

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Established 1980



A Quarterly News Magazine of the Texas Jewish Historical Society

Summer 2005

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Marvin Rich



Several members of the Texas Jewish Historical Society have asked how we choose where to hold our Annual Gathering and Quarterly Weekends and Board Meetings. Anyone who has attended a Quarterly Weekend knows how much hard work goes into making it successful.

Our primary goal is to meet in communities around the state so that it is convenient and cost-effective for all members to attend at least one meeting a year, and so that TJHS members can experience the unique and varied elements of Texas Jewish history. In choosing meeting locations, key considerations include the following:

- Local members must ensure sleeping, dining and meeting accommodations are adequate
- Travel costs and room rates must be affordable
- Volunteers need to be aware of and meet or exceed expectations.

At our July 2005 Board of Directors meeting in Houston, Rusty and Mitzi Milstein presented "Guidelines to Planning A Quarterly

See President's Message page 9



Tom and Minnie Friedman

CORRECTION

The Texas Jewish Historical Society News Magazine, (Spring 2005 issue, page three), features a photograph incorrectly identified as "Tom and Minnie Friedman in 1948." The late Tom and Minnie Friedman (pictured at left) founded Echo Hill Ranch in 1953. Today, as second-generation owners, their children, "Kinky" (Richard), Roger and Marci continue the legacy as they operate the private, child-centered camp for kids 6-14 in Medina, TX, near Kerrville.

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TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Gratefully acknowledges your gift to its

Endowment Fund

\$ _____

In _____
Of _____

An acknowledgment has been sent to the party you specified. Your gift will further the efforts to record, preserve and disseminate historic information about Texas Jewish culture.

THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY ENDOWMENT FUND

Your donations to the Texas Jewish Historical Society Endowment Fund help support important programs. Thank you to those who have made contributions this quarter. To honor a friend or loved one with a contribution to the Endowment Fund, please send the honoree's full name, type of honor (congratulations and occasion, memorial, etc.), your (donor's) name and a check in the amount of your choice to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX, 78766-0193.

THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY FALL 2005 QUARTERLY NEWS MAGAZINE

Your articles, oral histories and photographs are welcome for consideration for inclusion in the Texas Jewish Historical Society News Magazine. Email or mail to Assistant Editor Davie Lou Solka, davielou@solka.net, 501 Bermuda Place, Corpus Christi, TX, 78411, phone 361-852-5815.

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Note: The Texas Jewish Historical Society cannot guarantee the safe return of your documents or photographs. It is recommended that *only* color photocopies of both black & white and color documents and photos are provided. We welcome your suggestions, comments and ideas. Send to Susan Elsner Furman, Susan@ElsnerFurman.com or mail to 6215 Berthoud Pass, Dallas, TX, 75252.

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY WISHES AND MEMORIES

By Corresponding Secretary Selma Mantel

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has received the following contributions to the Endowment Fund.

IN HONOR OF

Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Schooler
for the 2005 Annual Gathering in Austin

Temple Mt. Sinai of El Paso, Texas
for joining the Texas Jewish Historical Society

Charles Hart's 70th Birthday
by Kathy & Michael Weimer

IN MEMORIUM

Robert Furman
Rusty and Mitzi Milstein

Estate of Francis Kallison
by Mr. and Mrs. Al Friedman

Estelle Rappaport
mother of Dr. Larry & Helen Wilk
from Ima Joy Gandler

Ruthe Weingarten
by Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Meltzer

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

The following new members were honored with a gift of a one-year membership in the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Phillip Elsner
In honor of his birthday
from his parents Essie and Roy Elsner

Judith Lachman
from her children: Vicki Pitluk, Barry Pitluk, Murrie Pitluk, Len Hoppe and Dulce Hoppe

Mr. & Mrs. Bill Podazer
In honor of their first wedding anniversary
by Elaine Greenberg

Corresponding Secretary Selma Mantel
sent the following notes and cards.

Sylvan Mellinger
for his recovery

Dr. Larry & Helen Wilk
on the loss of his mother, Estelle Rappaport

SAN JACINTO SYMPOSIUM DVDS AVAILABLE FROM 2001 - 2005

By Trevia Beverly

DVDs of several San Jacinto Symposiums are available from the Friends of the Texas Revolution. Each DVD costs \$17 for SJBA, members and \$20 for non-members plus a \$2 shipping and handling fee per DVD.

DVDs may be ordered by mailing a check made payable to the SJBA, to Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground, P.O. Box 940536, Houston, TX 77094-7536. DVDs are available for immediate shipment and are listed below.

2005: Fifth Annual Symposium, The Battle of San Jacinto:

- Chairman, San Jacinto Historical Advisory Board, **Jeffrey D. Dunn**, *From the Brazos to the Battle: The Final Days of the San Jacinto Campaign*
- Texas History journalists and authors **Bill and Marjorie K. Walraven**, *Bayonets on the Bayou? The United States Army and the Battle of San Jacinto*
- **Anne E. Hodges and Brenda S. McClurkin**, *Documenting the Texas Revolution: Resources in the University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections*
- **A. Carolina Castillo Crimm, Ph.D.**, *Sam Houston State University, Conflicting Loyalties: Tejanos as Rebels and Loyalists*
- Social Studies Curriculum Specialist **Edward L. Miller**, Judson Independent School District, *The San Jacinto-New Orleans Connection: The New*

Orleans Greys, Tampico, and General Cos' Saddle

2001: New Perspectives from the Mexican Side:

