

# Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas  
Established 1980



A Quarterly News Magazine of the Texas Jewish Historical Society

Winter 2006

## ANNUAL GATHERING DATE & BOARD SEARCH ANNOUNCED FALL 2005 WEEKEND IN VICTORIA SMASHING SUCCESS



Message from TJHS President Marvin Rich

As my term as President of The Texas Jewish Historical Society nears an end, I would like to thank everyone who has participated in our many successful events and especially those individuals who have made a commitment to the society by serving as an officer or a member of the Board of Directors.

In accordance with our By-Laws, I have appointed a Nominating Committee chaired by Immediate Past President Charles Hart, and comprised of two holdover members of the Board of Trustees and two members of the Society-at-Large who are not candidates for any office.

The Nominating Committee will submit their report to the Texas Jewish Historical Society not less than 40 days before the 27th Annual Gathering. The Gathering and election are slated for April 28-30, 2006 in Houston. In addition to the Slate of Officers, the Nominating Committee will recommend twenty Board members to the Board of Trustees.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has more than 800 members. The membership includes people who live in every Texas city and town with a synagogue, travel long distances to attend services, and members who live outside the state.

See President's Message page 9

## Is Your Information Correct?



Look yourself up lately? It takes a village to build the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Biennial Directory, and as a member, you are part of the village. Check your information under *both* Alpha and City listings. Then add new information and correct errors using the form inside the back cover of this news magazine. Check UPDATE on the form and mail it by February 20th. Thanks for your help!

- Name(s) – spelling? Maiden name (if applicable)?
- Address – including apt. number? Zip code?
- Email address – accurate? Same provider?
- Phone number – accurate? Area code?
- Fax number – if you have a fax, is it included?
- Anything else?

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Winter 2006 News Magazine

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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.

## DONATIONS TO THE ENDOWMENT FUND

When you honor or memorialize a friend or loved one with a contribution to the Texas Jewish Historical Society Endowment Fund, you are extending the life and future of TJHS. Your donations help support important programs.

To honor a friend or loved one, send the honoree's full name, honor (congratulations and occasion, memorial, etc.), and your name (donor name), along with a check in any amount to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX, 78766-0193. Upon receipt of your gift, you will receive an acknowledgement similar to the one pictured above. Thank you for your support.

## THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2006 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](mailto: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](mailto:Susan@ElsnerFurman.com) or mail to 6215 Berthoud Pass, Dallas, TX, 75252.

## MAZEL TOVS, MISHABERACHS AND MEMORIALS

By Corresponding Secretary Selma Mantel

### MAZEL TOV!

**Abigail Michelson – Lockhart, Texas**  
From Samylu and Norman Rubin  
Gift of membership in the  
Texas Jewish Historical Society

**Shirley & Marvin Rich – Houston, Texas**  
On their 50th Wedding Anniversary

### MISHABERACH

Wishing a speedy recovery to:

**Essie Elsner – Odessa, Texas**  
**Larry Wilk – Corpus Christi, Texas**

### MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

#### **Taube Cohen**

Mother of Barbara Rosenberg

**Maurice Aronstein, Cuero, Texas**

**Norton Furman, El Paso, Texas**  
Father-in-law of Susan Elsner Furman

**Natalie Rosenblum, Dallas, Texas**

#### **Rabbi Nahum Sarna**

Father of Professor Jonathan Sarna

### IN MEMORIUM

**Marion Edelstein Cohn**  
by Max and Susan Reichenthal

**Doris Mauriel Frost**  
by Virginia and Jay Norman

Letter from President Marvin Rich, cont.

I urge you to accept a position to serve on the Board, as either an officer or board member. We need your advice and guidance, your participation, and most important your commitment to the TJHS so that we can work together to ensure the Society continues to thrive as a growing organization dedicated to documenting our experiences and preserving Texas Jewish history.

We can do this only with your help. When a Nominating Committee member calls, please accept their nomination. Even better, be proactive. E-mail Charles Hart [CBHart635@aol.com](mailto:CBHart635@aol.com) or give him a call and offer to serve.

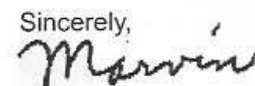
Accommodations for the Gathering are in the Marriott Hotel located near the Houston Galleria, on the West Loop at San Felipe. The hotel is excellent and is offering TJHS members a special low rate of \$89 per night..

As is customary, our program will be filled with interesting speakers and activities. We welcome and encourage your participation. The best part is, of course, being with long-time friends and forging new friendships.

Mark your calendars now for the weekend of April 28th and watch for reservation information.

Many thanks to Barbara and Jay Lack and all who helped with the unforgettable Fall Quarterly Weekend in Victoria. This issue contains many photos from that exceptional weekend!

May you and yours have a HAPPY AND HEALTHY 2006!

Sincerely,  


Marvin Rich  
President  
Texas Jewish Historical Society

## Galveston...Oh, Galveston...Roots! Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum Needs Your Information

Did your ancestors come to America through the port city of Galveston, Texas? Did they arrive by ship from Bremen or Naples or Liverpool in the first decades of the twentieth century? Were they part of an organized movement of East European Jews who were brought to America through Texas and settled in cities throughout the American Midwest?

Did they have stories of the journey to America by ship, or a loved one left behind, or an "angel of mercy" who met their ship and smoothed their transition to America? Do you still use a pair of candlesticks or a Kiddush cup that your ancestors brought with them to America to begin a new life here? If your answer is "yes" to any of these questions we want to hear from you!

The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum is planning a major traveling exhibition that will explore the history of Galveston Island as a significant port of immigration into Texas and America from 1845-1914. The exhibit is scheduled to open in summer of 2008 and travel to other museums during 2009-2010.

One section of the exhibit will highlight "The Galveston Movement," an internationally organized movement of more than 10,000 Jews who were recruited in Eastern Europe to come to America through the port city of Galveston. They settled in one of a dozen cities in the American West. Agents and representatives from the Movement helped them with jobs, places to stay, and connections for school, language study and other necessities for getting by in a new land.

