th year in Florida, and has received a great amount of publicity and recognition. The 2nd Annual Texas competition is open to amateurs and professionals of all ages. Last year's winner was Mr. Ralph Marks of Houston. The competition is sponsored by TJHS member Jerry Wolens of Boca Raton, Florida in honor of his wife, Sylvia. Contest rules include:

- Entries can be from a single paragraph up to a maximum of 2,000 words
- Each page must include title, writer's name, age, address and phone number
- Each entry must include a word count list
- Each person may submit up to 4 entries
- Handwritten work will be accepted only if legible
- Include a four-to-six line biography of the writer
- Judging will be based on originality and content
- May be edited for publication in the TJHS newsletter and/or local media
- Winners will be announced at the TJHS Annual Gathering in San Antonio the weekend of April 30-May 2, 2004
- Send entries to Sylvia Wolens Jewish Heritage Writing Competition, c/o TJHS, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, Texas, 78766-0193

Contestants are strongly encouraged to keep a copy of their work, as *entries will not be returned*. Prizes are 1st place - \$500; 2nd place - \$250; 3rd place - \$100. All entries will be included in the TJHS archives at the University of Texas at Austin. For information, contact Jack Gerrick at 817-9278-8765.

Important: Please do NOT send irreplaceable original documents or photographs. Due to postal issues beyond our control, we cannot guarantee receipt or return of items. We strongly recommend providing color photocopies (even of black and white photos) rather than originals. Also, to help with their return, please include a self-addressed envelope and make sure to include your contact information on each item you send. Thank you for your help!

TEXAS CZECH HERITAGE AND CULTURAL CENTER SEEKS JEWISH PARTICIPATION

By L. David Vogel

Several years ago the Czech-Texan Community selected La Grange as the site for the new Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center. A statewide project of Texas Czechs, the Center is currently in the planning and fundraising stages, with the outdoor amphitheatre recently completed.

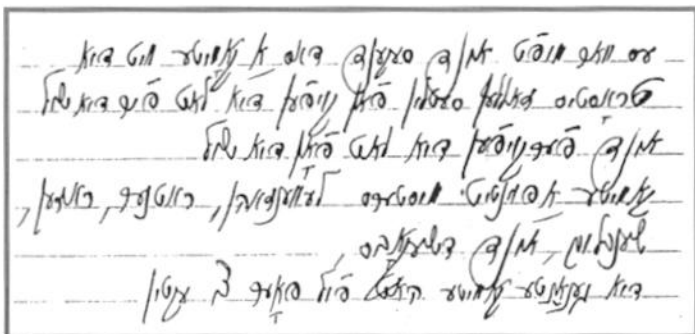
Situated on a high bank of the Colorado River overlooking the Colorado River Valley, La Grange, and the Bluff area, the Center will be a beautiful, first-rate facility built in traditional Czech architectural style. The Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center is "dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the history, language, culture and heritage of Texans of Czech ethnicity." It is expected to attract many visitors from Texas, the United States, and beyond.

While the majority of Czech-Texans are of the Catholic faith, Center board members and the Executive Director welcome input and participation by Jewish Czech-Texans. They have expressed a feeling that Jews represent an important component of the immigrant Czech-Texan experience, which should be included in the Center's design and content.

To learn more about the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center, visit www.czechtexas.org. If you would like to become involved in the project, contact Executive Director Woody Smith at 1-979-968-9399 or toll-free at 1-888-785-4500, email Czech@ctv.net, or mail to P.O. Box 6, 250 W. Fairgrounds Rd., La Grange, TX, 78945.

Secrets from the Minutes from Fort Worth's Congregation Ahavath Sholom

The following is excerpted from a speech TJHS Member Hollace Weiner delivered to the Fort Worth Chapter of Jewish Women International on May 7, 2003



Oy vey is mir! Who could possibly decipher this handwriting from over a century ago? Is it Greek to you? It looks like Hebrew to me. But it's neither. Supposedly this is Yiddish. To tell you the truth, it is a mixture of languages. We know that Yiddish is the mother tongue our Ashkenazic ancestors developed a thousand years ago in Poland, the Ukraine, Belarus, Rumania, Germany, and the Balkans. It was the *lingua franca*, the special language spoken among Jews wherever they were forced to flee. Written with Hebrew characters, Yiddish is a fusion of languages *schmeered* together and spoken with a melodic Slavic lilt. It is also a phonetic language – with each letter standing for one sound.

These minutes, from Fort Worth's Congregation Ahavath Sholom, reveal something else. The words are not the typical Yiddish amalgam. Tons of them are English words written with Hebrew characters. The minutes book is full of what scholars call anglicized Yiddish—English words we use every day. Or words *they* used every day. You can almost hear their accents by the way they phonetically spelled the English words.

For example:

A motion was “mooft” and seconded.

Mr. Levenson was “aPsent.”

The Purim ball was a big “sook sess.”

They rewarded the Sunday school students with pieces of “kindee.”

They heated the shul with a wood burning “schtoff.”

Money was “kesh” and curtains were “coytans.”

They even used the word “*FIXIN*” when they planned to do something—an indication of their rapid acculturation of Texan ways of speaking. Sometimes they mixed in Biblical phrases. Four showed up in Fort Worth's infamous Hell's Half Acre, the trustees at the shul hired a detective to drive the “immoral men and women” into

“exile.” The trustees also appointed a committee to visit fellow Orthodox Jews at Shearith Israel Congregation in Dallas to alert them about the “immoral” Jews doing business in the region's red light districts.

There was a lot of communication between the trustees at Fort Worth's Ahavath Sholom and their Orthodox brethren at Dallas' Shearith Israel. When a Fort Worth man named Max Kaplan was murdered in Dallas in December of 1902, the board at Ahavath Sholom got upset because, according to the minutes, “*The Jews of the city of Dallas did not attend to the burial according to Jewish law and custom. So it was decided that a protest resolution should be sent to the Cong. Shearith Israel of Dallas for not attending the [burial] laws according to Jewish customs.*”

The response from Dallas: “Under the circumstances we did the best we could.”

Burial is sacred.

Many of you are familiar with Fort Worth's pioneer Jewish cemetery – Emanuel Hebrew Rest, founded in 1879. There were many, many empty plots in the graveyard back in 1901 when Ahavath Sholom started looking for a cemetery of its own. What prompted the Orthodox Jews to hunt for their own burial ground? The answer is on page 55 of the minutes, dated October 27, 1901:

It was mooft and seconded to appoint a committee to see the [female] President of the Jewish cemetery society to learn whether Mrs. Greenvald, who recently died, is Jewish and, if not, to protest that she not be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

The reference is to Mrs. Philip W. Greenwall, whose husband managed the city's Greenwall Opera House. Within this family, there is a history of intermarriage. Mrs. Greenwall, who died in 1901, had a rather non-Jewish first name: Almira. Her daughter, Mary, had wed a fellow named Charlie Fain.

Was Mrs. Greenwall Jewish? Probably not. Because Almira Greenwall's remains were buried in the family plot at the Jewish cemetery, Ahavath Sholom began looking for a cemetery that would closely follow traditional burial customs, restricting Hebrew cemeteries to Jews.

(Secrets continued)

But I'm getting ahead of my story. What is the lowdown on these minutes?

TJHS Past President Fay Brachman found these turn-of-the-century minutes in a ledger in the administrative offices of Ahavath Sholom. The minutes' book covers board meetings from October 1898 to the end of 1905 – seven years, 199 pages, and 145 meetings. My colleague Esther Winesanker, the daughter of a Yiddish printer, translated and typed them into English.

These minutes have probably never been translated. What leads me to that conclusion? They contain a lot of information that is not in the Congregation's 100th Anniversary Book. They fill in a lot of gaps and even clear up a few mysteries.

For example, the minutes state that the first rabbi hired to serve at Ahavath Sholom did not last long. He was a fellow named Rabbi Korn. He was hired in January 1904 after answering a want ad. The trustees agreed to give him what they called a "fair trial" – meaning two months employment (at \$50 per month) *"to learn whether we were satisfied with him or whether Rev. Korn would be satisfied with us."* Problems surfaced from the start, primarily in the Sunday school. Students acted up – so much so, that a board member was assigned to keep order in the classroom. On February 28, 1904 nearly two months after his arrival, Rabbi Korn was sent packing.

Two days after dismissing Rabbi Korn, the shul's directors called a special meeting and hired another rabbi. He was Rabbi G. Halpern. The trustees liked him so much, they paid him \$80 a month, plus \$50 to move his family to town, and a \$5-a-month furniture allowance. He remained for more than a year.

The reason Ahavath Sholom decided to hire a rabbi in 1904 was because congregants were concerned that their children, who attended American public schools, were not learning the language of their forefathers. They needed a Hebrew School. They needed a rabbi who would double as a sermonizer and a Hebrew teacher. In other words, they sought what historian Abraham Karp calls a "preacher-teacher." In his book, *"Jewish Continuity in America"* (Univ. of Alabama Press, 1998), Karp explains that at the turn of the century there was a trend among Orthodox synagogues in America to utilize the shul as more than a


place for a minyan, but also as a "*cheder*" or Hebrew school to teach Judaism to the next generation. This was an innovation. They did not need a rabbi to lead services, because laymen led the morning and evening minyan. But who had time to teach the children?

In the old country, the most learned among the men instructed the next generation. In America, even the most learned were out making a living, peddling scrap metal or selling fruits, vegetables, shoes, or clothing in the busy downtown. None of them had the time to teach their children.

In America the new trend was to open a school that the minutes refer to as a "T.T." (This was variously spelled with the Hebrew letters "*tof tof*" or "*tet tet*." Can you guess what that meant? It was their abbreviation for Talmud Torah, a public Hebrew school to which every Jewish child was accepted, whether or not their parents were affiliated with the shul. Every month, a board member from the shul went house-to-house collecting contributions to keep the T.T. afloat. And the money poured in, for this was very important to these immigrants.

This Talmud Torah opened in January of 1904 with the arrival of Rabbi Korn followed by Rabbi Halpern, both of them "preacher-teachers." These facts, however, are at variance with the Congregation's commemorative history book that claims the Hebrew school began in 1906 and that Rabbi Charles Blumenthal was the congregation's first rabbi. The Talmud Torah was well underway by then, and Rabbi Blumenthal was, perhaps, the third rabbi in the congregation's history. Why the discrepancies? No one had discovered or translated these seven years of minutes, so no one compiling the official history knew or remembered that far back.