- Professor of History, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, **Miguel Soto**, *The Mexican Retreat after San Jacinto - Military Concerns or Speculative Considerations?*
- Associate Professor of History, North Carolina State University, **James E. Crisp**, *When Did Mexico Lose Texas? The Quest for the Irreversible Moment*
- Houston Archeological Society member **Gregg Dimmick**, *Tracking the Mexican Army Through the Mar de Lodo*
- Author, Comedy Writer, Film Maker and Historian **Frank Thompson**, *Hollywood's Portrayal of the Battle of San Jacinto*

2002: Personalities of San Jacinto:

- Author **Jim Haley** and Professor of History, The Victoria College, **Dr. Stephen L. Hardin**, *Sam Houston*
- History, El Colegio de Mexico, **Dr. Josefina**, *Santa Ana Anna*
- Sons of the Republic of Texas, **Gerard Kendall**, *Sidney Sherman*
- Professor of History, Southwest Texas State University, **Dr. Jesús F. de la Teja**, *Juan Sequin and the Tejano Company*

- Past President, Texas State Historical Association, **J. P. Bryan**, *San Jacinto: Who Wears the Coat of Many Colors?*

2003: San Jacinto: A Chapter in U. S. – Mexico Relations:

- Historian and Curator of the Alamo, **Dr. R. Bruce Winders**, *San Jacinto: The Turning Point of the Texas—Mexican War*
- Professor of International Studies, Instituto Tecnológico Autónoma de México, **Dr. Jesús Velasco-Marquez**, *Texas: A Wedge Between Mexico and the United States, 1836-1845*
- Author and great-granddaughter of Sam Houston, **Mrs. Madge Thornall Roberts**, *Sam Houston's Road to San Jacinto*
- Professor of History, the University of North Texas, **Dr. Randolph (Mike) Campbell**, *Slavery in the Texas Revolution*

2004: Digging for Texas History: New Insights into the Battle of San Jacinto and Origins of the Texas Revolution:

- Director of Cultural Resources, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department **Michael Strutt**, *Archeology at San Jacinto and the Latest Findings*
- **Ted Hollingsworth**, Senior Project Manager for Land Conservations, *Restoring the Environment of a Battle*

See San Jacinto, page 4

**TWO NEW GRANT PROGRAMS OFFERED BY
THE SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
APPLICATION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 15, 2005**

By Sumner Levine
Submitted by Marvin Rich

The Southern Jewish Historical Society is announcing two new grant programs.

The Kawaler Research/Travel Grant is designed to aid researchers with travel and expenses associated with projects pertaining to Southern Jewish history. The Grant is open to individuals employed in academic fields. The Southern Jewish Historical Society encourages anyone engaged in serious research to apply for the Kawaler Research/Travel Grant.

The Lowenstein Archival Grant is designed to aid archives in the preservation of material related to Southern Jewish history. Applications for the Lowenstein Archival Grant are accepted from all archival organizations, especially those operating on local and regional levels.

Applicants for both grants are asked to provide the following:

- A description of the project
- Kawaler Research/Travel Grant research/travel funds should include a plan indicating their research goals and the libraries and/or archives where they intend to conduct their research.
- Proposed budget showing total anticipated expenses and all sources of funding
- Total amount of the grant request
- Description of professional and/or institutional background as it relates to historical or archival work

Deadline to receive applications is September 15, 2005.

Mail applications to Scott Langston, 206 Mitchell, Weatherford, TX 76087. Contact Mr. Langston at ScLangston@charter.net for more information.

■ TJHS

San Jacinto, continued from page 3

2004: Digging for Texas History, cont.:

- Professor of History, TCU, **Gregg Cantrel, Ph.D.G.**, *Anglo Texans and the Road to Revolution*
- Professor of History, Austin Community College, **Andres Tijerina, Ph.D.**, *The Tejano Side of the Texas Revolution*
- Center for American History, the University of Texas, **John Wheat**, and Author, Illustrator, Historian **Jack Jackson**, *Their Audacity Is Now Intolerable: Col. Juan N. Almonte and the Texas Revolution*

For a membership brochure or to join the Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground, send your request or dues check, (see fee schedule below), to FSJB, P.O. Box 940536, Houston, TX 77094-7536.

- Student - \$15
- Senior (65-plus) - \$15
- Individual - \$30
- Family/Dual - \$50
- Patron - \$100
- Supporting - \$250
- Sponsor - \$500
- Benefactor - \$1,000
- Corporate/Business memberships available

For more information please phone Trevia Beverly at 713.864.6862.

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TEXAS CEMETERY PROJECT

By Don and Gertrude Teter

About 20 years ago, a committee was named to research and identify all of the small, abandoned Jewish cemeteries in Texas. As a result of this endeavor, the locations of many cemeteries were found. Locations without Jewish cemeteries were also identified.

The project was put on hold for about five years. Then, Gertrude and I were asked to head the committee to continue the project. We decided to enlarge the scope of responsibilities and attempt to include all the Jewish burials in Texas. As a result of about six years of documenting all the burials we could locate, the book, *Texas Jewish Burials*, was published. It contains 34,000 listings, including Jewish cemeteries and other cemeteries where Jewish burials were known.

Many researchers and genealogists throughout the country use this book as key reference material.

It is now time to consider updating and re-publishing the book by its 10th Anniversary, which will occur in 2007. Errors in the book include typos, marker recordings and omissions. Obviously there have been many burials over the intervening years, which should be added to the pages of this book. Although the book is arranged alphabetically by surname, a printout for each cemetery is available.

It is our suggestion that each cemetery be re-documented, making changes and additions as necessary. The original database can then be updated. When a committee is formed, we will be glad to advise, consult and furnish the current database, but it is beyond our abilities to perform the necessary physical effort.

Please contact us at donte@hal-pc.org or call 281-424-5829 if you can help.