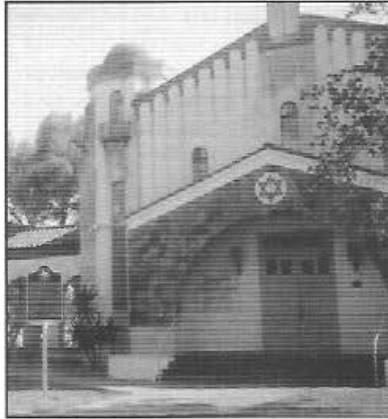
In the coming months, Museum staff members are planning to travel to major railhead cities in Texas and the Midwest to collect the stories and scan photographs from descendants of Galveston immigrants who were routed to these communities through the Galveston Movement.

If your grandparents or great-grandparents came to America via Galveston, please send us an email at the address below so that we may contact you. Based on your response, we will schedule a trip to your local library, community center or synagogue, and individuals who immigrated to Texas through Galveston or descendants of those individuals, will be invited to bring in family photos and record family stories of their journey to America through Texas. In this way, your family story will become a part of the archive of images, objects and stories related to this important historical period.

If you or your family members came to America through the Galveston Movement, or if you know of anyone who did, please send a note to Anya Rous [atgalvestonproject@aol.com](mailto:atgalvestonproject@aol.com).

## CORPUS CHRISTI'S ORIGINAL TEMPLE BETH-EL BUILDING RECEIVES HISTORICAL MARKER OCTOBER 16, 2005

By Davie Lou Solka



The building once home to Corpus Christi's Temple Beth El synagogue is an officially designated Texas Historical Commission site, after receiving a historical marker late last fall. The marker was dedicated on Sunday, October 16, 2005, at 1315 Craig Street, the first Jewish house of worship in Corpus Christi.

The synagogue was built in 1936 and was home to the congregation until 1982 when it moved to 4402 Saratoga Boulevard.

The synagogue's original chandeliers, stained glass windows and rows of seats marked with Stars of David are still in place, which aided in attaining the historical designation. This is the second historical marker for Corpus Christi's Jewish community, with Hebrew Rest Cemetery holding the first one.

The congregation sold the building to the Montessori School of Corpus Christi. In 1991, the building sold to the Metropolitan Community Church.

The church rented space to the Loving Spoonful, a free kitchen and pantry for people living with HIV and AIDS, and to the South Texas Interfaith Council. In June 2005, the Metropolitan Community Church sold the building to Loving Spoonful, but continues to hold services in the sanctuary.

The marker reads: *"Jewish settlers came to Corpus Christi shortly after the city's founding in 1852. Several became prominent business owners and community leaders. In the 1870's, the Jewish community formed a Hebrew Benevolent Society. In 1912, they formed a congregation, which included both Orthodox and Reform families. Services were held irregularly in various places until 1928, when the Congregation officially organized and elected officers, and purchased this site."*

In 1936, the Congregation, called Temple Beth El, hired architect Dexter Hamon to design the synagogue. Hamon chose the Spanish Colonial Revival style for the synagogue, which today is a rare example of a Jewish congregational structure built in that style. In 1950, architect Morris Levy added classrooms, an auditorium and other facilities.

Hamon's design exhibits Spanish and Mediterranean influences, including two domed towers with iron balconies, red tile roofs, courtyard, arched porticos and an arched motif

on the main facade, with stone tablets at the center. A Star of David is centered on the wide arched stone entry.

In 1942, Temple Beth El's Orthodox members organized a new congregation called Shomre Emunah, or "Keepers of the Faith". The Reform congregation continued to worship in this building under the leadership of Rabbi Sidney A. Wolf until 1982, when it moved to the new site on Saratoga Boulevard. The two groups maintained close ties through the years.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark 2003, Temple Beth El and B'Nai Israel, a Conservative congregation, agreed to merge as one congregation in September 2005, under the new name, Congregation Beth Israel, located at the Saratoga site of Temple Beth El.



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## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION APPROVES ROCKDALE JEWISH CEMETARY PLAQUE

By Lynna Kay Shuffield



After waiting over 18 months, the Texas Historical Commission is nearing approval of the wording of the Rockdale Jewish Cemetery plaque.

I really appreciate everyone's assistance with this project.

The Milam County Genealogy Society kindly agreed to sponsor this project and we are grateful to their members and all their assistance and support in helping clean the graves and perform the cemetery inventory necessary for the project.

### Plaque Wording

**Jewish Cemetery** The International & Great Northern Railroad reached the new town of Rockdale in January 1874. Among the early residents were brothers Benjamin and Joseph Loewenstein, who opened a mercantile from a tent before the railroad arrived. They and their families were part of a larger contingent of Jewish settlers in the area. By 1879, a reported 100 Jewish residents lived in Rockdale, which boasted an active B'nai B'rith Lodge.

In August 1877, Benjamin and Carrie Lowenstein's son Author died and was buried at this site. The following November, the Hebrew Benevolent Association bought the land for use as a dedicated Jewish burial ground.

Among those interred in the Rockdale Jewish Cemetery are Henry Goldsticker, a Confederate veteran, and Isaac Crown, who died

in a disastrous fire in 1888 at Rockdale's Mundine Hotel. One grave – that of Isaac Ensheimer – was placed in a separate part of the cemetery; Ensheimer committed suicide in 1884. The final burial, that of Morris Cohn, occurred in 1939.

The site is a reminder of Rockdale's diverse history.

■ TJHS

Historic Texas Cemetery – 2004

Lynna Kay Shuffield

P. O. Box 16604

Houston, Texas 77222

*Our Loose Ends*

(Genealogy Column )

[http://www.geocities.com/lks\\_friday/COLUMN-001.htm](http://www.geocities.com/lks_friday/COLUMN-001.htm)

Milam County TXGenWeb

<http://www.geocities.com/milamco/>

San Jacinto County TXGenWeb

[http://www.geocities.com/lks\\_friday/SANJAC-01.htm](http://www.geocities.com/lks_friday/SANJAC-01.htm)



## A LETTER OF THANKS TO THE TJHS BOARD

Good news. My first book, "Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and their Work," is coming out in paperback in February! That means that the first printing sold out and there are only 100 copies of the second printing left in the warehouse. Once the book is out in paperback, the price will go down. It is more likely to be used as a college textbook and to appear on student reading lists. It should have a long shelf life.

The TJHS nurtured that book from the start, providing me with leads and home hospitality during my research. The Society gave the publisher, TAMU Press, a grant toward publication and gave me a generous grant for travel expenses while promoting the book. It has certainly paid off by familiarizing more and more readers with our fascinating Texas Jewish history.