These minutes set the record straight. They unlock mysteries. The story of this congregation began in 1892 when Ahavath Sholom, which means Love of Peace, started in the living room of William Goldstein. (Remember that name, as it comes up again.) The congregation was poor, with a balance in the treasury sometimes as low as \$8.85. Some years, there were overdrafts, mainly because the treasurer added incorrectly. (Esther Winesanker, my translator, caught these tabulation errors. No one else did, except the bank.) The trustees of Ahavath Sholom were selective. When people applied for membership in the shul, none were automatically accepted.



RABBI SIDNEY & BEBE WOLF MEMORIAL SERVICE

By Helen Wilk

TJHS member Helen Wilk made the following remarks during a special Shabbat service held in Temple Beth El, Corpus Christi, on February 28, 2003 to honor the memory of Rabbi Sidney A. Wolf and his wife, Bebe. Rabbi Wolf served Temple Beth El for 40 years, from 1932-1972.

I have written about Rabbi Sidney Wolf for three publications, each time doing research on various aspects of his life. Initially I wrote about him in the book our Temple published, "Our Golden Years." Several years later I was asked to write a biographical entry for the "Volume 6 Handbook of Texas" and more recently, the handbook editor asked me to write about Rabbi's involvement with music in Texas for the book they are currently producing. Additionally, Fort Worth author / historian Hollace Ava Weiner wrote a feature article "In Honor of the Memory of Rabbi Sidney A.

Wolf & His Wife, Bebe," which appeared in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, and a wonderful chapter about his promotion of civil rights, *Harmonizing In Texas*, for the Anthology "Quiet Voices-Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s."

What made Sidney Wolf so special, so worthy of all these words? Why do these memories of Sidney and his wife Bebe still resonate? I want to begin with a little story that illustrates his wry sense of humor. In 1977, when Rabbi Wolf had been retired for about five

(Secrets, continued)

A committee was appointed to investigate each applicant's moral and ethical character, a practice common in Orthodox synagogues of that era according to historian Karp, who found a similar situation in his study of a Rochester, N.Y. Orthodox shul.

In January of 1899, the Ahavath Sholom Board appointed a "Committee to Try to Unite All Jews." What that meant was, they didn't want unaffiliated Jews to start a rival congregation. There were stirrings among the unaffiliated Jews to launch a Reform congregation. The shul minutes state: "*There should only be ONE minyan in Fort Worth.*" Theirs. This was easier said than done. Two months later, the minutes relate, "*The Committee for Uniting All Jews, created so that there should not be two synagogues in the city, reported that they had not succeeded and needed more time.*"

Around this juncture, William Goldstein, who was congregational president, poured out his soul during a board meeting. He had suffered business reversals. He was down on his luck. He resigned as shul president. If he could borrow \$300, he was confident he could start a new business and get back on his feet.

David Brown, an ice manufacturer and the congregation's treasurer, stepped forward with a plan. If the Board of Trustees would serve as the lending agency, he would lend the congregation \$300 to pass along to Mr. Goldstein, interest free, to be repaid to the Board of Trustees in \$50 installments every six months. All parties agreed. Subsequently, David Brown was elected to fill the vacancy in the president's office left by Goldstein's resignation, and Goldstein repaid the loan over the next three years.

What a *mensh* Mr. Brown was. But, where is David Brown's picture on a wall that today is reserved for photographs of Ahavath Sholom's past presidents? It is not there. Where is David Brown's name in the congregation's commemorative yearbooks? It is omitted. Why?

Perhaps because David Brown left Congregation Ahavath Sholom in 1902 to help form a rival synagogue, the Reform Congregation Beth-El. Again, the Yiddish minutes reveal information missing from the community's official history. Stay tuned for much, much more. ■ TJHS

(Rabbi Wolf, continued)

years from his 40-year tenure on our pulpit, our congregation found that it had made a mistake in our choice of a new Rabbi, and we asked this gentleman to leave that spring and not fulfill his contract. Finding ourselves without a Rabbi and knowing that it would take several months to fill the position, we asked Rabbi Wolf to come out of retirement and back on the pulpit. He graciously agreed but remarked with a smile on his face that he had not sprouted the wings of an angel until he had retired.

I think that when Sidney Wolf came here as a young, newly ordained rabbi, at the height of the depression in 1932, he could not have envisioned the impact he would have on this community. The 30,000 residents of Corpus Christi included about 50-60 Jewish families who finally organized a congregation in 1928 and offered him a three-month trial as their first Rabbi at the enormous sum of \$125 a month.

He arrived here with a Rabbinic Ordination from the Hebrew Union College, a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Cincinnati, and musical skills from the scholarship he had been given to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. With his cosmopolitan education, he found himself preaching in a wooden shack (that included a "wheezing organ"), on Craig & 11th Street in a small, rather isolated city. However, under his guidance, by 1937 Temple Beth El built a lovely Spanish-Colonial Sanctuary on that same property and the congregation had grown to about 100 families.

The Metropolitan Community Church now owns the old Temple at 1315 Craig Street and they have recently received a Historic Building designation from the city and have applied for a State Historical Marker. It feels good to know that they appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of the building. We look forward to being with the congregation when these markers are placed. I think Sidney recognized very quickly that, in addition to serving the needs of his Jewish congregation, he was also the ambassador of good will to the non-Jewish community, and served the Jewish residents of all the smaller cities in South Texas, too.

He and his good friend, the Reverend William Capers Munds, Rector of the Episcopal Church of the Good

Shepherd, began a tradition in 1935 that continues to this day; that of sharing a Thanksgiving service, rotating every other year between the church and synagogue and sharing each other's pulpits. It does not seem so incredible in this age of ecumenism, but in 1936 it was *so* incredible that *Time* magazine featured it under the banner of "Love in Corpus Christi." You will see a photo of that when you view the display in our social hall. One of the photographs in the exhibit from the Texas Jewish Historical Society was taken during an early, shared Thanksgiving service held in the church.

In 1950, Rabbi decided to invite a Black minister to preach from the pulpit of Temple Beth El and added the gospel singing of the children's choir from the all-black Solomon Coles School. Once again, in today's society this does not seem extraordinary, but in 1950, this city accepted segregation as the proper standard of behavior. It was revolutionary to do this and many congregants were upset. When I asked Rabbi Wolf what influenced him to do this he simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "It seemed the right thing to do," and he continued to do it for many years *before* the beginning of the civil rights movement.

He served in a number of community organizations and earned the respect of a great many citizens. He used that respect and stature to continue to work toward a more inclusive society. He helped break down the barriers that kept Hispanic and African-American citizens from playing golf on the city course, and from having access to the lockers and swimming in the city pools. He learned how to work quietly and effectively to bring about the changes he knew would improve the lives of minorities. This must have been a radical stance for someone who, himself, was a minority.

I also want you to know that his personal life had more than a single share of tragedy. When his wife, Sarah Phillips, returned to Cincinnati to give birth to their first child in 1936, she became ill with pneumonia and died six days after the birth of their son, Phillip. Sidney had to leave the baby with his maternal grandmother in Cincinnati and return home alone. Even the bachelor's club he organized in Corpus Christi when he returned helped 42 young men find appropriate mates but it did not work for him.

(Rabbi Wolf, continued)

A good friend advised him to write to a young lady in Lafayette, Louisiana. Bertha Rosenthal had earned her nickname, Bebe, by being the youngest of five French born sisters, all part of a musically talented family. Within three months their friendship blossomed and brought them under the wedding *chuppah* in March of 1938. Then it was time to pick up two-year-old Penny, as Phillip was called, and bring him home.

Seems like a very happy picture, except that Rabbi and Bebe faced yet another tragedy when their first born daughter, Cecelia, died while still in the hospital, four days after her birth in 1939. No one ever knew for certain why she died. I have a feeling that Sidney must have thought there was a black cloud following him around.

Then, shortly after they moved into the house the congregation built for them at 229 Leming in 1940, their daughter Joanne was born. Now their family really was complete. Bebe Wolf was the ideal Rabbi's wife. She was his helpmate, supporter and sounding board. She was a gracious hostess, a great cook, and an active member of Temple Beth El Sisterhood. She was also a wonderful musician and taught piano to a number of students. I love Joanne's description of their home as "awash with music."

In addition to all her other responsibilities, I found it interesting that Bebe became intrinsically involved in Planned Parenthood. She understood the importance of young people being armed with honest information about sex and she provided counseling to numerous teenagers. She was always known as an honest and plainspoken woman, and parents and students alike listened and respected her views.

When Del Mar Junior College hired C. Burdette Wolfe to create a Department of Music, Sidney finally had the partner he needed to organize the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra. He was the founding president of the Corpus Christi Symphony Society and raised the funds necessary to make it possible for Burdette Wolfe (no relation) to organize and conduct the symphony orchestra. The 600-seat Corpus Christi High School auditorium (now known as Roy Miller High School) was the site for the initial season of four concerts performed in 1945.

Rabbi Wolf received a number of honors during his lifetime and afterwards. He treasured the award given to him by the NAACP as well as the Sidney Wolf Scholarship awarded to a student in the Del Mar Music

Department every year since 1982 in gratitude for the many years he taught music appreciation. (Edna Guerrero was the 1999 recipient of that scholarship and when I spoke with her, she told me she is continuing to work toward her goal of becoming a music teacher.)

On November 10, 1982, the Mayor of Corpus Christi, the late Luther Jones, presented a proclamation declaring that date as Rabbi Sidney A. Wolf Day in Corpus Christi. Rabbi's weakness from cancer made it necessary for Bebe to accept that proclamation and read his note of appreciation.

On Monday February 21, 1983, Rabbi Wolf made his last journey to Temple Beth El on Craig & 11th Street where his funeral was held. Tonight we mark the 20th Anniversary of his death. In Jewish tradition we call this his *Yortzeit*. In 1996, Bebe Wolf's funeral was conducted in this sanctuary, and it was the end of an era. The *Corpus Christi Caller Times* printed the following editorial on February 23, 1983, "A Lasting Mark."

Not every religious leader in a community has an impact outside his own church or synagogue. But that certainly is not true of Rabbi Sidney Wolf. For more than half a century, Rabbi Wolf, who died last week, was a vital force for good and beauty in Corpus Christi. He has left a lasting mark on the city and its people.