■ TJHS

EARLY ZIONISM IN TEXAS: DO YOU HAVE INFORMATION?

Dr. Stuart Rockoff is working on an essay about early Zionism in Texas. He reports that he has come across a 1934 project entitled "Nachlath Texas," in which the Texas Zionist Association planned to raise money to purchase 1000 dunams of land in the Upper Galilee region of Palestine for a Jewish settlement named after the Lone Star State.

Although Texas Zionists were to receive first priority for settlement, Dr. Rockoff believes that it was primarily intended for European Jewish refugees. By 1938, \$28,000 had been raised and a formal agreement had been made with the Keren Kayemeth Leisrael.

Dr. Rockoff has been unable to find out what happened to this project. "I have never heard of an Israeli town named after Texas," he says. "Was this part of a larger project to establish such colonies in Palestine in the 1930's? Is there a larger context that I'm missing?"

If you have information about this project or resources that will assist Dr. Rockoff, he would greatly appreciate your contacting him at:

Stuart Rockoff, Ph.D.
Director, History Department
Goldring / Woldenberg Institute of
Southern Jewish Life
P. O. Box 16528
Jackson, MS 39236-0528
Phone 601-362-6357
Fax 601-366-6293
Email rockoff@msje.org
Website www.msje.org

■ TJHS

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBER DORIS MARWIL FROST DIES AT AGE 86

Portions of this Article are excerpted from © San Antonio Express News May 24, 2005

A memorial service was held at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 25, 2005 for civic volunteer Doris Marwil Frost. The service was held in the Wulfe Sanctuary of San Antonio's Temple Beth-El synagogue, 211 Belknap. Barry Block officiated.

An avid San Antonio Spurs fan, Mrs. Frost died 30 minutes after watching their playoff victory on Sunday, May 22, 2005. Mrs. Frost died as a result of the effects of a stroke she suffered on April 1, 2005.

The mother of longtime Texas Congressman Martin Frost, Doris Marwil Frost was a native of the East Texas town of Henderson. She had lived in San Antonio since her late husband Jack's retirement in 1979.

Mrs. Frost was an avid bridge player, having obtained the distinction of Life Master 50 years ago. For many years she was a bridge instructor and a director of duplicate bridge games in California, where her husband worked as an aerospace engineer. She also spent many hours watching tennis on television.

She devoted thousands of hours to volunteering for a variety of civic organizations including Lighthouse for the Blind, the

National Council of Jewish Women, and Golden Manor Retirement Home. Her son, Martin Frost served in the United States House of Representatives from the 24th District of Texas (Dallas-Fort Worth area) from 1979 until January 2005.

Doris Marwil Frost grew up in Henderson, where her father, M.H. Marwil served as Mayor for



two terms. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education from the University of Texas at Austin, where she met her husband, who was from San Antonio.

Her father-in-law, Joe Frost was co-founder of Frost Brothers Department Store. They lived in Southern California during World War II, moved to San Antonio after the war and then moved to

Fort Worth in 1949 when Jack took a job with Convair Aircraft (now Lockheed Martin). They moved back to Southern California in 1962 and retired in San Antonio in 1979.

Doris and Jack traveled extensively until Jack's death in 1995.

In addition to her son, Martin, and his wife, Major General Retired Kathy Frost of Alexandria, VA, Mrs. Frost is survived by her daughter, Carol Frost Wagner and her husband, Richard Wagner of Sumner, Texas; her son, Richard M. Frost and his wife, Catherine Frost of Monterey, California; five grandchildren, Alanna Bach of El Paso, Texas, Mariel Sala of Highlands Ranch, Colorado, Jennifer Frost of Washington, D.C., Melissa Frost of Santa Rosa, California, and Camille Frost of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

She is also survived by two sisters, Vera Reimer and Shirley Sanger both of Dallas; a brother, Stanley Marwil of San Antonio; great-granddaughters Helaine Bach, Simona Bach and Esther Bach all of El Paso.

■ TJHS

RABBI ISRAEL ROSENBERG: CIRCUIT RIDING RABBI OF WHARTON & OTHER TEXAS CITIES

By Rachelle Issero – Jerusalem, Israel

I attended a ceremony at Yad Vashem in March, 2005, where 250 United Jewish Appeal (UJA) delegates from Houston, Texas, gathered to dedicate a work of art by Alice Lok Chanah. This stunning piece was presented to the Chairman of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., Fred Zeidman. Fred invited me to join the group because he is a Wharton native and was going to talk about my father in his acceptance remarks.

Fred choked up when he mentioned my father, Rabbi Israel Rosenberg. Jo Wadler Capito, also of Wharton, was part of the group. People came to me to tell me that they knew my father and remembered his influence. My heart was full and I was deeply moved. Here in Jerusalem, Jews from Houston and I were able to reminisce about my father. He would have been very proud of his Texas Jews, their ability to remember the past and their loyalty to Israel.

My father, of blessed memory, passed away on Rosh Hodesh Sivan (June, 1978), just before the holiday of Shavuot. Yet, even after 26 years, he lives on in those he influenced in his 22 years as a Rabbi of Shearith Israel Congregation in Wharton, Texas.

Who was this remarkable person whose name still brings tears to the eyes of his parishioners and friends?

First, he was a remarkable father who taught his children – a daughter and a son – equally. We sat with him and our mother, Esther, of blessed memory, in our small apartment on the Lower East Side of New York on Friday nights studying the weekly Torah portion, which he read to us in Yiddish in his free translation. In this way we learned Yiddish. Otherwise we spoke English or Hebrew.

My father, a scholar of the Bible and the Talmud, believed that both girls and boys should be taught equally. As we grew older and moved uptown to a more comfortable neighborhood, he would gather the youngsters in our apartment house and study with us on Shabbat afternoons.