I see this as a good omen for our current project, an anthology on the Jews of Texas. That volume, titled "Lone Stars of David," is to be published by Brandeis University Press. As most of you know, the TJHS is underwriting the project and subsidizing publication costs. We are spending night and day working on the book to meet the publisher's deadline.

I wanted to share this good news with you and thank you for your continued confidence in me.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hollace Weiner

■ TJHS

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## REMEMBERING BERT KRUGER SMITH (1915-2004)

By Davie Lou Soka



Bert Kruger Smith was often described as gracious, elegant and intelligent. She could also be

stubborn and resolute. She is best known as an author, a lecturer, radio talk-show moderator and community activist. But most important to her were her roles as a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Bert Kruger Smith wrote seven books, including one novel. Her most notable work of non-fiction was *Aging in America*. She also wrote on mental health, youth with learning disabilities, and aging. For ten years, she was moderator of Austin radio show, "The Human Condition." She worked with the University of Texas' Hogg Foundation for Mental Health for more than fifty years. Her last work was published in 1999 in the form of a pamphlet offered through the Hogg Foundation. She retired from the Hogg Foundation that year as Executive Associate Emeritus.

Bert Kruger Smith and her husband, Sid, were married for 68 years and had three children: a daughter, Randy, and two sons, Sheldon and Jared.

Bert Smith was born in 1915 in Wichita Falls, Texas to Jewish

immigrants from Russia. Her father, Sam, was a jeweler who later helped Bert's brother, Aaron, open Kruger's Jewelers in Austin. Her mother, Fania was a published poet.

Smith graduated high school at age 15 and attended the University of Texas at Austin, but in the fall of 1932, she transferred to the University of Missouri to study journalism. At age 19, she won first prize in a national writing competition sponsored by *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, which began a lifetime of achievements and awards. Smith earned a Bachelor Degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri and met her husband. The couple married in Houston, and moved to Port Arthur. After six months, they moved again, this time to Wichita Falls where they both worked for the local newspaper. From there they moved to Alaska and then to Oregon, where their first child, Sheldon, was born.

Austin was their next place of residence. There, Sid began working in the family jewelry business. It was then that their second child, six-year-old Jared died from polio. His death was tragic, but it inspired Bert to commit her life to helping others.

Following Jared's death, the family moved to Coleman, Texas, where they published the community newspaper for 15 months. Continuing their travels, they then moved to New York, and later back to Wichita Falls. They finally settled in Austin in 1952. There, Kruger Smith earned a Master's Degree from the University of Texas, and received an honorary Doctor of

Humane Letters degree from her alma mater, the University of Missouri. In 1983, a Bert Kruger Smith Centennial Professorship in the UT School of Social Work was established.

In addition to serving on numerous local, state and national commissions and boards, she was named Austin's Most Worthy Citizen and Woman of the Year. She was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame in 1988 and is listed in numerous *Who's Who*. She and Sid were honored with Jewish Family Service's "Amazing Aging" Award. AGE named an award in her honor – the Bert Kruger Smith Vision Award, which recognizes individuals for "foresight and energy in creating and/or implementing programs, services, or legislation that serves older adults."

Bert Kruger Smith died at age 89, on July 26, 2004 when a chronic lung condition worsened and breathing became difficult. In addition to Sid, she is survived by her daughter Randy and son-in-law John Huke; son and daughter-in-law, Sheldon and Joy Kruger; grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Honored by many organizations, on November 14, 2004 Austin Groups for the Elderly, an alliance of non-profit agencies to help the aged dedicated a garden in her name. The University of Texas at Austin lowered flags to half-mast on September 22, 2004. Austin's Family Eldercare planted a tree. A true community leader, Bert Kruger Smith will be remembered with great affection.

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## THE HOFFMAN BROTHERS FROM COMANCHE

By David Hirsch Hoffman, FAIA

In the firmament of Texas Jewish history there are many stars that have filled the skies and whose legacies shine brightly upon us. These stars, both large and small, light the way for those that follow. Occasionally some of the stars have a collective presence and, as illuminating as they may be individually, together they form a grouping with a unique identity unto itself. This phenomenon is known as a constellation. The Hoffman brothers, Maurice, Leo and Harold, from Comanche, Texas are each a star whose brilliant light burns distinctively, yet like a constellation, they have a shared identity that is recognized by all who knew them.

The stars in the galaxy have their origins in greater celestial events and so it was for the Hoffman brothers. Their genesis was in the Galveston Movement, a planned diversion of Jewish European immigration away from New York to Galveston, Texas between the years of 1907 and 1914.

Galveston was selected a favorable port of entry because of its trade network with the southern and midwestern regions of the country, which facilitated the movement and dispersion of immigrants. The Hoffman brother's parents, Ephraim Zalman Hoffman and Sarah Bernstein Hoffman, were two of the 10,000 persons who participated in the Galveston program. They arrived within a few weeks of each other: Ephraim Zalman, from Poland, landed on September 28, 1913 aboard the S. S. Wittekind,

sailing from Bremen, Germany, and Sarah, from Belorussia, landed on October 10, 1913 aboard the Chemnitz, also from Bremen.

Ephraim Zalman journeyed as far as Fort Worth where he found employment and adopted the name Charles – more popularly called Charlie.

Sarah joined her father, already in Texas, and lived with his nephew's family in Gatesville and Dublin until she also moved to Fort Worth in the summer of 1914.

Charlie and Sarah were introduced by mutual friends and, after a brief courtship, were married on November 24, 1915.

Their first son, Maurice Jacob (my father) was born on August 30, 1916. A Western Union Telegram to Sarah's father in Stephenville, Texas was sent with the succinct announcement "Boy wife doing nicely", signed "Charlie Hoffman". Maurice was given the Hebrew name Moshe Yaacov after his paternal greatgrandfather. Their second son, Leo J., was born April 1, 1919 and was given the Hebrew name Yehuda Lieb, after his maternal great, greatgrandfather. A third son, Harold, was born on November 8, 1920 and was given the Hebrew name Hersh Baer after his paternal grandfather.

After several unsuccessful business ventures, Charlie and Sarah decided their young family needed a fresh start outside of Fort Worth. They



Harold, Leo and Maurice in their first Comanche portrait (circa 1925)

loaded the boys in their car and headed for central Texas. On their way to investigate the possibilities in Rising Star, rainy weather caused them to stop in Comanche. Sarah's father, Chaim Bernstein, had lived in Comanche ten years earlier when he first came to Texas and peddled bananas. They found an available storefront building that suited them on the west side of the town square.