Rabbi Wolf was an accomplished musician and a superlative teacher, as well as a spiritual leader. He taught at CCSU and at Del Mar College; he performed many hours as a pianist, introducing countless young people to music. He was a founder of the Corpus Christi Symphony, and served on its board of directors. But his interest and activities on behalf of others spread much farther than that. The Red Cross, The Crisis Intervention Center, La Retama Library, the Adult Learning Center all profited by his guidance and his work on their behalf, and so did those persons helped by those and other agencies with which Rabbi Wolf was involved.

In 1974, Rabbi Wolf was honored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews as a recipient of its National Brotherhood and Humanitarian Award. ►

(Rabbi Wolf, continued)

During the presentation, the conference director noted that Rabbi Wolf "Took the people to his heart and they, in turn, embraced him." No man could wish a better epitaph; no man deserved it more.

As we entered the 21st Century the *Corpus Christi Caller Times* selected the 11 most important and influential people of our community in the 20th Century. Rabbi Sidney Wolf was among that elite group because he had such an amazing impact on the development of our city. Bebe Wolf was at his side with support and love in all that he accomplished.

Tonight, as we sit in the Sidney A. Wolf Sanctuary of Temple Beth El we are pleased to honor the memory of this extraordinary couple.

Note: The TJHS photo exhibit "Howdy Y'all-The Texas Jewish Experience" was on display that evening and remained at the Temple for an additional two weeks. Joanne Wolf Cohen of Cincinnati and her brother and sister-in-law, Phillip & Angela Wolf, commissioned an original musical composition from composer Lawrence Weiner for the *Veshamru* prayer. Its premier by the Temple Beth El Choir was well received, as were the words spoken by Joanne and one of her sons, author Josh Wolf Shenk. ■ TJHS

AN INTERVIEW WITH BESSIE KANTROVICH CHODOROW

By Jan Siegel Hart & Leonard Gorin

The following was transcribed from an interview taped on July 30, 2003, in Bessie's Waco, Texas home.

I was born in Waco on 4th Street, June 19, 1900. I am 103 years old. My father, Louis Kantrovich, married Gertrude Adams of Waco. They moved to Fort Worth, where they had a grocery store. My mother died when I was two-years-old, and my sister, Lena, and I moved to the Jewish Orphans Home on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans. We were there 11 years, until 1911. There were about 100 children there, with boys and girls living separately. I went to a manual training school and got a good education. My sister was trained to be a stenographer. I was recently honored by an endowment made to the Jewish Orphans Home by my son in my honor.

My brother, Abe, lived with my father. My father remarried, and he and his wife had four children. When Lena and I left the Jewish Orphans Home, we went to Fort Worth to live with my father and his new family.

Since there was not enough room for us, Lena and I went to live on Jennings Avenue, then on Travis with four other relatives: Eva Adams Goldberg, her daughters Belle and Saide, and a son, Sam. Eva's husband, Max, was on the road selling watches. The Goldberg's had two other daughters, Rose and Mary. Rose married Sam Edelman.

The Edelman family and Sam Goldberg ended up with a chain of jewelry stores, including the Fort Worth Jewelry Company on the corner of Ninth and Main, which they later sold to Zale's. They were the first to have \$1.00 down and \$1.00 a week. They pioneered the credit jewelry business. The customers had little bankbooks, which they brought in when they made their payments. There was always a line of people making payments. I remember our first car in Fort Worth – a Chevrolet. Before we had a car, we walked.

We had an old bony horse during the Depression. We didn't have a garden, so we shopped for food in the store. On Sunday afternoons, people would sit in the chairs on the front porch and rock and watch the traffic go by. ►

(Chodorow, continued)

There was a terrible epidemic after World War I in Texas, and many people died. Rose's daughter, Mary, died. People were quarantined to their homes. They burned creosote lamps by the bed. Later there was Scarlet Fever, then Polio. Waco was a soldiers' town, with Camp MacArthur.

I lived in Fort Worth until 1929. I went to Jewish dances and weekend events with young people from other towns. Young people were supervised at parties in Jewish Community Centers. We attended services at Temple Beth El. I met Max Chodorow, and we were married in the Rabbi's office on September 15, 1929. We moved to Waco where Max had a ladies shoe business. He believed in fitting women in shoes that wouldn't hurt their feet.

We joined the Shul (Agudath Jacob), since his family was Orthodox. We didn't keep kosher; we went our way. I joined the Sisterhood and the Council of Jewish Women. Max was President of B'nai B'rith and a Master Mason. In Fort Worth I did temporary secretarial work for lawyers Cantey, Hanger and McMahon. In Waco, I worked for lawyers Naman, Howell and Boswell, and helped in the store. I took a three-month training course in business to qualify for these.

To celebrate the holidays, we went to Shul. We didn't light candles in the home. Before Max's parents died, we had Passover Seder in their home. We attended services every Friday night. Waco was very undeveloped when I grew up here. The Johnson grass grew very high in all the yards. People didn't cut their grass. There were only three homes on Austin Avenue when we bought our home in the 1950s. Austin Avenue ended on 29th Street. Waco Drive was a two-lane street. There were streetcars, then trolleys, and then buses to Baylor. The kids had to be in their dormitories by 9 p.m.

My daughter, Greta (Mrs. Harold Kost) of Holliston, Massachusetts was born in 1934. My son, Hilton, was born in 1935. The children attended services in the synagogue where Hilton was a Bar Mitzvah. They both went to Baylor and the University of Texas. Greta was a teacher and she married Dr. Harold Kost, who became a Major in the Army. They have three children, Dr. Linda Kost, Dr. Rhonda Kost (Mrs. Alfred Specter) and Sharon (Mrs. Sam Koszer). Rhonda has twins and a son. Sharon has one son. They are young. They come to visit me.

Hilton is a lawyer and CPA and lives in Los Angeles. He has two children, Jordan and Piera. Jordan graduated from Stanford and is a lawyer and practices in a firm with his father. Piera attends the University of Pennsylvania. All the grandchildren got college educations.

Max died in 1984. Many family pictures are displayed in our home. I was an avid reader of crime and mystery, but now I find them vile. When I was able to read, I also read romance novels. Later, I listened to books on tape.

Editor's note: One month after I interviewed Bessie, she died. She had trouble hearing and seeing, but her mind was still sharp. It was an honor to meet this fine lady and spend an hour with her as she reminisced about her life. This is a prime example of why we need to continue our oral history project. These stories would have been lost if TJHS Board Member Ima Joy Gandler had not asked her Aunt Bessie to share them with us. ■ TJHS

A Lone Star Zionist

By David Hirsch Hoffman

With translations from the Hebrew by the Charles E. Hoffman family

I never knew my great-grandfather, Chaim Tzvi Bernstein, but I would have liked to. He died several years before I was born so I never had the opportunity. He was the first in my paternal family to come to Texas and, consequently, was indirectly responsible for everything in that New World that followed. I have been told he was a quiet, gentle and unassuming man, yet he has given me clues to his character and left evidence of his personal traits that are revealing and begin to define him for me.

He was a learned man and a record keeper. In 1911, on his journey to America aboard the Crown Prince Wilhelm, he dutifully recorded the ship's tonnage, the date of its commission and other statistics as well as the lengths of the daily runs for the seven days they journeyed from Bremen, Germany to New York City. He marked the daily lengths of travel on a map detailing the span of the Atlantic Ocean between the continents. This 39-year-old passenger, although one among the many crowded travelers on board, not only recognized the importance of his venture but was compelled to document his new beginning.

At the time of his emigration, my great-grandfather was living in Paritch, Beylorussia, with his wife Rachel Leah and their five children. Rachel's father, Israel Gorelik, had died in 1877. When her mother, Dvorah, remarried into the Shmidow family, Rachel was sent to live with her paternal grandfather, Yehuda, who was an overseer in the forests around the town of Rechitsa. It was there that she met and became engaged to her cousin, Chaim, who had come to Rechitsa to teach. They were married in 1893.

Chaim received training at several yeshivas and made his living in Rechitsa tutoring young girls in the basics of reading and writing. He mainly taught Yiddish as well as some Russian. The firstborn to Chaim and Rachel was my grandmother, Sarah, in April 1894. With the decline of the forests and the death of Yehuda in 1897, the Bernsteins moved back to Paritch. Education, a benefit not often extended to Jewish girls at the time,

was a high priority for Chaim to share with his daughter. She was taught to read in both Hebrew and Russian and was required to regularly read from the Bible as well as learn from the teachings of the Talmud. She remembered that it was with love and patience that he shared his gift of knowledge.

Several members of the Shmidow family had emigrated to New York and had changed their name to Smith. Around 1908, they sent 100 rubles back to Paritch for my grandmother, Sarah, to join them in America. Her parents consented to the journey and made the necessary arrangements, but due to a medical condition having to do with an eye infection, she was denied access to the ship in port.

Sarah returned home and her parents set aside the money for a rescheduled trip. Several years passed and, after what must have been considerable deliberation, it was decided that Chaim, and not Sarah, would be the first to travel to America. This was a practical decision based on the logic that he would be more capable of generating the income necessary to eventually send for the rest of the family. According to my grandmother, he made a promise to her that once he had the means, she would be the first to join him.

My grandmother remembered that by this time, her father was a Zionist and would have preferred to go to Palestine. The devastating pogroms in 1881 were the catalyst in Russia for the first *halutz*, or pioneering movement focused on settlement in Palestine. The first emigration followed shortly thereafter and within 10 years, large groups of Russian Jews were making their aliyah to Palestine. Following the Dreyfus trial in France, Theodore Herzl published "Der Judenstaat" in 1896 calling for the creation of a Jewish State, and by 1897 the World Zionist Organization was created.

My great-grandfather would have been an impressionable young adult in his early twenties at this time and, receiving his Hebrew/Yiddish training in centers of Jewish learning, was undoubtedly

influenced by these dramatic developments that were unfolding. The pogroms continued into the early twentieth century and successive annual meetings of the Zionist Congress remained intent on Jewish settlement in Palestine.

So as the Bernstein family considered their options, joining the wave of Russian emigration to Palestine must have been a serious consideration. However, Chaim's wife, Rachel, remained focused on America because her mother's second family, the Schmidows, were already there and were doing well. So by November of 1911, Chaim was preparing for his passage to America, not Palestine, under the anxious gaze of his wife and their five children.

One can only imagine the selectivity involved in choosing to reduce one's life possessions to a mere suitcase for such a journey. We don't know all of the contents of his travel bags, but we do know that his books were a priority for him as we still have a small library of them in our family collection.