But it's best to go back to his beginnings. Israel Rosenberg was born in 1905 in the Carpathian Mountains of Munkacs, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I, this area became part of Czechoslovakia.

He was a proud Czech citizen because he believed in the democratic principles of that newly formed but short-lived Republic.

He was born into a Hassidic world from which he broke away at the age of 17, cutting off his "payes" (side-locks) and exchanging them for a

deeply held belief in Zionism. In those days, those lifestyles could not co-exist.

His father and grandfather were extremely pious Jews who were proud of having been appointed to be the "Munkacher Shochtim" (mohalim and ritual slaughterers). The family tree includes famous rabbis going back centuries. As a child I was able to recite ten generations of the family tree.

Though he became quite secularized in his thinking, my father remained faithfully adherent to Orthodox practices, adding a romantic touch of Hassidic rituals. He even dabbled in Kabalistic lore. Despite or because of his deep learning in Jewish sources, he was able to turn himself into an expert in Modern Hebrew language and literature. He became a devotee of S. Y. Agnon, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner, writing critical words on Agnon's complex works. His ability to master languages was extraordinary. My father taught himself Hungarian (only Yiddish was spoken in his childhood home). He taught himself German while serving as the junior rabbi and cantor in a "liberal" congregation in Sudetenland in 1930-1938.

There he organized Zionist youth groups and Halutsim training camps

See Rabbi Rosenberg, cont. page 8

so that every person, young and old, was able to escape to Palestine just as Hitler took over. Ironically, the British White Paper barred our family from entering Palestine.

With the Almighty's miraculous intervention we were lucky to be able to reach the United States of America at the last minute. My father came in August 1939, and my mother, brother and I came in December 1939. That's a chapter all its own.

Once in the United States, my father taught himself English by reading the New York Times. He had many changes in his life – some planned and others forced by circumstances. He was a man of unbelievable optimism and capable of adapting himself as circumstances warranted.

Despite his personal observance, he was open to all Jews and always told me, "All Jews are assumed to be Kosher," so if a family invited him for dinner, he never questioned their Kashrut. He trusted that no one would try to put one over on him. He and my dear mother had 15 good years together in Wharton where they were not only the Rabbi and Rebbetzin, but also good friends to many families.

They would host the children for "farfel" on Friday night and "cholent" on Shabbat. Between meals he taught them Torah and my mother served her delicate Hungarian "old-World" pastries.

During the week, my father would

have his daily morning coffee at Rugely's Drugs with the Mayor of Wharton and the county Sheriff. He was seen driving his big black sedan and wearing his white Stetson. How he loved the open spaces! I think he even took on a Texas drawl.

My father drove a great deal from town to town. In the afternoons he would teach the kids in the playroom while the mothers had coffee and played bridge in the game rooms. After the lessons he would stop to have coffee with the ladies. He developed a life-long addiction to a "cup of coffee" and, in fact, his last words as he lay dying were "cup of coffee." Perhaps he preferred to believe that he was leaving one teaching session and heading to the next town and the next bunch of kids.

He was so proud that each of his students – boy or girl – was able to conduct a Friday night service.

My father was very musical and taught himself opera. He enjoyed using an aria from Carmen or Figaro, setting them to a Yom Kippur prayer. He had a sweet, dusky, cigarette-smoky, vibrato tenor. To this day, I miss his Z'mirot on Friday night as well as waking up on Shabbat morning to his chanting the Torah portion in preparation for later reading in the Synagogue.

But there was more. He was a pastoral rabbi, visiting the sick in the Wharton hospitals – Jews and non-Jews alike. Sick people needed his attention. In return, his good friends

in Wharton and other nearby cities would drive him back and forth to Houston when he needed dialysis treatments the last three years of his life. What love! What loyalty!

He was there for them. And they for him. He was there for just plain friendship, enjoying the monthly gin rummy games. He formed an investment club with his members.

He always believed in a better future and was always ready to take a chance. He believed that a Jew must have faith, and what better example of faith than a lottery ticket or a venture in a penny stock? Sometimes he even won!

Another interesting item about my father was that he accepted invitations from church groups to talk about Judaism but chose to speak in the vestry rather than in the church itself. He felt that God had sent him out west in order to improve Jewish-Christian relations. Perhaps the present friendly attitude of many American Christians toward Israel is a result of his efforts.

I once asked him how he tolerated everyone calling him by his first name, Israel. I felt he was too ready to forfeit the honor due him. He answered that the greatest rabbis in the Talmud were all called by their names rather than by their title. So, here was this man steeped since childhood in Jewish learning, a man who knew pages and pages of Talmud by heart, not to mention all

See Rabbi Rosenberg, cont. page 9

the books of the Bible, serving small Jewish communities in Texas. To him each person was a world and to save one person was to save a world.

My parents' legacy lives on in their students' service and loyalty to our Jewish heritage.

The question remains: How did this young middle-aged European refugee couple integrate so well into a world so far removed from their origins?

They loved people, and they were open to accepting and helping all. They were grateful to God that they and their children were personally spared the horrors of the Holocaust. They lost almost everyone in their families. As Dr. Sweeney, originally of Wharton, said: "Rabbi Rosenberg needed to go as far away from Europe as he could in order to mourn the Holocaust alone. New York City was too much like what he had lost." On the other hand, it seems to me that because my parents were from the Old World they appealed so to the folks in the New World. They were able to bring Jewish values and meaning to communities that were in danger of losing those values.

My parents were able to adapt and find new friends and new meaning in serving the needs of a wonderful, generous congregation. May their memory be a blessing.