Charlie and Sarah opened their dry goods business in Comanche on April 13, 1924. It was known as Hoffman's Economy Store and they specialized in "Ladies Ready-To-Wear, Millinery, Dry Goods, Clothing and Shoes". The boys were ages seven, five and three and Comanche was destined to become the universe of their youth.

Their lives orbited around the family business in Comanche. Charlie and Sarah both worked in the store during the day and at night they were

*See Hoffman Bros., cont. page 9*

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## JAKE ERLICH – ADMIRER WAS ONCE THE WORLD'S TALLEST

© EL PASO TIMES – EL PASO, TEXAS

Anyone who ever met the late Jake Erlich couldn't help but look up to him. Sure, he was a Hollywood star who made nearly 50 silent movies in the 1920s and then made a career for himself in the circus – both deeds worth admiring.

But standing 8 feet 6 inches tall by most accounts, no one had a choice but to look skyward at the man who once held the title of the 'Tallest Man in the World'.

Erlich was El Paso's giant. Now, more than fifty three years after his death, Erlich's nephew is writing a book on the life of the gentle giant, whose stage name was Jack Earle.

Andy Erlich, a psychologist in Phoenix, grew up listening to stories about his bigger-than-life uncle. He has been researching Erlich's life since the 1980s. For the past five years, he has been compiling information for a book on Erlich's life, tentatively titled "Freeing the Giant".

During the late 1930s, Jake Erlich was also an honorary sheriff's deputy.

"There are lots of legends about him within the agency. Crooks would literally turn themselves in the second they saw him," said El Paso Sheriff's Office spokesman Rich Glancey.

Jake Erlich was born prematurely and weighed less than four pounds at birth. Doctors didn't think he would survive.

"My grandfather (Jake's Father) was working in Colorado as a watchmaker when the economy went down," said Andy Erlich. "He got on a train to go to California, but a storm routed the train south. After about five days, he got off at the Union Depot in El Paso and saw a sign that said 'Watchmaker Wanted. \$35 a week'. That was good money, so he brought his family to El Paso."

At the time, Jake was a normal-sized six-year-old. But the following year, he began to grow uncontrollably. "Nobody knew what the problem was, but it was a tumor on his pituitary gland," Andy Erlich said.

At thirteen, Jake was already over seven feet tall, but was depressed about being so big.

"My grandfather took him to California for a fishing trip to cheer him up. That's when movie scouts saw him and hired him to make silent movies." He made forty-eight movies, including "Hansel and Gretel" in 1923 and "Jack and the Beanstalk" in 1924.

During Erlich's movie making days, he began to go blind. The tumor on his pituitary gland was pushing on his optic nerve and eventually took away his sight. He returned to El Paso to receive treatment. Through some experimental treatment, he regained his vision.

Soon after, the circus came to town, and ironically, Jake Erlich was taller than the giant who was traveling with

the circus as a sideshow act. So began Jake's second career in the entertainment industry. He appeared in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1926 to 1940.

When the circus came to El Paso, Erlich's mother always hosted the performers in her home.

A few months after Erlich left the circus, he decided to try his hand in the business world and went to work with the Roma Wine Co. in California as a salesman. He became a wine expert.

After ten years with the company Jake realized he was ill and returned to El Paso to be with his family. His kidneys failed and he died at 46.

Jake Erlich is buried in the B'Nai Zion section of Corcordia Cemetery in the Erlich family's plot. A simple gravestone makes no mention of his fame as a giant. It simply states his name in English and Hebrew, and the dates of his birth and death.

Andy Erlich said, "Jake was a creative person, a painter, sculptor and poet. He published a book of poetry titled, "The Long Shadows". He was an El Paso celebrity.

Everywhere he went, people would remember him and want to talk to him."

■ TJHS



often planning for the next day and preparing orders for replenishing the inventory. The boys were integrated into the activities of the store at an early age starting with menial tasks, such as sweeping, eventually working their way up to accounting.

They each assumed roles in the store for which they were best suited and as a result of their experiences, they all three acquired a strong work ethic, learned discipline and developed an ability to focus. The influence of their parents also instilled within them an abiding sense of honesty and integrity, which became an inherent part of their everyday lives.

These were common traits ingrained in all three of the boys, to which they remained steadfast and guided throughout their lives. They would always be a substantial part of the light that emanated from their constellation.

Their Comanche universe offered many opportunities to the Hoffman brothers. They each excelled academically and were involved in extracurricular activities such as declamation, writing and music. They competed with each other and with anyone else who sought the top position. More often than not, they achieved their goals and became the first chair musician, the valedictorian and the prize-winners.

Their formative years were truly enriched by their Comanche experience and its influence on them was an indelible one.

As they each came of age, college beckoned and, like many families, they experienced the change in dynamics with the separation that ensued. Maurice graduated high

school in 1933 and enrolled in The University of Texas at Austin.

A mature underclassman, his familial ties and his bond to life in Comanche nevertheless remained strong. But Maurice had unknowingly established a gravitational pull that eventually attracted both his younger brothers to school in Austin. Their energies at The University created powerful new orbits and with each son's departure from Comanche, the force began to ebb from that small town sanctuary. When their father began to develop health problems, the parents sold the Comanche business in 1939 and moved to



Maurice, Leo and Harold Hoffman on the front lawn of their Austin home 3222 Gilbert.

Austin to be close to the boys.

The orbital transition was complete and life for the family was now centered on the three brothers sharing academic and community life together in the capital city. The pattern of achievement that was nurtured in Comanche blossomed in Austin.

The boys were like bright moons whirring around the family planet in their now-expanded universe. All three were active socially and academically, and continued to excel

in their extracurricular activities. Maurice became Chairman of the Board and President of the Texas Longhorn Band. He also played in the University Symphony Orchestra, the Austin Municipal Band, the house band at the Paramount Theatre and in a popular dance band. He was a member of the McLaurin Law Society and Texas Law Review.

Leo was a member of the Honorary Scholastic Fraternity for Freshman Men, the Varsity Debate Squad, Honorary Society of the School of Law, the Athenaeum Literary Society, and the Longhorn Band. He was also president of his fraternity, Tau Delta Phi, and an editor of the Texas Law Review.