Among other things that he brought with him must have been a chronicle of his most recent family history. For within a few years of his arrival, he acquired an English Bible and dutifully began meticulously recording in delicate Hebrew script the birth, marriage and death dates of his family. Once again, the power of knowledge and the importance of documentation were his priorities.

The immigration records at Ellis Island reveal that Chaim, or Hyman, Bernstein arrived in New York on December 6, 1911. After about eight months there with only his teaching trade to offer, his disillusionment grew.


Attempting to prosper amidst tens of thousands of other immigrants prompted him to accept an offer from his enterprising young nephew in Texas, W. H. (a.k.a. Wolf or Velvel) Novit, to join him in his successful banana peddling business. Unripe bananas were unloaded at the port in Galveston and shipped by rail to other parts of the state. Wolf Novit received his share of the bananas in Gatesville and arranged for their distribution to other towns further along the rail line such as Hamilton, Comanche and Dublin. Hyman joined Ike Comer in

Comanche where he handled the bananas until they were ripened and Ike would travel in the area around the town selling them. My grandmother recalled being told that the only English the family fruit merchants needed to know was the price of bananas, "Fifteen cents a dozen, two dozen for a quarter."

By 1913, Hyman was able to send 100 rubles back to the family for Sarah's promised passage. He was still selling fruit and had not established a permanent residence other than the back room of the small store in Comanche. In a letter dated October 4, 1913, that was intended to be delivered to Sarah upon her arrival in Galveston, Hyman wrote (as translated from the Yiddish), "I'm not in Dublin but I'm in a town called Comanche. Velvel and his family also left Dublin and have moved to Gatesville. Why am I in Comanche? This is America. In America you don't stay in one spot because the opportunities keep changing."

When the notice from Henry Berman at the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau in Galveston arrived indicating Sarah's safe passage, it was addressed to Hyman in care of Wolf Novit in Dublin, Texas. Sarah lived with the Novits in Gatesville and then back in Dublin for the first few years of her new life in America, while her father continued to develop his business. Hyman had relocated to Stephenville and had opened a grocery store in a corner building across the street from the ornate Erath County Courthouse. He was graduating from being a fruit merchant to becoming a dry goods entrepreneur. However, his family and his business were apparently not all that he had on his mind at the time.

Among a cache of our family papers that recently came to light, there was a single, yellowed sheet with immaculately scripted Hebrew text placed exquisitely on the faded ruled lines of the aged paper. Although the piece is untitled, undated and unsigned, it was undoubtedly penned by my great-grandfather because, letter for letter, the script matches the entries in the Bible where he kept the family records. The document is entitled "Address to the Ninth Texas Zionist Convention."

The recent discovery of this document not only provides a revealing glimpse into my great-grandfather's sentiments regarding his passion for Zionism, 

it is a deep emotional expression that furthers my insight into his character and personality.



Hyman Bernstein ca. 1914 at the age of 42.

What may have been the first official Zionist gathering in Texas was held in the home of Mr. L. G. Gilbert in Fort Worth on the second day of Rosh Hashanah in 1897. This group of 22 members organized under the name of Ahavath Zion in 1899 received their charter from the Federation of American Zionism in June of 1902.

The Texas Zionist Federation held its first convention in Fort Worth in 1906 and the Ninth Texas Zionist Convention, for which my great-grandfather prepared his speech, was held in Fort Worth in December of 1914. The convention, beginning on December 27, 1914, was a three-day session held in the Hebrew Institute Building at 819 Taylor Street and was reportedly attended by 350 members and visitors. Including guests, there were over 500 persons at the opening session where they joined in the singing of "Hatikvah," which at that time was the National Zionist Song. The Great War in Europe had begun that year and as reported in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, among the many important matters to be considered at the convention were the future of

the colonists in Palestine and what action to give them all the support necessary, since the European Zionists, because of the war, are not in a position to render assistance.

(continued on page 19)

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE WIESS: STEAMBOAT CAPTAIN AND CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

By W. T. Block

For information about W. T. Block, see page 26.

Napoleon Bonaparte Wiess was the first person of Anglo-American descent, born in Port Neches, Texas on March 10, 1839 – all of the Joseph Grigsby children having been born in Kentucky.¹ Wiess' parents were Simon Wiess, born Jan. 1, 1800 in Lublin, Poland of German Jewish parentage, and Margaret Sturrock Wiess, born in Dundee, Scotland on June 12, 1814. Theirs was a bond marriage in Dec. 1835, subject to arriving at a courthouse somewhere to make the marriage legal.

Simon and Margaret opened their first mercantile business in Nacogdoches in 1836, where their daughter, Pauline was born. In 1837, Simon converted his merchandise inventory into a keelboat load of baled cotton, prior to floating downriver to Beaumont. Simon briefly operated a store in Beaumont before he opened his third business in Port Neches, where Napoleon was born in 1839.

After three business blunders, Simon made his final move in 1840 to Wiess Bluff, 16 river-miles north of Beaumont,

where he built his home, store, cotton warehouse building, and steamboat dock. Wiess Bluff was as far north on the Neches River as steamboats could travel during the low water season of summer. Wiess' last four sons were born in Wiess Bluff.²

Little is known of Napoleon's early years, except that he received a rudimentary education, first at his mother's knees. It seems likely, as well, that Simon Wiess hired a private tutor for his six children, or perhaps started the first log cabin school at Wiess Bluff. No doubt, too, Napoleon learned much while clerking, weighing, grading, and loading cotton during the 1850s.

One of the tales told of Napoleon and Mark Wiess occurred in 1856 while their father made a business journey by buggy into Tyler County. One hour after leaving, his wife discovered that her husband had forgotten his business papers. She sent Napoleon and Mark, racing through the

(continued on page 17)

Deep in the “Hart” of the Texas Jewish Historical



< The Fall 2003 Board Meeting was held in the beautiful new home of TJHS President Charles E. Hart and his wife, Jan, a TJHS board member.

Howdy from the Hart's Temple, Texas ranch home – (front row, left to right) – Rusty Milstein, Max Stool, Helen and Dr. Larry Wilk, Blanche Sheiness, Marvin Rich, Mitzie Milstein; (kneeling:) Barbara and Ben Rosenberg, Joan Weiss, (far right:) Stanley Weiss. (Back row:) Roy and Essie Elsner, Charles and Jan Hart, Milton and Dorothy Harelik, Leta Schoen.

Get in line! Soup's on!

TJHS members enjoy a delicious deli-style lunch following the Sunday Fall Board Meeting.

*Left to right:
Jan Hart, Stanley Weiss,
Joan Weiss, Mitzie
Milstein, and Rusty
Milstein.*



Society's Fall Meeting – October 25-26, 2003

Dr. Sheila Dobin, PhD (second from right) talks with Jan Hart during Saturday dinner in the Dynasty Oriental Restaurant. Dr. Dobin, Texas A & M School of Medicine, Scott and White Hospital spoke on the Jewish perspective of ethics and morality in genetics. Also seated, left to right, Roy and Essie Elsner, Charles B. Hart, and Mr. Louis Dobin.

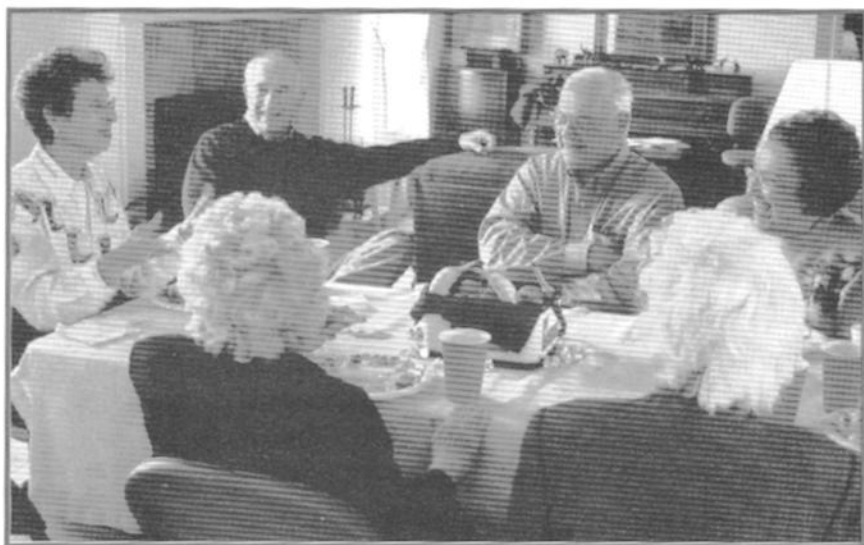


Jan Hart, Milton and Dorothy Harelik, and Stanley Weiss caught enjoying Saturday evening dinner.



Dining in the Dynasty. A little schmoozing and catching up before dinner.

Jan Hart, Ben Rosenberg, Max Stool, Dorothy Harelik and others enjoy Sunday lunch and schmoozing.



forest, and two hours and 12 miles later, they overtook their father. However the footrace had so exhausted their vigor, it required six hours to retrace their steps that earlier had consumed only two hours.³

On June 20, 1861, Napoleon Wiess married Cynthia Ann Sorelle, who was born in Arkansas on Aug. 14, 1845. On Mar. 25, 1861, the four oldest Wiess brothers helped organize Jasper County's "Red Star Guard Rifles," with Napoleon Wiess elected first lieutenant. On Sept. 20, 1861, Mark and William Wiess enlisted in Cavalry Company A, Spaight's 11th Texas Battalion at Sabine Pass, followed by Napoleon on July 3, 1862.⁴

The best record of Napoleon's military experience can be found in one of his letters, deposited in Galveston's Rosenberg Library, and quoted in *The Beaumont Enterprise* (Aug. 12, 1964), in part as follows:⁵

"Dear Mother: ...We had a little battle among all the little fights...We lost 37 men killed, 60 wounded, 11 prisoners. The Yankees lost 355 killed and wounded...We also took 1,240 muskets...Cousins David and Peter were also in the fight and came out safe (presumed to be from the Sturrock side). The battlefield is about 4 miles long. We also captured 2 pieces of artillery and some small arms. Some of the boys... also got clothing and a good many horses... I almost forget how you look—and I have not had a scratch of a pen from a soul since I have been over here. Your affectionate son Napoleon."