■ TJHS

President's Message, cont. from cover

Weekend and Board Meeting" to help those who volunteer to coordinate one. This excellent Ten Point Guide covers all aspects of meeting planning, and is immensely helpful to those who have previously not helped with planning or coordinating a meeting. The Guidelines are available for all future volunteers.

In addition to the details of planning the meeting, we must consider a factor over which we have no control – Texas weather! We have been very lucky in the past, as we have thus far avoided hurricanes when we meet in October, and we have dodged the "Blue Northers" that turn highways into ice sheets when we meet in January. The college football weekends also have presented problems with accommodations.

We would be delighted for you to volunteer to coordinate a meeting in your area. If you feel that TJHS has neglected your town or community and you will consider taking on the responsibility of chairing a Quarterly Weekend, please contact me at your earliest possible convenience at shirelmarv@aol.com or 713-723-1406 so we can select a date for a future meeting or Annual Gathering.

In other Texas Jewish Historical Society happenings, Past President Barbara Rosenberg has suggested an intriguing

and ideal project for the Society. You may have heard rumors about individuals and groups which, in 1948, engaged in aiding the new State of Israel by spuriously shipping arms and ammunition that were "mis-labeled."

As far as we know, this aid by many people throughout Texas has never been documented. Most of the participants are no longer living, so there is likely no danger of prosecution. If anyone has information about or knows of these actions, either by aiding in acquiring the materials or by helping to pack and ship them, please contact Barbara at bcr219@aol.com, Fax 281-494-0199 or call 281-494-2668 to assist with getting this wonderful story documented and revealed. Additionally, your help with information about Jewish Cemeteries and Zionism in Texas would be greatly appreciated (see page 5).

I hope some of you will be able to assist with these projects, as they should prove quite informative and interesting to Texas Jewish history.

Sincerely,



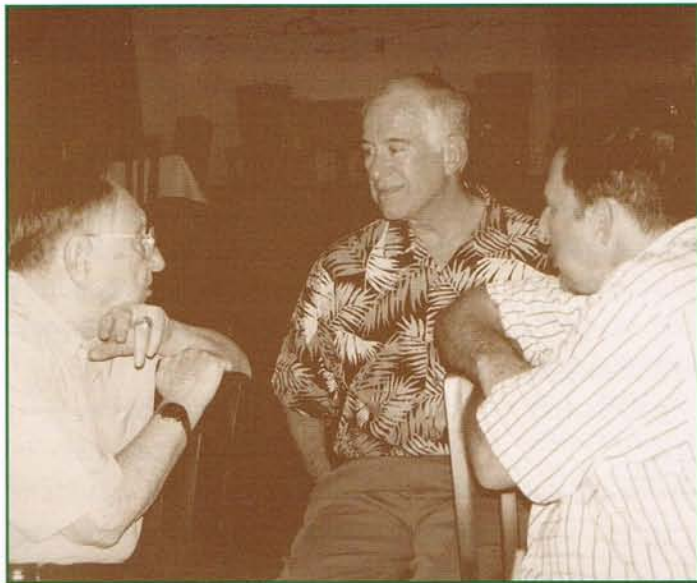
Marvin Rich
President
Texas Jewish Historical Society

TJHS SUMMER WEEKEND EVENT & BOARD MEETING HELD IN HOUSTON JULY 10, 2005;

The Texas Jewish Historical Society held its first Board of Directors meeting of the new term on Sunday, July 10, 2005. The meeting was held in the Courtyard by Marriott near the Houston Galleria.



The weekend began with a Dutch-treat dinner at Mykonos Island Restaurant where members dined on delicious seafood and Greek cuisine, followed by an enjoyable and entertaining evening that included music by a Greek Band and belly dancing! Many thanks to Beverly Beck Trachtenberg for organizing the Summer Weekend Event and Board Meeting.



NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETS FOR FIRST TIME SINCE APRIL GENERAL ELECTION



▲ Charles Hart (center) looks on as his wife, Jan, becomes a belly dancer.

▲ Jan Hart dons a belly dancer's costume during the TJHS Summer Quarterly Weekend at Mykonos Island Greek Restaurant in Houston



MOE BERG: NOT YOUR TYPICAL BASEBALL PLAYER

By Denis Mueller

Casey Stengel, himself known as an oddball, called Moe Berg "the strangest man ever to play baseball." Berg was a shortstop at Princeton University, where he used to bark out his instructions to the second baseman in Latin. His father urged him to be a lawyer instead of "this baseball thing," but Moe Berg loved two things in his life: baseball and languages. Berg played 12 years in the big leagues despite not being able to hit.

It is because of his study of languages that Moe is in the pages of history.

Moe Berg was born in 1902. His father owned a pharmacy, and in this Jewish working class area of Newark, New Jersey, a young Moe Berg fell in love with baseball.

He graduated at the top of his class and then went to Princeton, where he graduated magna cum laude.

Needing money, he turned to baseball. When the Chicago White Sox asked him to switch to catcher, Berg did so with an understanding that he couldn't hit but his intelligence as a reserve catcher could keep him in the big leagues for a very long time. Moe became a good player and hit .287 in 1929 while earning some votes for MVP. But Berg was not your typical baseball player.

While at Princeton, Berg had honed another skill. There he studied and learned ten different languages. Moe

Berg was somewhat of a mystery man to his teammates. On a tour of Japan with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, Berg delivered an eloquent speech at the Meiji University and then went to the tallest building in Tokyo and took pictures, which were later used as guides for American pilots in World War II.

Berg volunteered for the service in World War II and was soon asked to join the OSS. He delivered one more speech in which he spoke to the Japanese about why they should avoid this war. Berg was no James Bond in this spy business. At first he kept dropping his gun until finally he gave it to an aid and said, "You hold this."