Harold was a Comment Editor of the Texas Law Review and Quizmaster at the law school. He was a member of the Honorary Government Fraternity, Honorary Business Administration Fraternity, and joined Leo in Tau Delta Phi. All three graduated law school with honors. The illumination from their constellation was intense for all who encountered its brilliance.

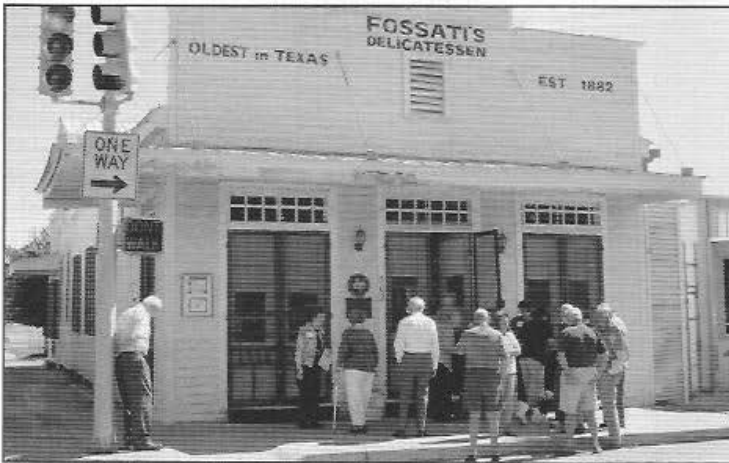
It took a mighty force to disrupt the glowing pattern of the Hoffman brothers. That interruption was World War II. They each served in the US Army – Maurice and Harold in Europe and Leo in the Pacific – but the connection to their family unit remained unbroken. Even amidst the chaos, the military recognized the boys' shared talents and each served in financial and administrative roles.

During the war years, they each wrote hundreds of letters home to their mother and father.

*Hoffman Bros., cont. page 17*

## Victoria Site of TJHS Fall Quarterly Weekend & Board Meeting October 21-23, 2005

The Texas Jewish Historical Society's Fall 2005 Quarterly Weekend & Board Meeting was a perfect ending to an exciting year of activities and events in communities throughout the Lone Star State. The final quarterly weekend of the year took place Friday through Sunday, October 21-23, 2005. Hosted by Barbara and Jay Lack of Victoria, the weekend was, itself, historic in nature. Featuring something for everyone from entertaining and informative lectures, to tours of Civil War-era homes, to excellent dining and down-home hospitality, the weekend began Friday with Shabbat dinner and services at B'nai Zion synagogue.



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## Historic Homes Tour, Texas' Oldest Deli & Beautiful Scenery Among the Highlights

Participants started their Saturday with an entertaining and informative lecture, "Jewish Families Who Settled in Victoria in the 1800's" presented by Victoria Preservation Society Executive Director Gary Dunham, who covered an amazing amount of history related to Victoria's Jewish beginnings. Mr. Dunham spent much of the day serving as the guide on the historic homes tour. Lunch was enjoyed in Texas' historic and oldest deli, Fossati's. A relaxing evening featuring dinner and conversation at the Lack's home was the perfect ending to an action-packed day. The weekend ended Sunday with the quarterly meeting of the TJHS Board of Directors. (See related photos page 19.)



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## TRIO UNCOVERS PROUD HISTORY OF JEWISH CIVIL WAR VETERANS

By Chris Vaughn - ©Fort Worth Star-Telegram Staff Writer, 11.11.2005

### RESEARCH REVEALS MILITARY SERVICE OF 4 TEXAS JEWS

By Sam Hodges - ©The Dallas Morning News - 11.13.05

*A combined reprint of articles that appeared in the © Fort Worth Star Telegram and © The Dallas Morning News.*

*Editor's Note: This is the first of two segments of this article, written following the November 13, 2005 dedication of new headstones in Emanuel Hebrew Rest Cemetery, 1408 S. Main St. © Fort Worth Star Telegram.*

In the back of an oak-shaded cemetery behind the county hospital flies a Confederate battle flag, carved into the massive Samuels family headstone.

Jacob Samuels, at his death in 1906 at the age of 70, had not forgotten that he rode with Waller's Texas Cavalry during the Civil War, that he had fought and nearly died in Louisiana for the Confederacy.

Not far from Samuels' grave are the graves of three other Civil War veterans, two of whom - Phillip W. Greenwall and Solomon Kahn proudly wore the gray of the Confederate army. But occasionally history offers little surprises.

The men are buried at Emanuel Hebrew Rest Cemetery, a 1-acre plot all but hidden, south of downtown. Samuels, Greenwall and Kahn were Jewish Johnny Rebs.

"It's not common knowledge that Jews fought in the Civil War," said Gary Whitfield, an amateur historian and a retired Fort Worth teacher. "But if you go to primary sources, you'll find that history is a little different than many people think."

In this case, the digging into

Confederate rosters, generations of genealogies and crinkled obituaries was a collaboration of an 88-year-old Jewish man with a German accent, a Jewish former newspaper reporter and a Gentile with a drawl who wants to preserve the glory of the Confederacy.

The unlikely trio embarked on a years-long quest that taught each of them something about Southern



Courtesy Amon Carter Museum  
Jacob Samuels, Jewish civil war veteran

history, an ancient faith and debunking stereotypes.

"Both Garys believe in what they're doing," said Hollace Weiner, a former Star-Telegram reporter who is archivist at Temple Beth-El in Fort Worth.

She was referring to Whitfield and Gary Baum, a World War II veteran

and longtime member of the Jewish War Veterans.

"You'd never have been able to pay people to do as much as they did," Weiner said. As counterintuitive as it sounds - that a people once themselves enslaved would fight for the Confederacy - some Jews did take up arms against the North.

An estimated 2,500 to 3,000 Jews out of a Jewish population of 25,000 that included sizable communities in Charleston, S.C., New Orleans and Richmond, VA fought for the South. An additional 8,000 to 9,000 Jews out of a Jewish population have said 125,000 fought for the North experts.

The investigation into this forgotten slice of Tarrant County history started with Whitfield, the 61-year-old history-keeper for the Fort Worth chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Whitfield spends his free time searching the area's cemeteries for the graves of Confederate veterans. Some of the headstones are deteriorated, are gone or never mention war service. Whitfield orders new granite headstones from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But Whitfield knew little about the Jewish cemeteries or the faith's pioneers in Tarrant County.