The Beaumont Enterprise listed the fight as the Battle of Carencro Bayou, when actually it was the Battle of Bayou Bourbouef, fought in Nov., 1863. Napoleon did not know the final tally of battle losses, which amounted to 716 casualties for the Federals and 170 casualties for the Confederates. One source listed Napoleon Wiess as on "detached service, Jan. 24, 1864—England," which could very well be true. Napoleon's company arrived back at Sabine Pass in Dec. 1863, and Confederate soldiers were often detailed to man blockade-runners loaded with cotton. On my website, www.wtblock.com "The Diary of 1st Sgt. H. N. Conner lists all four Wiess brothers as soldiers on the Company A Muster Roll, but mentions nothing special about them. However, Valentine Wiess was also detailed to Wiess Bluff Jan. 1865 to supervise slaves."⁶

It is unknown exactly how the end of the Civil War affected Napoleon Wiess. It certainly affected Simon Wiess's cotton commission business, for the cotton shipments from Sabine Pass, which reached 20,000 bales in 1860, dropped to 6,500 bales in 1866.⁷

The next known activity of Captains Napoleon and William Wiess entailed the bringing of the steamboats *Alt Gallatin*, James L. Graham, *Adriance*, and *Alamo* to Neches and Sabine waters. (This was the *Albert Gallatin* No. 2, about which very little is known. The *Albert Gallatin* No. 1 exploded in Galveston Bay on Dec. 23, 1841 while racing another steamer. Several people were killed.⁸)

William Wiess was captain of both the *Alamo* (nicknamed the "sitting goose") and *Adriance*. William Wiess explained that he had sailed his steamers as far north as Belzoni Smith County, on the Sabine; *Pattonia*, Nacogdoches County, on the Angelina; *Rockland*, Tyler County, on Neches.⁹

It is not known from whom Napoleon Wiess purchased the *Albert Gallatin*, or to whom he disposed of it, although it was probably "traded in" on the *James L. Graham*. Even if the *Gallatin* been sunk in a river or the lake, it seems logical that such a disaster would have appeared in a newspaper.

The *Gallatin* was the second steamboat built in Beaumont. It was built in 1867, adjacent to the Goldsmith and Reagan Sawmill, which in 1869 became the Mark Wiess and James Potter Sawmill.

One source observed¹⁰ ...the steamboat *Albert Gallatin* built in Beaumont, with Capt. Napoleon Wiess at the helm, sent word ahead that when the river was at flood stage in 1870, he would come and get the cotton... the boat docked at Boone's Ferry (due north from Chester, TX in Tyler County) for two days, and a great ball was held for two days on the upper deck. People came from 20 miles away—from Woodville to Moscow—in ox wagons...

For reasons unknown to me, Napoleon Wiess disposed of the *Gallatin* in 1870 and purchased the *James L. Graham*. The *Graham* was built in Pittsburgh in 1866, was about 105 feet long, weighed 113 tons,

and could carry 400 bales. In 1867 the Graham belonged to Captain Ferguson at Galveston. In November 1869 its new owners, Pry and Hadnot, bought the Graham and brought it to the Sabine River, but strangely nothing else is known about the Graham prior to its sale to Napoleon Wiess in 1870.¹¹

Early in June, 1871, a moderate hurricane struck Sabine Pass soon after the Graham had sailed, bound for Beaumont. There was much local fear that the steamer had foundered in Sabine Lake. Instead, the Graham set a new speed record to Beaumont, arriving in four hours. Editor McClanahan of the Sabine Pass Beacon was so impressed that he asked: "...Why must we tolerate a contemptible pony mail to Sabine Pass when the J. L. Graham can run the distance in much faster time?"¹²

In 1928, 90-year-old "Uncle Tom" Seamens, of Seamen's Bluff near Boone's Bluff, told of his experiences as fiddler aboard Capt. N. Wiess' steamers. Ordinarily Seamens was a cotton farmer, but when cotton harvest ended, he fiddled for the next three months aboard either the Gallatin or Graham, until 1872. Seamens was a Confederate soldier in Spaight's Battalion, and he first met Nap Wiess there when both were soldiers. Seamens wrote of being forced to watch a deserter being shot by a firing squad in Aug. 1964, which my Grandpa Block also had to watch.¹³

Another man who sailed on Capt. Napoleon Wiess' steamers was Capt. W. E. Rogers of Sabine Pass and Beaumont. Rogers had been 2nd Engineer on the Mary Falvey at Beaumont in 1856, and was later chief engineer aboard the 225-foot Florilda when he enlisted in Company A, Spaight's Battalion, where the four Wiess brothers also soldiered. In 1865 Rogers was detailed briefly as Captain of the Florilda when it was a Confederate tender. The Florilda sank at Ochiltree's Wharf in Orange during the hurricane of Sept. 6, 1865.

After the war, with no other jobs available, Rogers sailed as first mate on the Gallatin and Graham. After Napoleon Wiess' death on March 12, 1872, Rogers and two partners bought the Graham from Cynthia Ann Wiess (and anyone else who may have owned an interest). Rogers sold the Graham to Galveston owners in 1875, and the fast packet foundered on Redfish Reef

in Galveston Bay in May, 1876.¹⁴ Roger's daughter, Kate, was the Wiess Bluff school teacher in 1890.

At the height of his sailing career, Napoleon Wiess' untimely death of pneumonia at age 33 occurred at Wiess Bluff on Mar. 12, 1872, and he is buried beside his wife Cynthia in the Wiess family cemetery. Certainly fate played a terrible prank on his widow Cynthia Ann, who was left to raise five children alone at age 27 and was also destined to die at the young age of 45. A similar event occurred to Dora Bumstead Wiess, whose husband, William S. Wiess, was killed at age 31 in a sawmill boiler explosion.

The children of Napoleon and Cythia Ann Wiess were William Simon Wiess (June 20, 1862-Nov. 14, 1893); Capt. Edward Sorelle Wiess (Dec. 14, 1864-June 9, 1922); Martha Ann "Mattie" Wiess (1866-?); Margaret Isabell "Maggie" Wiess (Jan. 2, 1869-Mar. 10, 1960); Walter Wingate Wiess (Dec. 24, 1870-Aug. 24, 1954); Napoleon B. Wiess, Jr. (1871-1874).¹⁵

William Simon Wiess was married twice, first to Mary M. Simms (1861-1889), by whom he had two sons and daughter, and second to Dora Bumstead (1871-1951), by whom he also had one son and one daughter. Amy Lea Wiess' birth at Cairo, Jasper County, on Mar. 2, 1881-2 indicates that her father W. S. Wiess was working for the Yellow Bluff Tram Company and its crosstie sawmill at Cairo.

W. S. Wiess was working at his brother-in-law's, George W. Hooks, sawmill at Hooks Switch (also known as Sharon or Arriola), Hardin County, when the boilers suffered a very violent explosion, killing four men and injuring six. W. S. Wiess and Lemuel Waldrop were two of the four killed. One big boiler was found lying 150 yards away from the mill.¹⁶

William S. Wiess' children by Mary Simms and Dora Bumstead included Amy Lea Wiess (Mar. 2, 1881-Sept. 13, 1958); William Napoleon "Bud" Wiess (Dec. 16, 1883-killed in train accident Jul. 21, 1903); Thomas Edward Wiess (1888-1889); Jessie Wiess (Sept. 24, 1892-Nov. 30, 1970); William Simon Wiess II (May 14, 1894-Oct. 3, 1952).

Capt. Edward Sorelle Wiess was a tugboat captain at Sabine Pass, and he married Flavilla McGaffey of Sabine on Feb. 12, 1894. The progeny of that family included Jennie Vivian Wiess, who married Capt. Dan Bromley; Floyd Wiess, who married Rosabelle Sweeney (the writer's first cousin); Cornelia, who married 1) Jack Berry, 2) Gene McCrory, 3) J. W. McGaffey; Lillian, who married Steven Fred Austin; Birdie, who married Capt. Carl Bromley; M. Kathleen, who married 1) Asa C. Welch, 2) Tom Ridley; Mary Nellie, who married 1) J. H. Northrup, 2) T. Simesasa, 3) H. Settlemire; Louie Colen, who married Louella Hughes; Marjorie, who married 1) E. E. Granger, 2) B. B. Lang.

I remember an incident involving Kathleen Welch's granddaughter-in-law back about 1972 when I was on the staff at Lamar University. She came to me and asked if I could supply the genealogy of Kathleen Welch. I told her I could, but it might take me a while. What she did not know was that I had supplied the genealogy of Floyd Wiess to my second cousin Richard Wiess. I had heaps of info about Simon and Margaret Wiess, Napoleon and Cynthia Wiess, John and Sarah McGaffey, Increase R. and Julia Marie Burch, Bradley Garner, Sr., etc., and all I had to do was erase Floyd Wiess' name and enter Kathleen. The next morning I called her and told her I had the genealogy ready. She expressed great surprise and gratitude that I was able to complete it so quickly, and I was less than honest with her, noting that I supposed I "just had a special knack for genealogy."

Martha "Mattie" Wiess married Sherwood Increase Burch (Jr.) on Apr. 20, 1886. (The original Burch brothers at Sabine Pass, Sherwood, Sr., Increase, and Charles had, like Napoleon Wiess, a long steamboat history of their own as cotton steamer captains.)¹⁷

Their progeny included Elizabeth Eleanor Burch, who married Dr. John McKinnon; Ann M. Burch, who married Oscar Herndon; Ruth Burch, who married K. Eichelberger; Sherwood Burch, Jr. (III), who married Love Smith; Charles Edward Burch, who married Aline Janecka.

Margaret Isabell (Maggie) Wiess married George Washington Hooks, who was a partner with Dr. S. B.

Turner in the Hooks Switch Sawmill. Their progeny included Dessie (1886-1887); Lou Seale Hooks, who married F. H. Patrick; Thomas Wiess Hooks, who married Dorothy Hoyt; Edison Hooks, who married Jennie Martin; Ethel Hooks, who married J. H. Vertrees; William Napoleon Hooks, who married 1) Ethel Dean, 2) Christine Gaday; Thelma Lorrain Hooks, who married Earl V. Massey; Georgia Hooks, who married Ben Avant.

Walter Wingate Wiess married 1) ?? Hooks, 2) Johnnie Ella Moffett. Their progeny included Bessie Belle Wiess, who married John W. K. Walker; Walter Wingate Wiess, who married Mary Lou Phillips; Gladys Wiess, who married Parley Conley; Edward Wiess, who married 1) Frances Burrow, 2) Agnes Nelson; Mattie Lee Wiess, who married Don F. Burton; Harold Wiess, who married Margaret Nelson.¹⁸

Hence, these are the amazing annals of Napoleon and Cynthia Ann Sorelle Wiess, which were also marked by early deaths; two widowhoods, leaving families of young children still to be raised; and the epics of William and Napoleon Wiess, which contributed to the cotton steamboat history of East Texas.