Berg was an active spy who parachuted into Yugoslavia and met with resistance leader Marshall Tito. After meeting with Tito, Berg's next assignment was to help determine how close Germany was to developing an atomic bomb. So, Berg studied physics and then went to Germany. Using various disguises and getting people to talk to him, Berg was able to determine where the German research plants were and learned that they had been bombed by the allies.

Berg lured German atomic physicist Werner Heisenberg to Switzerland, where he would talk to him. Berg's orders were to kill, but Heisenberg implied that Germany was lagging behind the United States in the race

for the bomb. Despite great danger, Berg stayed in Germany and helped recruit various German scientists who would become valuable to the United States after the war.

Berg quietly returned to the U.S. after the war, and while some thought he squandered his life playing baseball, as his brother said, "he loved the game."

His teammate, Ted Lyons said of Berg, "He was different because he was different; he made up for all the bores in the world. And he did it softly, stepping on no one."

■ TJHS

*Sources: Joe Posnanski,
Kansas City;
ESPN contributed to this story*



**MARION EDELSTEIN COHN:
MARCH 2, 1931 – AUGUST 4, 2005**

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Marion Joyce Cohn passed away on Thursday, August 4, 2005 in Houston, Texas. She was 74.

Marion was a loving mother, grandmother and teacher. In many years of teaching, including more than 20 years in public schools and a community college in Dallas, Marion taught English as a second language to children and adults who came to Texas from many lands around the world. She loved her work and was devoted to her students, giving a head start to native speakers of Spanish, as well as Vietnamese, Russian and other languages.

Born in Brownsville, Texas on March 2, 1931, Marion was the youngest child of Morris and Yetta Edelstein. She graduated Brownsville High School as Valedictorian of the Class of 1948. She went on to graduate summa cum laude from The University of Texas, and received graduate degrees from Southern Methodist University and the University of Illinois.

Marion was a member of Houston's Congregation Emanu El, a Life Member of Hadassah and a member of the National Council of Jewish Women.

History became Marion's passion after her retirement. She spent many hours tracing her family's roots and relations across the United States and the world. She

traveled to her father's hometown in Lithuania with her sister, Helen, and also researched and wrote articles for a Brownsville historical newsletter and the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Marion is survived by her son and daughter-in-law, Miles and Phyllis Cohn; her grandsons, Jeremy and Alex Cohn; her brothers and sisters, Ruben and Bernice Edelstein, Ben Edelstein, Arthur and Eunice Edelstein, Helen Silverstone and Alex Sidelnik; numerous devoted nephews, nieces and cousins; and the hundreds of students whose lives she touched.

A funeral service was held at the Brownsville Hebrew Cemetery on Tuesday, Aug. 9, 2005, at 10 a.m.

The family has requested that memorial contributions made in Marion's memory be made to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Colonial Place Three, 2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22201-3042, www.nami.org.

■ TJHS



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The Texas Jewish Historical Society has two exhibits available for organizations that would like to give their members a taste of Texas Jewish history.

In cooperation with the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, the TJHS-produced series of old photographs, stories, and a look into the earliest beginnings of Texas Jewish history is available free of charge.

The traveling exhibits are on museum-quality reproduction foam board and include 25 large photos with descriptive literature. The exhibits can be displayed on easels or hung on a wall.

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The exhibits have been welcomed by numerous organizations including schools, synagogues, Hadassah meetings and events. For information or to reserve an exhibit, contact Harold Eisen, hmeisen@swbell.net 2655 Thomas Road, Beaumont, Texas, 77706, phone 409-892-3233, Fax 409-892-3289.

REMEMBERING MYRTLE UHRY

By Vickie Vogel

Myrtle Kahn Uhry died January 29, 2001 in LaGrange, Texas. If she had lived until her birthday, which was November 3, she would have been ninety-seven. Myrtle was our special friend for the last fifteen or so years of her life.

Myrtle, called "Mimi" by the family, grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Born in either Lake Charles or on the Napoleonville Plantation where her sister Marion was born, Myrtle moved to St. Louis and worked in a department store there for a number of years before coming to Houston. Her parents were Moise and Emily Uhry. Her father was a clothing merchant, originally in business for himself in Lake Charles. He later worked in the Lauterstein store in Schulenburg, Texas, and then managed a store called The Bargain Center, which was located next to the LaGrange State Bank, also owned by his son-in-law, George Lauterstein.

I often asked Myrtle to tell me about growing up in Lake Charles, but I never learned much. She preferred to talk about what she was doing this week and what was planned for next week. She looked to the future and not the past. Although she received little religious education, her father "was so religious he wouldn't open mail on Shabbos." When a friend of hers bought a

new automobile and offered to take Myrtle for a ride one night, she insisted the interior light be left on so everyone could see it was Myrtle Uhry riding down the street of Lake Charles in a new Cadillac.

Myrtle never learned to drive and never needed to. Many people in LaGrange were volunteer "chauffeurs" and, like us, invited her along on excursions.

"Myrtle, we're going to Austin tomorrow. Want to go?"

"Well, why not?" was the usual response, followed immediately by, "Where are we going to eat?"

For a woman about five feet tall and weighing less than a hundred pounds, she took a great interest in food and loved to eat out. She always insisted on picking up the check.

"You buy the gas and I'll get dinner. I have Visa."

There are some foods that will always make me think of Myrtle: zucchini bread, sauerkraut, pickled okra, carrot salad – and always with black coffee. At home, she would throw an assortment of vegetables into the steamer rack for dinner.

Myrtle called one day all excited. "I found a new Jewish holiday on

the calendar and it sounds like a good one. The Feast of Esther!"