"I figured there was bound to have been some Jews in Tarrant County who fought," he said.

*Jewish Civil War Vets, cont. page 13*

Whitfield was surprised to learn from Weiner that there was an old cemetery even he didn't know about – Emanuel Hebrew Rest, donated by John Peter Smith in 1879 as the area's first Jewish cemetery. Whitfield combed the cemetery and found eight graves of men who could have been Civil War veterans based on their ages. Only the Samuels headstone gave any clue to allegiance or service during the Civil War. And while Whitfield could check some historical records, Weiner and the members of Jewish War Veterans Post 755 provided far more.

"I felt it would be a nice project for us to undertake," Baum said.

Confirming the men's war service took months, if not years, of work, matching known Civil War veterans to the men buried in the cemetery. In one case, the three spent months on one man's history, only to find out that a man with the same name who fought for the Confederacy was buried in Louisiana, not Fort Worth.

They discovered that all the veterans were privates and that one of them, Simon Gabert, fought for the Union with troops from Missouri. On the other side, Samuels rode with Waller's Texas Cavalry, while Kahn served in the Alabama infantry and Greenwall in the Louisiana infantry.

Finding their descendants proved to be even more difficult. Baum, Weiner and Whitfield went down so many unproductive rabbit holes, they had trouble keeping people's names straight. But they needed descendants because no one could

order new VA headstones without the go-ahead of people, who in some cases didn't even know their forefathers had fought in the war. "We went to the earliest obituaries we could find," Baum said. "They would usually mention aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandchildren. We worked forward from that."

After eight months and much help from genealogists, they found a granddaughter of Samuels' in Corpus Christi, a great-grandson of Gabert's in Fort Worth, a great-granddaughter of Kahn's in Fort Worth and a great-granddaughter of Greenwall's in Garland. All agreed to have new headstones placed in the cemetery, alongside the existing stones.

Sandy Hoffman, Kahn's descendant, and her family knew that he had fought in the Civil War, because they have several artifacts from his service in the Alabama infantry.

"Jews fought on both sides of the war," said Sandy's husband, Alex Hoffman. "It was probably the same during the civil rights movement. People of the same faith were on opposite sides of the issue."

It may defy stereotypes, but the Old South was not anti-Semitic, said Robert Rosen, a lawyer in Charleston who wrote a book titled *The Jewish Confederates*. Jews held positions of stature in many Southern communities and were typically warmly accepted, including into politics. The first three Jewish U.S. senators were from the South, he said.

"The South has to plead guilty for being racist," he said. "It does not have to plead guilty to being anti-Semitic. A lot of the traditional problems Jewish citizens faced at the time, they didn't face in the Old South. They felt very much a part of the community. They had a very strong sense of patriotism and loyalty to the South."

Primarily, though, Jews fought for the South for the same reasons they fought for the North – because they wanted to prove that they were loyal to their home, Rosen said.

"In the 19th century, there was the term 'the wandering Jew,'" Rosen said. "The stereotype was that they weren't loyal. They didn't live anywhere. But these were boys, both North and South, who really wanted to show they were part of the country."

There's a bit of a parallel between those long-dead soldiers in Emanuel Hebrew Rest Cemetery and Baum, and perhaps it explains his passion to see this project through.

He too was foreign-born, an immigrant from Germany at the outbreak of World War II. He enlisted in the Army and served with the 101st Airborne Division, eventually going in for the D-Day landings in a glider, a young man who decided to fight for his new home.

"This intrigued me," he said of the Civil War research. "I just grabbed it. I found it very enlightening."

*Jewish Civil War Vets, cont., page 14*

*Editors Note: Segment II of this article is excerpted from © The Dallas Morning News.*

Hollace Ava Weiner, who worked with Mr. Whitfield, added that their research shows "diversity on the frontier" and challenges the notion that few Jews fought for the Confederacy.

Mr. Whitfield is an Episcopalian who grew up in Dublin, Texas, in Erath County.

Its mayor was a Jew, Morris Hoffman, whom Mr. Whitfield admired.

That, combined with his reading of Robert Rosen's book *The Jewish Confederates*, led Mr. Whitfield to make researching Texas Jewish Confederates one of his retirement projects.

About five years ago, he got in touch with Ms. Weiner, archivist for Fort Worth's Beth-El Congregation and author of the book *Jewish Stars in Texas*, about notable rabbis in the state. She told him about Hebrew Rest, a small, shaded cemetery across from John Peter Smith Hospital in the heart of Fort Worth. Mr. Whitfield went through the cemetery, taking down names and birth and death dates. Then he began to do research on all the men buried there who would have been of an age to fight in the Civil War.

He confirmed service by four and fleshed out their stories by using state and federal military archives, pension records, census data and

newspaper obituaries. Ms. Weiner helped him with research in the Beth-El Congregation archives. Gary Baum of Fort Worth's Jewish War Veterans Post 755 tracked down descendants of the soldiers and coordinated planning for today's service.

Here are highlights of what was learned about Hebrew Rest's Civil War veterans:

**Phillip Greenwall (1841-1917)**



joined the 5th Regiment of the Louisiana infantry. But he was hospitalized for part of the war and spent most of the rest in a Union prison camp in

New Orleans. After the war, he operated the Greenwall Opera House, whose performers included Sarah Bernhardt. He married a Gentile. Her burial in Hebrew Rest upset some of the city's Orthodox Jews so much that they started a second cemetery, Ms. Weiner said.

**Simon Gabert (1836-1911)**



German immigrant Simon Gabert was the first Jew to settle in Fort Worth, in 1856, but he drifted farther west. On a return trip to Texas in 1861, he detoured to St. Louis, and there he joined the Union Army's 4th Regular Missouri Cavalry. Pension records show that at the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas, he kept delivering messages on horseback despite having been shot in the thigh.

After the war in 1880, he settled in Navasota, Texas, then moved back to Fort Worth with his wife and six children. In 1901, he and Mr. Greenwall – who had been on opposite sides of the Civil War – worked together with other local Jews to found Beth-El Congregation.

**Solomon Kahn (1835-1914)**



Another German immigrant, Solomon Kahn, fought for the Confederacy in Virginia, as part of the 3rd Alabama Infantry. He was a prisoner of war for

more than three years – as long a Civil War incarceration as Mr. Whitfield is aware of. Mr. Kahn, a merchant, lived in Fort Worth and Dallas after the Civil War.