Four Wiess brothers fought valiantly for the Confederate States of America, which ended in total defeat, as well as the near destruction of the Simon Wiess cotton commission business at Wiess Bluff. However, the Wiess brothers fought their way back from defeat as well, and who knows what Napoleon Wiess might have accomplished had fate not intervened and permitted him to live to a ripe old age. His descendants today probably number into the thousands.

Endnotes from W. T. Block's *Napoleon Bonaparte Wiess*

1 W. T. Block, *SAPPHIRE CITY OF THE NECHES: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PORT NECHES, TEXAS ETC.* (Austin: Eakin, 1987), 12.

2 W. T. Block, *COTTON BALES, KEELBOATS, AND STERNWHEELERS: A HISTORY OF THE SABINE RIVER AND TRINITY RIVER COTTON TRADES, 1837-1900*, (Woodville, 1995), 29-43; W. T. Block, "From Cotton Bales to Black Gold: A History of the Pioneer Wiess Families of Southeastern Texas," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*, VIII, No. 1 (Nov. 1971), 39-61.

3 *Beaumont Journal*, March 3, 1907. 4 "Jasper County

(*A Lone Star Zionist, continued from page 13*)

This need was further reinforced by the reading of a letter from Louis D. Brandeis pointing to the extra burden that the Jews in America must carry in establishing the Palestine colony. As further reported in the *Star Telegram*, "It is today's purpose of the Jews in the land of the free – the Zionists meeting in Fort Worth – to make a home for their persecuted brothers of other lands. It is their purpose to transplant conscious and sensitive human beings from a land where they may not even own a square foot of earth to a land where their homes and their orchards may be their own – 'every man under his vine and under his fig tree'."

(*Napoleon Bonaparte Wiess, continued*)

and the Civil War," Kirbyville TX Banner, Sept. 15, 1961; Muster Roll of Co. A, in Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record, Nov. 1971, p. 29; also muster roll of Co. A in "Diary of 1st Sgt. H. N. Conner."

5 Reprinted from Beaumont Enterprise, Aug. 12, 1964, from original in Rosenberg Library.

6 W. T. Block, "The Swamp Angels: A History of Spaight's 11th Texas Battalion," East Texas Historical Journal, XXX, No. 1 (1992), 44-58; "Diary of 1st Sgt. H. N. Conner," Beaumont Enterprise, Jan. 21, 1912; Ibid. Sept. 21, 1910, both of the latter articles written by William Wiess.

7 Cotton Bales, Keelboats, p. 79.

8 Telegraph and Texas Register. Dec. 29, 1841.

9 Cotton Bales, Keelboats, p. 81.

10 J. P. Landers, "Valentine Burch," TEXANA, III (Summer, 1965), 109-110.

11 Cotton Bales, Keelboats, 84; Lasworth, "Texas Steamboat Register," p. 85.

12 Sabine Pass Beacon, June 10, 1871.

13 W. T. Block, "Tom Seamens: Pioneer's Tales Cover Area History," Beaumont Enterprise, Jan. 11, 2003.

14 Beaumont News-Beacon, May 31, 1873; Galv. Weekly News, June 1, 1876; "Obituaries of Capt. W. E. Rogers, Beaumont Enterprise, also Journal, May 15, 1925; W. T. Block, "Capt. Rogers Kept Busy Running Supplies," Beaumont Enterprise, May 11, 2002.

15 Taken from Tom Cloud's website at <http://mykindred.com/wiess>.

16 Galv. Daily News, Nov. 15, 1893; W. T. Block, EAST TEXAS MILL TOWNS AND GHOST TOWNS, Vol. 2 (Lufkin: 1995), "Hardin County, pp. 37-39; "Jasper County," pp. 87-91.

17 The 1860 Census of Sabine Pass, res. 322, Increase R. Burch, capt. Sabine; res. 372, Charles Burch, steamboat pilot; res 328, Sherwood Burch, steamboat clerk; Cotton Bales, Keelboats, 17, 47, 50, 67, 82, 89.

18 Taken from Tom Cloud's website at <http://mykindred.com/wiess>. ■ TJHS

Among the various other presentations at the convention, a report was delivered on the current status of the Hebrew Schools in Texas. It was noted that Houston had 138 children in attendance at four schools, Fort Worth (91), San Antonio (60), Waco (50), Galveston (40) and Wharton (30). It was also reported that Dallas had "two dormitories" and that Austin had no Hebrew School at the time. Other interesting statistics included that there were 16 Zionist societies in the statewide organization and that nearly \$6,000 had been collected and sent to Palestine during the year. In today's dollars, that would be the equivalent of approximately \$110,000.

Attended by the leaders of Jewish communities throughout the state, prominent Texans scheduled for addresses included Dr. S. Burg of San Antonio, Dr. French of Waco, H. J. Dannebaum of Houston, Rabbi Rosinger of Beaumont and Rabbi Fox of Fort Worth. Pupils from the Hebrew Institute were also scheduled to make speeches to the group in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. In addition to the speeches and policy meetings, according to the *Star Telegram*, there was "an exhibit of oil, almonds and wines sent by the Jewish colonists in Palestine and an exhibit of arts and crafts." At some time during this high level of activity, my humble yet most sincere great-grandfather, Hyman Bernstein, apparently spoke the following words:

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished Guests:

The organizers of the ninth annual convention of Texas Zionists in Ft. Worth have given me the honor of speaking to the convention in Hebrew. I should say that this is the first time that I am speaking in Hebrew before an audience such as this, and I beg your indulgence if I don't speak as fluently in Hebrew as I do in other languages.

Distinguished convention!

The terrible war in Europe has brought great destruction to the world and our nation. The Jewish people have suffered and are still suffering more than any other. Our towns have been destroyed by fire.

Our young men in all countries have been taken to the army. People have been slaughtered and killed on behalf of nations who regarded them as strangers in their own countries.

(A Lone Star Zionist, continued)

Those who have stayed behind in the towns and cities are suffering from hunger and cold. Our sworn enemies have accused them of the most baseless charges and many of them have been hanged and killed for no reason. Each one of you here knows from the daily press all the misfortunes that have befallen our people there.

In addition, the Zionist movement, which had previously grown considerably in Europe, has suffered decline and has practically ceased to function because the leaders of the Zionist movement have scattered to the four winds and each one has had to concern himself with his own troubles as a result of the war.

However, distinguished convention, the day will come, sooner or a bit later when the cannons will be silenced and all nations of Europe great and small will gather at a great conference represented by their delegates to talk of peace and to fix the borders of nations.

At that time, distinguished guests, we must send people from among the best of our nation who will represent our people with great dignity, to this historic conference to present the claims of the Jewish people and to demand from the nations of the world that they restore our national heritage, the land of our forefathers in Eretz Israel that we have not forgotten these two thousand years!

However, distinguished delegates, we must organize and bring all those among our people who believe in our national revival, beneath our banner, the banner of Zionism. All members of this assembly, each one in his own town, must speak and work ceaselessly among their fellow Jews telling them that Zionism and only Zionism is the hope for the salvation of the Jewish people dispersed throughout the world. Let us hope that all the Jews, wherever they are, will see the justice in our cause and give their support to Zionism. And at that time, when the greater part of our people gathers beneath the banner of Zionism, the delegates representing our people at the peace conference will be able to demand from the nations of Europe, on behalf of the Jewish people who seek to live in freedom, that they return our land Eretz Yisrael to us that was torn from us two thousand years ago.

Let us hope that all nations will understand the justice in these demands – and then the sun will truly shine

upon us from the east! But meanwhile the best among our people must work faithfully and intensively among the Jewish nation, and on behalf of our people, and they may be certain that their work will not be in vain. As our great departed leader (Herzl) said: "If you will it, it is no dream!"

Hyman Bernstein was undoubtedly preaching to the choir at the Texas Zionist Convention. His references to the deprivations, the breakdown of the Zionist movement in Europe and the recognition that the clarion call of Zionism was for the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael were familiar themes to the attendees however passionately my great-grandfather may have expressed them. His multiple references to "the great conference to talk of peace" were particularly prescient. Four years later, at the conclusion of the hostilities in the fall of 1918, the Paris Peace Conference convened.

This resulted in the Treaty of Versailles, which, as a peace agreement, has not only been considered a failure but is largely regarded as the beginning of the path that led to the rise of Mussolini and Hitler. However, as my great-grandfather urged in his brief speech, a strong case for the goals of Zionism was presented to the peace conference on February 3, 1919 in what was known as the "Zionist Organization Statement on Palestine."

In summary, the statement promoted the creation of a British Mandate in Palestine with the establishment there of a Jewish National Home. It set forth the justification for the Mandate and suggested its borders and method of governance. The Mandate was established the following year in 1920, and the terms by which it facilitated Jewish immigration and settlement were, in part, in accordance with the conditions recommended in the "Statement."

The tragedy of the First World War and the plight of the Jews were particularly acute to my great-grandfather. Shortly after the start of the war in 1914, he lost contact with his wife and four children in Russia.



Do you want to see
PALESTINE The Jewish Homeland?

Then don't you think you should
GIVE A HELPING HAND?

How would you feel if the Jewish homeland in Palestine were not established because you did not help?

Would you not regret the lost opportunity?
THEN DO IT NOW!!

Enroll as a Member of The Zionist Organization

Fill out application on the other side and send it with \$2.00, your membership dues for one year, to the Zionist Organization of America, 55 Fifth Avenue, New York, or the Zionist Committee of your City.

Membership Card for the Zionist Organization of America found in one of the books belonging to Hyman Bernstein.

They were essentially lost to him and my grandmother, Sarah for seven years, until 1921, when Sam Shmidow in New York noticed a small notice that Rachel Leah had managed to place in a Yiddish newspaper. By the time arrangements could be made for their journey to America, the two oldest daughters had succumbed to illness and died. By 1922, when Rachel Leah and the two surviving children with her arrived in Texas, Hyman had moved to Fort Worth. Sarah, also in Fort Worth, had married Ephraim Zalman Hoffman, later Charles Hoffman, in 1915 and by that time had given birth to three sons, Maurice, Leo and Harold.