"Look again," I said, "I think that is the Fast of Esther."

"Oh, " she groaned, turning the word into four or five syllables.

Passover she loved. "Can I eat the matzo yet?" she'd whisper at the Seder in Schulenburg.

"Not yet," I'd whisper back. "We have to bless it."

"Now?"

"Wait."

"Now?"

"Soon."

She'd take us to lunch at Frank's after Rosh Hashanah services. During Yizkor at Yom Kippur her eyes would tear as her parents' names were read. As we walked to the back of the Temple to break the fast, she would call out, "Let Vickie at the front of the line. She's fasting!"

"They're fasting, too" I'd laugh.

"That's their lookout", she'd say. "Let Vickie go first! Where's David? Go! Go!"

Myrtle had a theory that after eighty, you are allowed to say anything you like. Entering a restaurant or some gathering, she would invariably announce, "Look at all the fat people!"

Myrtle, cont. page 15

Myrtle retired from Neiman-Marcus after working many years in Houston. Perhaps that is where she developed her sense of style. She was always well dressed, and she had a horror of anyone seeing her without her make-up. We occasionally bumped into former customers who remembered her. Even more often, people in LaGrange who remembered her brother-in-law, George Lauterstein approached us. (Myrtle lived in the Lauterstein home after her retirement and following George and Marion's deaths.) George had owned a clothing store and became a director of First National Bank in LaGrange when it was being reorganized during the Depression. Many people down on their luck or needing help had received financial assistance from George and wanted to tell Myrtle how much they appreciated how he had helped them get on their feet.

Until the last few years Myrtle walked to the square or to the H.E.B. a few blocks away. "Do you remember me?" strangers were always asking her. "I helped you cross the street."

"Everybody in LaGrange has helped me cross the street," she always replied. Walking the shaded street to the grocery store, she would stop, stamp her foot, and pick something up off the pavement. She was grazing on pecans in her path.

At her memorial service, friends

shared fond remembrances of Myrtle. I told of our last lunch out. By then, Myrtle had started to use a cane. As she placed it under the table she said, "Oh, did I hit you with my cane?"

"No, no," I reassured her.

"Well, I meant to," she said.

Myrtle always said, "I hope I just drop dead." She had quit smoking twenty years before, after a heart attack, and she assumed the end would come quickly. She didn't like being hospitalized during her final illness. ("I never thought this would happen to me!" she said, shaking her head.) She kept her sense of humor as best she could. Once when I was visiting, her nephew George called from Wimberly. After a brief conversation, she hung up and said they had been disconnected. When the phone rang, she picked up the receiver and said, "Pay the bill!"

Myrtle's other nephew, Marion Moise Lauterstein often visited from New York, and her sister Aline Pollock came in from St. Louis from time to time. Alfred Uhry, the playwright, was a second cousin. We took Myrtle to Columbus for an amateur production of "Driving Miss Daisy," and to Austin for "The Last Days of Ballyhoo."

Myrtle never married. She once told me there had been someone special, but he died before the wedding. She moved more slowly in her nineties.

"Hold my hand," she would say.

Sometimes she would add, "Of course, I'd rather hold David's hand." The last few weeks of her life, a live-in companion enabled her to stay at home. She valued her independence. Myrtle Uhry lived a long, good life. I wish I had known her in her youth. I bet she was a pistol.

■ TJHS

(RE: Beth Israel Article - page 16)

Dr. Stone consulted the following in developing the Congregation Beth Israel timeline

- ◆ Cohen, Anne Nathan, *The Centenary History – Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854-1954*. Houston, 1954
- ◆ Cohen, Henry, "Settlement of the Jews in Texas." *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 139-156
- ◆ Maas, Elaine, "The Jews of Houston: an Ethnographic Study." Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 1973
- ◆ Schlam, Helena Frenkil, "The Early Jews of Houston." Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1971
- ◆ Winegarten, Ruthe and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews, a Photographic History*. Austin: Eakin Press, 1990
- ◆ *The American Israelite*; ◆ *Die Deborah*; ◆ *Galveston Daily News*; ◆ *The Handbook of Texas Online*; ◆ *The Occident*.

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL: WHEN WAS IT REALLY ESTABLISHED?

By Bryan Edward Stone, Ph.D.

In April, 2005, at the 26th Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society in Austin, I gave a presentation in which I claimed that the Jewish cemetery in Galveston, established in 1852, was the state's first. I also stated that Congregation Beth Israel in Houston — the state's first Jewish congregation — was formed in 1859.

After my talk, several audience members questioned these dates, claiming that the Galveston cemetery was formed in 1844 — that's eight years before Galveston's, and that Houston's Congregation Beth Israel was really established in 1854. Thus the Temple recently celebrated its 150th anniversary.

I was surprised that my dates for these events were being challenged since many historians, including Elaine Maas, Helena Frenkil Schlam and Ruthe Winegarten, have also accepted the later dates for Houston's Jewish institutions.

Moreover, Beth Israel was indisputably chartered in 1859, at which time its members first elected officers and notified the national Jewish press that they had formed a congregation. The State of Texas document exists and has been reprinted.

The difficulty begins with Beth Israel's Centenary History, written in 1954 by Anne Nathan Cohen, who held that there was a cemetery in Houston in 1844 and a congregation Beth Israel ten years later. But Cohen acknowledged, "[r]ecords of the first five years [1854-1859] apparently are

non-existent," and cited as evidence for these early dates only the statements of two prior writers, Rabbis Henry Cohen and Henry Barnston, neither of whom provided citations for their chronology.