**Jacob Samuels (1836-1908)**



A native of Warsaw, Poland, opened a general store in Fort Worth in 1857. When Texas seceded, he joined a Texas cavalry unit in the Trans-

Mississippi Department of the Confederate Army, seeing action in the Battle of Galveston, among others. After the war, he married a woman from New Orleans. They moved back to Fort Worth in the 1870s. Of the four Civil War veterans buried at Hebrew Rest, Mr. Samuels alone has a tombstone noting his military service.

The most notable Jew in the Confederacy was Judah Benjamin of Louisiana, who served in President Jefferson Davis' Cabinet.

■ TJHS

## TEXAS JEWISH CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS

By Lynna Kay Shuffield  
"Our Loose Ends Genealogy"

Gary Whitfield, a member of the Fort Worth, Texas Robert E. Lee Chapter 239, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) is compiling a list of Texas Jewish Civil War soldiers / veterans. (See related article page 12).

Whitefield's list includes the names of 160 men of the Jewish faith who served in Texas Confederate units during the War Between the States. He believes there were at least 200, with many having served in Waul's Legion. Whitefield is interested in the following for his research.

- Identifying Jewish soldiers who served in Texas Confederate units
- Identify Texans who left to fight for the Union
- Information about Jewish Civil War veterans who later moved to Texas and who are buried in Texas
- Copies of photographs of Texas Jewish Civil War soldiers and veterans. He has located just one photo to date.

If you have information on Texas Jewish Civil War soldiers or their burial locations, please contact Whitefield at [gary1408@charter.net](mailto:gary1408@charter.net), or mail your information or copies of photographs to 3908 W. 4th St., Fort Worth, Texas 76107.

■ TJHS

## ADDRESS TO THE TEXAS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY: "A LONE STAR STATE OF MIND"

Presented at the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Fall 2005 Quarterly Meeting  
Friday October 21 at Temple B'nai Israel, Victoria, Texas  
GARY Stewart BRANFMAN, M.D.

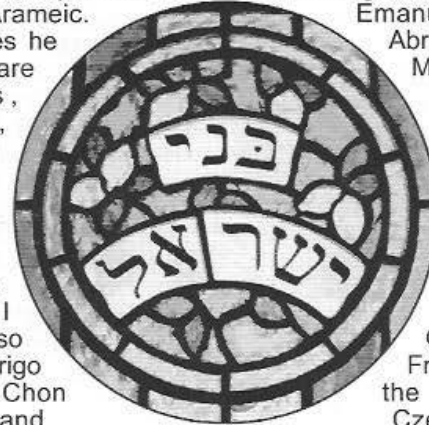
"We did celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the ship... I sang the Kol Nidre, and I heard voices coming from the other caravels to join in the prayer. I knew that we are not sailing in vain." These are the words of Louis de TorresYosef, born Ben HaLevy Haivri. The year is 1492, and the ship is the Santa Maria. His one-way ticket out of the Spanish Inquisition's reign of terror was his command of Arabic, English, Hebrew, Spanish, French, and Arameic.

The other voices he speaks of are translators, navigators, doctors, and astronomers. Jews with names like Rodrigo de Triana. Don Gabriel Sanchez, Alonso de Loquir, Rodrigo de Triana, Chon Kabrera, and Doctor Briena.

The earliest record of Jews in Texas dates back to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. In 1545, there were 1,400 Jews in Mexico City. Punishment for public acknowledgement of their Jewish faith was burning at the stake. Upon arrival in Texas, they found that (up until 1821) Jews could not legally practice in Texas either.

There were Jews in Texas during the fight for independence from Spain, and then during the fight with Mexico. Adolphus Sterne provided financial backing for the Texas Revolution. Albert Moses

Levy, the surgeon-in-chief who treated Sam Houston for his war wounds, was awarded 640 acres of land for his contributions to Texas independence. Samuel Isaacs received 320 acres for his exemplary military service. The De Cordova family helped develop Waco. Anthony Wolfe died defending the Alamo. By 1880, the Texas census contained the names Henri Castro, Louis "Moses" Rose, George Levy, Léon Blum, Emanuel Kahn, Abraham Levi, and Mayer Halff.



The Stained Glass in B'nai Zion

When we gaze upon a list of immigrants who contributed to Texas history, we see the Jews, the Germans, the French, the Irish, the Italians, the Czechs, the Lebanese, the Greeks... But why

the Jews? And why not other religious groups? Are we not simply like them? Another Religion? No. We are not simply another religion. We are a people. An ancient civilization still praying in the same language, maintaining the same customs, observing the same holy days, protecting the same homeland, and worshiping the same G-d as our ancestors did over 5000 years ago.

*Lone Star, cont. page 16*

The first Jewish immigrants came to Victoria from the Alsace-Lorraine area of Germany near

the French border. As early as 1849, Jewish prayer services were conducted by visiting Rabbis from Houston, Galveston, and New Orleans. In 1858, Congregation B'nai Israel was organized by five pioneer families, and has served the Jewish community in Victoria for a century and a half. The Temple B'nai Israel Sisterhood, formerly known as the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society, was organized in 1871 by Mrs. Ben Alexander, who also served as it's first president.

The B'nai B'rith Max Bettin Lodge No. 212 was founded in 1875. By 1875, the Alexander, Guggenheim, Halpin, Schwartz, Silverstein, Apfel, Dreyfus, Levy, Oppenheimer, Rouff, and Potash families made Victoria their home. According to Historian Bob Shook, "...the Jews became Victoria's most successful merchants." Between 1900 and 1912 the Bettins, Elkowitz, Lerner, Slotnicks, Lazors, and Simons contributed to the landscape of our city.

Architect Joseph Gruy completed Temple B'nai Israel in 1923. This eclectic-classical structure has



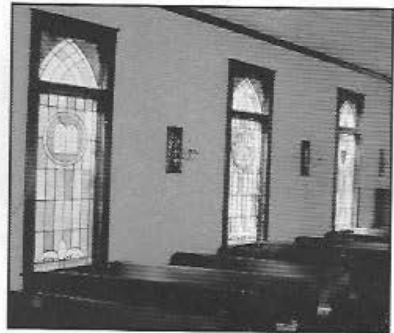
stained-glass windows with round-arched transoms, brick corbelling, brick pilasters, and denticulation, as well as box columns with banded caps. Dr. M.G. Soloman was the first resident rabbi of Temple B'nai Israel. He was followed by Dr. M.M. Sessler, who served from 1907 until 1909.