As a result, Hyman Bernstein was now called "Zeide" by the family. My father Maurice, six-years-old in 1922 when his grandmother Rachel Leah and his teenage aunt and uncle arrived in Texas, remembered being told that they were going to pick up "the new family from Russia." For a period of time after that, my father thought the train station in Fort Worth was Russia.

Hyman, now reunited with his surviving family, remained in Fort Worth and taught Hebrew for a living. He applied for citizenship upon his arrival in the United States and received his Certificate of Naturalization in December of 1916. His wife, Rachel Leah, died of cancer in 1929 at the age of 55. Hyman died of throat cancer in a Dallas hospital in June of 1946 at the age of 74. He was survived by his three remaining children: Sarah Hoffman, Irving Bernstein and Jen Miller. He also was survived by his grandson, Maurice; his wife; my

mother, Virginia; grandson Leo and his wife Shirley; his third grandson, Harold Hoffman. At the time of my great-grandfather's death, there were also two great-grandchildren, my cousins Patricia Hoffman Bernstein and Nancy Hoffman Alper. Hyman lived to witness the depravity of the Holocaust but his life fell two years short of experiencing the Zionist dream when Israel declared its Statehood in May of 1948. He is buried in the Ahavath Sholom Hebrew Cemetery in Fort Worth alongside Rachel Leah. The Hebrew inscription on his gravestone in part reads, "A pure and honest man who walked in righteousness and modesty, involved with his fellowman." I never knew my great-grandfather but with that sentiment, I do concur. ■ TJHS

Jewish Cemetery Rockdale, Milam County, Texas

PREPARED BY LYNNA KAY SHUFFIELD

Submitted by Shirley & Marvin Rich

SYNOPSIS: The Jewish Cemetery in Rockdale, Milam County, Texas is an integral part of the history of Texas as well as an example of the pioneer spirit of the early Jewish immigrants and their commitment to their faith.

On 11 November 1878, the Hebrew Benevolent Association (the "Association") purchased 22 acres of land in Rockdale, Milam County, Texas, from the Texas Land Company to establish a Jewish Cemetery.¹ Today, almost 125 years later, the Association is no longer in existence, but the deed remains in the name of the Association.

The earliest documented burial is Arthur Loewenstein, age 10 months, 8 days, the second son of Benjamin and Carrie Malsch Loewenstein. Arthur was born on 30 September 1876 in Rockdale, and died on 8 August 1877, 15-months prior to the purchase of the land by the Association.

Arthur's father was a prominent merchant and businessman in the community. He opened his business in a tent on Wednesday, 24 December 1873, before the International & Great Northern Railroad reached Rockdale in January 1874. When the railroad came to Rockdale, it was the end of the line and the community could only be characterized as a new, unsettled western tent town.²

On 8 May 1874, an election was held in which a majority of voters favored the incorporation of

Rockdale, and in early June or July the justice declared, "the inhabitants of the town of Rockdale are incorporated." One square mile, whose center would be the intersection of Bell and Main, would be known as Rockdale.³

"While in the Austin area, [in 1879, Charles] Wessolowsky visited the Jews in nearby communities. In Rockdale, there were 100 Jews and a B'nai B'rith lodge whose members planned to inaugurate a Sunday school. However, there was disagreement over rituals. Wessolowsky reported some of them still cling and hold fast to the doctrines and deed forms of the so-called *chasid* (pictist), while others require and ask for 'progress'"⁴

During the 1880s, there was a Jewish Community in Rockdale. In 1884, the Rockdale Jewish School Community was established and served until the expansion of public schools.⁵

In March 1884, Rockdale celebrated the Bar Mitzvah of Henry Kaiser, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kaiser. According to an article about the event published in the *Galveston Daily News*, "the best people of the city [Rockdale] were assembled. The feast was, in point of abundance and excellence, one of the finest ever spread at a private residence in Rockdale. Master Henry, in an admirable address, acquitted himself nobly, and received the hearty plaudits⁶ of all. Champagne flowed in abundance and it was a late hour when the last of the guests departed. Mr. Kaiser is one of our leading merchants and the ovation tendered by the large assemblage on this occasion was a fitting tribute to an enterprising citizen."⁷

The only known suicide in the cemetery is Isaac Ensheimer, age 35, who died on 29 April 1884. He was employed by Abe Steinberg, who also is buried in the cemetery. Isaac died by taking chloroform and morphine. In the note he left he said, "Disappointment in man has brought me to the long sleep. Please bury me decently."^{8,9} The primary reason Isaac makes the plea in his note is that, according to Rabbi Shraga Simmons, "Judaism regards suicide as a criminal act. Someone who commits suicide is considered a murderer. It matters not whether he kills someone else or himself. His soul is not his to extinguish."¹⁰ Therefore, Isaac's burial was in keeping with someone who committed suicide, as he is buried in a separate part of the cemetery along the fenceline. Henry Goldsticker died on 09 August 1888 of Bright's Disease.^{11,12} He was a Confederate Veteran having served in the Lavaca Guards (of Henry Goldsticker's son George

Lavaca County, Texas), 24th Brigade, Texas State Troops. During the Civil War, the Texas Legislature enacted laws and provided funds to organize the Texas State Troops, which were structured into companies of men to provide a frontier defense. Although organized like military units, these men were not part of the Confederate States Army.

Henry Goldsticker's son, George, and niece, Hattie Philipson are also buried in the cemetery. Hattie is the daughter of Ludwig and Sarah (Levy) Philipson. Henry's wife was Gabriella Philipson Goldsticker, sister of Ludwig.

One of the more tragic burials in the cemetery is Isaac Crown, who died in the Mundine Hotel Fire in which 12 people were killed. In 1880 John Mundine of Lexington built a three-story brick structure on the corner of Main and Railroad streets, the present site of McVoy's Grocery Store in Rockdale. The hotel opened in 1881 under the management of Dr. & Mrs. W. A. Brooks and soon became the social center of the town. But on June 8, 1888, the Mundine Hotel was destroyed in the most disastrous fire in the history of Milam County.^{14,15,16,17,18,19}

The Loewenstein family constitutes a large number of the burials in the cemetery. Benjamin Loewenstein,²⁰ the patriarch of the family died in 1934 when he was hit by an automobile while crossing the street in Rockdale.²¹ His other family members buried in the cemetery include his wife, Carrie Malsch Loewenstein who died as a result of a fall in her home.^{22, 23}

Other family members include Joseph E. Loewenstein, Jr., who was named for Ben's brother, Joseph Loewenstein. Carrie's mother, Salomine Malsch, is also buried within the family plot.²⁴

The Jewish Cemetery continued to serve the community until the last burial, which was of Morris Cohn on 30 April 1939. There are 19 marked graves and two unmarked graves.

The names of the individuals buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Rockdale, Milam County, Texas were added to the Milam County, TX general website at: <http://www.geocities.com/milamco/> Included are the individuals' names, dates of birth and death, and notes. In addition, there is a history of the cemetery on the website.

1) CLICK on MILAM COUNTY CEMETERIES

2) On CEMETERIES WEBPAGE, drop down on page to JEWISH CEMETERY and CLICK. ■ TJHS

Honorable *Menschen*

Submitted By Dorothy Harelik

We extend our **heartfelt sympathy** to the TJHS family of **Irvin Samuels** of Corsicana TX. Mr. Samuels passed away in November. **A hearty Mazel Tov** to TJHS Historian, Blanche Sheiness – 90 years young! Blanche celebrated her 90th birthday on November 24th ...**Davie Lou & Jack Solka**, Corpus Christi, on the birth of their first granddaughter (after 4 grandsons!). Proud parents are Gary & Shelly Solka of Austin, TX. Grandparent honors are also shared with Phyllis & Phil Stoup of Plano, TX, and great-grandparents, Rose Solka of Dallas, and TJHS members **Sam & Sheila Rosenfield** of Austin...**Davie Lou & Jack Solka**, on the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson, Brian, whose parents are Michael & Elizabeth Solka of Austin... **Elaine Albin** on her Bat Mitzvah in Corpus Christi on November 14, 2003. Elaine's grandson, Ben Kline, also became a Bar Mitzvah in Austin on November 1, 2003. His parents are David and the late Ruth Kline... **Dr. Bruce & Hollace Weiner**, Fort Worth, on the birth of their grandson, Max Jacob, whose proud parents are Mark and Michelle Weiner. Max was born on October 4, 2003 at Antelope Valley Hospital in Lancaster, CA, where his father is an Air Force Navigator stationed at Edwards Air Force Base in the Mojave Desert.

Do you have news to share with your TJHS family? "Honorable *Menschen*" features tid-bits about members and member families' births, marriages, accomplishments, graduations, degrees earned, get well wishes, condolences, announcements and more. Please email information for "Honorable *Menschen*" to Dorothy Harelik at dkharelik@htcomp.net or mail to 602 South Bell Street, Hamilton, TX, 76531, or call 254-386-3538. ■ TJHS

Want to see the latest?

Check out the Texas Jewish Historical Society website!

<http://www.txhjs.org>

email: txhjs@yahoo.com



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We appreciate your articles and photos for inclusion in the TJHS Newsletter. Please send articles, information and photographs to davielou@solka.net or mail them to 501 Bermuda Place, Corpus Christi, TX, 78411, phone 361-852-5815.

Send your ideas and suggestions to
Susan Elsner Furman at Susan@ELsnerFurman.com

It's All In A Name

Contributed by Shirley & Marvin Rich

Other than aristocrats and wealthy people, Jews did not get surnames in Eastern Europe until the Napoleonic years of the early 19th Century. Most Jews from countries captured by Napoleon, Russia, Poland and Germany were ordered to get surnames for tax purposes. After Napoleon's defeat, many Jews dropped these names and returned to "son of" names, such as Mendelsohn, Jacobson, Levinson, etc.

During the so-called Emancipation, Jews were once more ordered to take surnames. In Austria, The Emperor Joseph made Jews take last names in the late 1700s, Poland in 1821, and Russia in 1844. It is probable that some of our families have had last names for 175 years or less.

In France and the Anglo-Saxon countries, surnames went back to the 16th Century. Also Sephardic Jews had surnames stretching back centuries. Spain, prior to Ferdinand and Isabella, was a golden spot for Jews. Isabella expelled them the same year Columbus left for America. The earliest American Jews were Sephardic.

In general, there were five types of names: descriptive of head of household, of occupation, city of residence, assigned names, and purchased names. People had to pay to choose their name, while the poor had assigned names.