In my view, the dates provided by Rabbis Cohen and Barnston, and reproduced in the Centenary History, are incorrect. It is unlikely that there was a Jewish cemetery in Houston as early as 1844, and equally unlikely that Beth Israel existed as an institution prior to being chartered in 1859. Certainly the Jews of Houston gathered before this for prayer or holiday worship, perhaps in a private home or a spare room behind somebody's store — this was common in small communities across the country. But until 1859, Beth Israel was nameless, charterless, bylawless, officerless, and penniless; no mention of the congregation was made in the local or national press until 1859; and they kept no minutes until 1861. Thus before 1859 Houston Jews may have had a prayer group, but not a congregation.

To support my preferred dates for these institutions (cemetery 1854, Beth Israel 1859), I offer the following *two timelines, one based on the dates provided by the Centenary History and other sources, the other based only on other sources.

I hope you will agree that if the first timeline is correct, the early Jews of Houston were behaving very strangely. Why did Houston form a congregation before a Hebrew Benevolent Society? Most communities formed HBA's

first, as they were easier and less expensive to operate, then worked up from there. Why did Houston Jews form no organization to fence or maintain their cemetery for eleven years, and why did their neighbors in Galveston, in establishing their own cemetery in 1852, not know about it?

Why would Houston Jews announce the establishment of their HBA in the Jewish press but not their congregation, clearly a more important achievement, the previous year? The second timeline seems to me much more likely. It means, of course, that Congregation Beth Israel celebrated its 150th anniversary five years early. It also means that Galveston, not Houston, was home to the state's first Jewish institution, which rankles among Houstonians. It should be no surprise, however: Galveston is an older settlement than Houston and had a larger Jewish population until the early twentieth century. In any case, Houston's Beth Israel (1859) was created nine years before Galveston's B'nai Israel (1868).

If I have neglected any evidence that would make the first timeline more believable, please contact me to let me know.

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■ TJHS

TIMELINE #1 – CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL BASED ON DATES IN CENTENARY HISTORY

1836 City of Houston founded. One year later, there are 1,500 residents including at least two Jews, Eugene Chiméne and Henry Wiener. Other Jews including Michael Seeligson and Lewis Levy arrive by 1840.

1844 Houston Jews (numbering somewhere between four and seventeen) establish a cemetery. No rabbi is present, no formal consecration occurs, and no burials are recorded. The cemetery is not fenced, nor is an organization established to maintain it. The Jewish press is not notified of this first hint of Jewish communal organization in Texas.

1850 The Jewish population of Houston rises to about seventeen.

1852 Galveston Jews establish a cemetery. Rabbi M.N. Nathan visits from New Orleans and gives a sermon in which he describes this gathering as “the first public assemblage” of Jews in Texas, where they have met to “lay the foundation-stone. . .of the edifice of Judaism.” His sermon is reprinted in *The Occident*, a national Jewish newspaper. *The Galveston Daily News* describes the service as “the first ever performed publicly by a Hebrew minister in Texas.” The participants at the service, many of who have lived in neighboring Houston and maintain business contacts there, are apparently unaware that there has been a Jewish cemetery in Houston for the past eight years.

1854 Congregation Beth Israel is established, though no charter is drafted, no officers elected, no bylaws adopted, no minutes kept, no dues collected, and no mention made in the national Jewish press. The event is also ignored by the city’s newspapers.

1855 One year after establishing their congregation, Houston Jews form a Hebrew Benevolent Association, an organization that American Jewish communities typically establish before founding a congregation. They report this event to the national Jewish press, despite having made no announcement the previous year when their congregation was formed. According to the *Occident*, the HBA of Houston’s first order of business is to collect “a sufficient amount of money to build a fence around their grave-yard.” It’s about time, perhaps, since the cemetery is now eleven-years-old.

1861 Congregation Beth Israel minute books begin, stating, “the committee for repairing the fence of our grave-yard reported progress.”

1868 Galveston’s Temple B’nai Israel established.

TIMELINE #2 – CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL BASED ON OTHER SOURCES (NOT CENTENARY)

1836 City of Houston founded. One year later, there are 1,500 residents including at least two Jews, Eugene Chiméne and Henry Wiener. Other Jews including Michael Seeligson and Lewis Levy arrive by 1840.

1850 The Jewish population grows through the years, rising to about seventeen.

1852 Galveston Jews establish a cemetery. Rabbi M.N. Nathan visits from New Orleans and gives a sermon in which he describes this gathering as “the first public assemblage” of Jews in Texas, where they have met to “lay the foundation-stone. . .of the edifice of Judaism.” His sermon is reprinted in the *Occident*, a national Jewish newspaper. The *Galveston Daily News* describes the service as “the first ever performed publicly by a Hebrew minister in Texas.”

1854 Houston follows with its own cemetery, though they neglect to report this initial Jewish institution to the national Jewish press.

1855 One year after establishing their cemetery, Houston Jews form a Hebrew Benevolent Association to maintain it, and they report this development to the national Jewish press. According to *The Occident*, the HBA of Houston’s first order of business is to collect “a sufficient amount of money to build a fence around their grave-yard.”

1859 Building on the communal structure instituted by the Hebrew Benevolent Association, Houston Jews establish Congregation Beth Israel in September. They receive an official charter from the State of Texas, and one of them writes to the *Occident* to report that the congregation has been formed, a building dedicated, officers elected, and a name selected. In November they advertise in the *American Israelite* for a rabbi.

1860 Rabbi Zachariah Emmich arrives in Houston, the state’s first full-time rabbi.

1861 Congregation Beth Israel minute books begin, stating, “the committee for repairing the fence of our grave-yard reported progress.”

1868 Galveston’s Temple B’nai Israel established.

TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS ELECT NEW OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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