Abraham Levi arrived in Victoria before the Civil War, establishing the largest dry-goods establishment in Southwest Texas. Soon after, he began to sell banknotes and formalized his banking business under the name A. Levi and Company, which became, in 187, the largest state chartered bank in Texas. Its name was changed to Victoria Bank and Trust Company in March 1923. The Levi Company also owned 25,000 acres of land in six Texas counties, had extensive cattle interests, and financed the area's first electrical generator and ice plants.

The success stories of Victoria's small Jewish congregation are voluminous. A 1920's trunk-of-the-car welding supplier blossomed into Airgas Southwest, the region's largest distributor of welding supplies and industrial gases. A 1938 automotive and hardware store branched into furniture during World War 11, and today, Lack's Furniture is one of the largest, independently-owned retail furniture chains in the United States. Today, our local community is well represented in medicine, law, education and business, and our philanthropic efforts are boundless.

We are Americans, Jewish Americans, Jewish Texans, and here at B'nai Israel, Jewish Victorians. Jewry worldwide is

small in number, but immense in accomplishments. In Victoria, our microcosmic minion mimics our international reputation with pride. We are patriotic Americans, supporters of Israel, proud Texans. Locally, for one-



B'nai Zion sanctuary, Victoria, TX

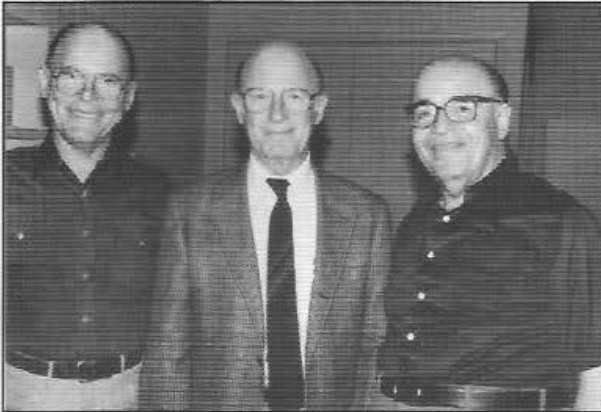
and-a half centuries, every conceivable cultural and charitable organization in Victoria has benefited from our generosity. According to Gary Dunham, director of the Victoria County Heritage Commission, "This place - Victoria, Texas - would be a very different place if the Jewish families had not been here. They brought a level of enlightenment that wouldn't have been here."

■ TJHS



Pulpit at B'nai Zion





Their last portrait together, ca. 1998.  
Harold, Leo and Maurice Hoffman

During the war years, they each wrote hundreds of letters home to their mother and father. Maurice and Leo, now married, also wrote extensively to their wives. The trove of letters from the three of them conveys a maturity beyond their years, a commitment to their service duty but most of all a common yearning to once again be home in the comfort and certainty of their family sphere.

The brothers returned from their immersion in global turmoil to find their personal world had irreparably changed as well. Their father had succumbed to his heart ailment in June of 1945 and they all spent the next several years readjusting and seeking to reestablish the order in their world that had been so thoroughly disrupted. Opportunities in post-war Dallas eventually lured them all to relocate there by the late 1940s. New patterns emerged as the brothers developed family units of their own, bringing into the world three progeny moons each, all the while with their mother Sarah remaining the anchor to their astral system. Leo and Harold developed stellar reputations as lawyers. Maurice hung his star on a developing business to which he applied his legal and accounting talents. Throughout their lives, all three utilized the strengths of character that were formed in Comanche, matured in Austin, broadened during the war years and honed in their adult lives.

With the passing of Harold Hoffman in January of 2005, the last of the brothers left this worldly experience to join the other two in the celestial adventure beyond. They departed this world in almost the same span of time in which they were borne into it. It was if the gravitational principle that followed them throughout life still applied and the dynamics of their sibling relationship was still a force even unto their death. And like all the stars in the sky, their constellation shines day and night and will endure for a very, very long time: Its illumination enriches all of us who knew and loved them as Maurice, Leo and Harold and inseparably as the Hoffman brothers from Comanche.

■ TJHS

## MY KIND OF MAN

Provided by Marvin Rich

Here is just a little more evidence of the Roosevelt administration's dastardly behavior toward Jews during World War II.

A few months ago, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell gave a posthumous award for "constructive dissent" to Hiram (or Harry) Bingham, IV.

For over fifty years, the State Department resisted any attempt to honor Bingham. To them he was an insubordinate member of the US diplomatic service, a dangerous maverick who was eventually demoted. Now, after his death he has been officially recognized as a hero.

Bingham came from an illustrious family. His father, on whom the fictional character Indiana Jones was based, was the archaeologist who unearthed the Inca City of Machu Picchu, Peru in 1911. Harry entered the US diplomatic service and in 1939 was posted to Marseilles, France as American vice-consul.

The US was then neutral and not wishing to annoy Marshal Petain's puppet Vichy regime, President Roosevelt's government ordered its representatives in Marseilles to not grant Jews any visas. Bingham found this policy immoral and risking his career, did all in his power to undermine it.

In defiance of his bosses in Washington, he granted over 2,500 USA visas to Jewish and other refugees including the artists Marc Chagall and Max Ernst, and writer Thomas Mann's family. He also sheltered Jews in his Marseilles home, and obtained forged identity papers to help Jews in their dangerous journeys across Europe. He worked with the French underground to smuggle Jews out of France into Franco's Spain or across the Mediterranean, and even contributed to their expenses out of his own pocket.

In 1941, Washington lost patience with him. He was sent to Argentina, where later he continued to annoy his superiors by reporting on the movements of Nazi war criminals. Eventually he was forced out of the American diplomatic service completely. Bingham died in 1988 almost penniless.

Little was known of his extraordinary activities until his son found some letters in his belongings after his death. Many groups and organizations have honored him posthumously, including the United Nations and the State of Israel.

■ TJHS

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### TJHS BOARD HOLDS FALL QUARTERLY MEETING SUNDAY OCTOBER 23, 2005 IN B'NAI ZION



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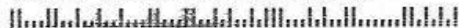
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