Examples of the different types of names include descriptive of the head of the household: Hoch (tall), Klein (small), Cohen (rabbi), Burger (village dweller), Shein (good looking), Levi (temple singer), Gross (large), Schwartz (dark or black), Weiss (white), Kurtz (short).

Names describing occupations: Holtz (wood), Holtzocker (wood chopper), Geltschmidt (goldsmith), Schneider (tailor), Kreigsman (warrior), Eisen (iron), Fischer (fish).

Names from city of residence: Berlin, Frankfurter, Danziger, Oppenheimer, Deutsch (German), Pollack (Polish), Breslau, Mannheim, Cracow, Warsaw.

Bought names: Gluck (luck), Rosen (roses), Rosenblatt, (rose paper or leaf), Rosenberg (rose mountain), Rothman (red man), Garfinkel / Diamond (diamond), Koenig (king), Koenigsberg (king's mountain), Spielman (spiel is to play), Lieber (lover), Berg (mountain), Wasserman (water dweller), Kershenblatt (church paper), Stein (glass).

Assigned names (usually undesirable): Plotz (to die), Klutz (clumsy).

Look for Part II in your next issue of the TJHS Newsletter, when we feature birth names of some well-known Jewish performers. ■ TJHS

Deadline for The Next Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter is January 31st

We welcome your input and contributions to the Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter. Please send your information and/or color copies of photos to Associate Editor Davie Lou Solka by January 31 for the Winter 2004 issue. Photos are welcome, but you are strongly encouraged to send color copies only (even of black and white photos), as we cannot guarantee the receipt of or return of materials submitted. It is recommended that you scan original photos and papers or provide them on computer diskette.

TJHS Silver Anniversary Slated for April 30-May 2, 2004 in San Antonio

By Max Stool

Mark your calendars! The Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society is a double-celebration, as we will celebrate our Silver Anniversary. The Gathering is slated to begin Friday, April 30, 2004. The general membership meeting is scheduled for Sunday morning, May 2. With 25 years of great accomplishments and substantial growth, the San Antonio Committee is planning an eventful celebration, which will be informative, entertaining, and a social success! Hotel accommodations are in the newly renovated, historic Menger Hotel on Alamo Plaza, located right next to the Alamo. The Menger couldn't be more fitting for our Anniversary celebration, as the Alamo is a symbol of freedom, and a common theme among TJHS families is enjoyment of the benefits of freedom in our fine state of Texas.

The Menger is the oldest continually operating hotel west of the Mississippi, and offers an enjoyable ambiance, a cordial staff and a superb restaurant. The hotel also offers easy access to a number of interesting sites in and around San Antonio, including the River Walk, River Central Mall, and the Institute of Texan Cultures in Hemisfair Plaza, where TJHS supported a very fine exhibit.

In addition to its significance as a historical landmark, the Menger offers unparalleled amenities including the famous Colonial Room Restaurant, downtown San Antonio's largest swimming pool, a full service spa, fitness room and Jacuzzi. Constructed in 1859 under the

direction of owner William A. Menger and architect John Fries, the original two-story building occupies a prominent location in downtown San Antonio, only 100 yards from the site of the Alamo. The Menger has served as the home away from home to a number of personalities including Theodore Roosevelt, Sidney Lanier, Babe Ruth, Mae West, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Sarah Bernhardt and Gutzon Borglum, to name a few.

More than 130 years of refinements have created a masterpiece of traditional elegance and atmosphere. The Menger now boasts five stories, 316 rooms, and unparalleled amenities. Guests get to experience the history and charm of a national landmark and enjoy the comfort of a high-class hotel. Although much of the architecture, history, appointments, and artifacts found at the Menger certainly qualify as museum-quality, it remains a public hotel as it has been since 23 years after the fall of the Alamo.

Watch your mailbox for more information and your registration form as we near our 25th Anniversary Celebration and get ready for a big Howdy in San Antonio!



BOOK A TRAVELING EXHIBIT FOR YOUR NEXT PROGRAM - FREE FOR THE ASKING

By Jack Gerrick

The Texas Jewish Historical Society, in cooperation with the Institute of Cultures in San Antonio, has produced a series of old photographs, stories and a look into the earliest beginnings of Texas Jewish history. Two traveling exhibits on museum-quality reproduction foam board are available and include 25 large photos with descriptive literature. They can be displayed on self-standing easels or may be hung on a wall. The exhibit is packed in a waterproof box that can be shipped.

The exhibits are available at no charge, and should be returned to the Texas Jewish Historical Society using prepaid freight. The Society will prepay the exhibit to the point of the showing. Over the past years, the exhibits have provided insight into Jewish history, having been shown in a number of venues including schools, synagogues, Hadassah meetings and event for children.

For more information, please contact Jack Gerrick at (817) 927-8765.

From The Prez - A Report on The THJS Summer Board Meeting

Thank you Beverly Beck Trachtenberg for stepping in at the last minute to coordinate the Summer Board meeting in Houston. Board members and guests met in the Hilton Hobby Airport Hotel on July 13, 2003. Corresponding Secretary Selma Mantel suggested that for marriages, big anniversaries, or family losses, if she is notified, she will respond with notes from the Society. She also sends thank you notes for donations and notes of congratulations on special awards.

Hollace Weiner made a report on the proposed symposium on the History of Texas Jewry that she, Helen Wilk, and Rabbi Kenneth Roseman are putting together in conjunction with the 2005 Annual Gathering. The proposal was accepted by the Board.

I read a warm letter of thanks from Dr. Gary P. Zola for the gift from the Society to help convert sermons of Dr. Stephen Wise from aluminum recordings to compact disks.

Thanks to our editor, Susan Elsner Furman, for her work on the newsletters. Please remember to send your oral histories and photos for the newsletter to Davie Lou Solka. (See page 23 for her address.)

Charles B. Hart
President, TJHS

The Texas Freedom Network

Submitted by Shirley & Marvin Rich

The Texas Freedom Network advances a mainstream agenda of religious freedom and individual liberties to counter the radical right. To subscribe to their newsletter or e-zine, send an email to tfn@tfn.org, or, mail to P.O. Box 1624, Austin, TX, 78722. Phone: 512-322-0545; Fax: 512-322-0550. To join the organization, go to www.tfn.org/joinus.

About Mr. W. T. Block

Although my surname is Jewish, my family left Judaism at some time in the past; I just write a lot about Jews because I write a lot about all religions as my website reveals, and except for some unknown circumstance, I might have been Jewish myself today. Also, I fought the Germans all over Europe, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany as an infantryman in 78th Infantry Division and crossed the Remagen Bridge the same night it was captured. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters of Arts in History. I became interested in writing about Beaumont Judaism while conducting research for my MA thesis in the *Galveston Daily News*, when suddenly between 1880-1900, I discovered that in about 1968, there was a flood of information about early Beaumont Jews, the organization of Temple Emanuel, etc.

When my colleague, Lawrence Blum, a Lamar English teacher, informed me of the paucity of early history down at the Temple, it fired my imagination to write more. I publish two columns weekly in the *Beaumont Enterprise* and in other papers.

Three of my most recent articles were about Jewish (male) heroes and medal winners of World War II; Frances Slinger, the Jewish army nurse killed in action in Belgium, Oct. 20, 1944; and Hank Greenberg, the great Detroit Tigers slugger, whose minor league activity was with the Beaumont Exporters.

Even though I am 83, I still write like a demon.

I have one other story I want to write (I don't want it lost to posterity), but sadly I do not have much information. In 1875, Orange, Texas was a town of border ruffians, whereas Beaumont offered a much more amenable climate for Jews to flourish. In 1880, Henry Solinsky and Wolf Bluestein resettled from Orange to Beaumont, and each man flourished in Beaumont, even owning the Bluestein Opera House together. (Solinsky even traveled to New York seeking vaudeville talent). Bluestein was the most remarkable of men. He could neither read nor write, yet he had learned to compensate for that lack of knowledge in other ways. Bluestein made a modest fortune in Beaumont, both as a merchant and a rice farmer.

I do not know nearly as much as I wish I knew about either of these men, but what I do know needs to be preserved in the Texas Jewish Archives.

Mr. Block lives in Nederland, TX and is available by email at wt@wtblock.com His website <http://wtblock.com/wtblockjr>.

■ TJHS

Texas Jewish Historical Society Membership Form

☐ **YES!** My dues payment to the Texas Jewish Historical Society is enclosed. I have checked the appropriate categories below

I am a: ☐ **New Member** ☐ **Renewing Member**

☐ \$ 36 - Annual Member

☐ \$ 50 - Supporting Member

☐ \$ 100 - Sponsor

☐ \$ 250 - Sustaining Member

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

Winter Meeting Slated for February 6 - 8, 2004 on South Padre Island

Submitted by Rusty Milstein

Can you think of a better place for a February meeting in Texas than South Padre Island? The Texas Jewish Historical Society will hold its Winter Board Meeting Friday through Sunday, February 6-8, 2004, in the Radisson Resort, 500 Padre Blvd. All TJHS members are encouraged to attend this fun-filled weekend!

TJHS board member Rusty Milstein says the action-packed, informative weekend begins on Friday, February 6, with a bus ride to Temple Beth El in Brownsville, where attendees will be treated to Shabbat dinner and services.

Saturday, February 7, begins with a morning of sightseeing, shopping at Lighthouse Square in Port Isabel, a "Dutch treat" lunch at Pirates' Landing, and a guided bus tour of "Jewish" Brownsville. Afterward, enjoy a little rest, wiggle your toes in the sand, or shop on South Padre. The Saturday evening banquet will be in the Radisson.

Room rates for TJHS members range from \$89 per night for a single room, to \$189 per night for a two-bedroom, two-bath condo complete with full-size kitchen and living area. For a virtual tour or more information about the Radisson Resort, visit their website at <http://www.radisson.com/reservation/hotelSearch.do>

Watch your mailbox for the TJHS Winter Board Meeting Registration Form, which will include information about registration and shuttle fees. Transportation to South Padre Island is available by shuttle from either the Harlingen or Brownsville airports. Southwest Airlines flies into Harlingen. Continental flies into Brownsville.

Many thanks in advance to Gay Greenspan, Bernice Edelstein and Lori Suissa.

■ TJHS

Texas Jewish Historical Society

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Radisson Resort
South Padre Island
February 6-8, 2004



Make plans now for the
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Spring Annual Gathering
The Historic Menger Hotel
San Antonio, Texas
April 30 – May 2, 2004