

Texas Jewish Historical Society



February 2018 News Magazine

Y'All Come to Fort Worth for the Society's Annual Gathering, April 13-15th

by Hollace Weiner

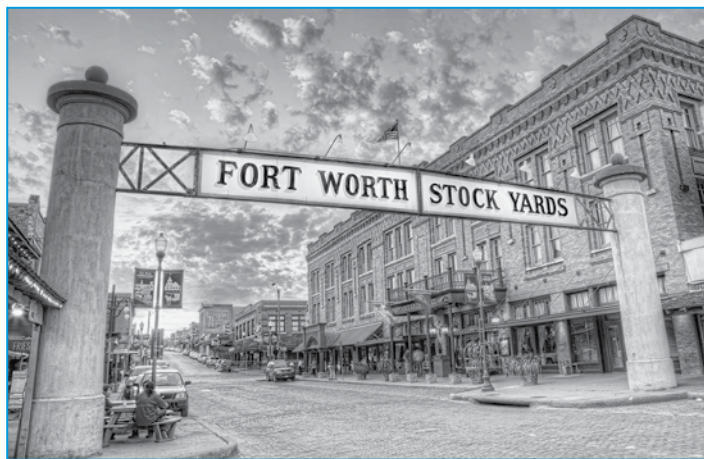
Fort Worth—the colorful city where Jews arrived before the Civil War, a synagogue sprang up in the gay-nineties, a rabbi raided the brothels, and Jewish clothiers specialized in western wear—is rolling out the red carpet for the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Annual Gathering, April 13-15.

The weekend agenda will not only look into the past—with a sermon on the “Heartbeat of Jewish Fort Worth”—but also examine recent Texas Jewish history, from the revival of Klezmer music to conversations with first-generation immigrants shaping the present.

The wandering Jews who settled in Texas weren't just the banana peddlers, shopkeepers and Galveston-Plan immigrants of a century ago. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, hundreds of Soviet and South African Jews made Texas home. They are the focus of a multi-media, Saturday-morning panel, “Gone 2 Texas: Two Waves of Immigration, Soviet & South African.”

The panel will delve into the reasons scores of Russian-speaking and Johannesburg-based Jews made the trek to Texas; compare and contrast their trials and tribulations; and learn how they and their children have fared in the USA. Mark Goldberg, director of Jewish Studies at the University of Houston, will moderate the Saturday-morning discussion, which will include video clips and paintings from artists among the émigrés.


The Soviets Texans had to learn English; the South Africans spoke with an accent. Both had lived in lands of censorship: The USSR had a totalitarian press; South Africa had no television until 1976 and videos like “Guess



Entrance to the Fort Worth Stock Yards.

Who's Coming to Dinner” were contraband. Jews exiting the Soviet Union knew little about Judaism, yet faced anti-Semitism. The South Africans came from flourishing Jewish communities, yet disapproved of apartheid and feared growing civil unrest. Russian-speaking Jews received support and guidance from local Jewish Federations as they resettled; South Africans had to

be self-reliant and help one another. Both immigrant groups were well educated, yet faced barriers to employment. Both immigrant groups trace their roots to Russia, with the South Africans originally coming from Lithuania.

Our Russian culture includes the rhythms of Klezmer music. The conference's Saturday-evening program will be a Klezmer Havdallah and barbecue. Cantorial Student Monica Braverman, who bonded with Society members when she led services at gatherings in Marshall and Longview, is the lead singer in Klezzoup!, a homegrown musical troupe. Monica and her fellow musicians will explore the klez/jazz revival in Texas and across the USA. The attire is denim and bandanas. 

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Message from the President

by Davie Lou Solka

What a great weekend in Gonzales January 12-14, 2018! Barbara and Ben Rosenberg kept us on the go with very interesting sights and information about Jewish life in Gonzales. Abbi Michelson made sure we were well fed with fabulous menus and hospitality lobby/room. (The hotel did not have a hospitality room, so we were allowed to use the lobby/breakfast area.)

At the Jewish Cemetery (there are two, but one is on private land and difficult to visit), we were visited by three “ghosts” portrayed by Jan Hart, Joan Katz, and Vickie Vogel. Shabbat dinner was lovely, and services were conducted by Rabbi Peter Tarlow.

Saturday morning, Kay Goldman spoke to us on “Early Jewish Businesses of Gonzales.” Barbara Rosen-



berg interviewed Samylu Rubin regarding her growing up in Gonzales. Samylu was then joined by Carol Brin, Bob Gindler, Sheldon Lippman, and Abbi Michelson, who talked about their lives in Gonzales. Susan Lewis was the moderator.

After lunch, we went to the Gonzales Memorial Museum. We saw the “Come and Take It” cannon, which was given to the settlers in Gonzales by the Mexican government in 1831 as protection against Indian attacks. Although several museums claim to have the original, we were assured that *this one was the original!*

A visit to the Old Jail Museum was fun with stories by Sandra Wolff, Director of the Museum. Sandra lived in the jail for ten years while her father was the jailer. If you were a fan

of Andy Griffith and Mayberry, you would see similarities in this jail and the one in Mayberry—very casual!

A bus tour of Jewish homes in Gonzales was very interesting. We saw the Michelson, Totz, Stahl, and Joseph homes along with many others. This tour was designed especially for us, and we appreciated the effort of the tour guide who researched these homes.

After Havdalah and dinner, we were visited by Captain David Levi Kokernot, portrayed by our own Gary Whitfield. Captain Kokernot was quite a colorful personality, and Gary did him justice, including his ever present cigar!

After a successful board meeting on Sunday morning, we left Gonzales with memories of fun, visits with old and new friends, and perhaps a thought of another visit.

I hope you will be able to join us in Fort Worth April 13-15, 2018, for the Annual Gathering and Board Meeting. Susan Lewis, along with her committee of Jack Gerrick, Morton Herman, Bob Lewis, Hollace Weiner, and Gary Whitfield, have an exciting weekend planned. Not only will you learn about “new” waves of Jewish immigration, but you will be entertained with special programming on Klezmer music and experience a Klezmer Havdalah. See the

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The Texas Jewish Historical Society February 2018 Quarterly News Magazine

The Texas Jewish Historical Society News Magazine is published four times annually. Stories about Texas Jewish history, oral histories, and requests for assistance with research are welcome, as are photographs and historical documents. Please provide color photocopies or scans at 300 dpi or greater in gif, tif, or jpg format, and send electronically to Editor Jack Solka at jack@solka.net or by mail to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, 512-527-3799. Be sure to include your name and contact information.

Editor Jack Solka
Layout/Design Editor Alexa Kirk

Note: The Texas Jewish Historical Society is unable to guarantee the safe receipt and/or return of documents and photographs. It is strongly recommended that you provide color photocopies of both color and black & white documents. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Visit us on the web at www.txjhs.org.



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Baytown Congregants

“Want Eternal Light to Shine”

At Historic K’Nesseth Israel in Wake of Hurricane Harvey Damage

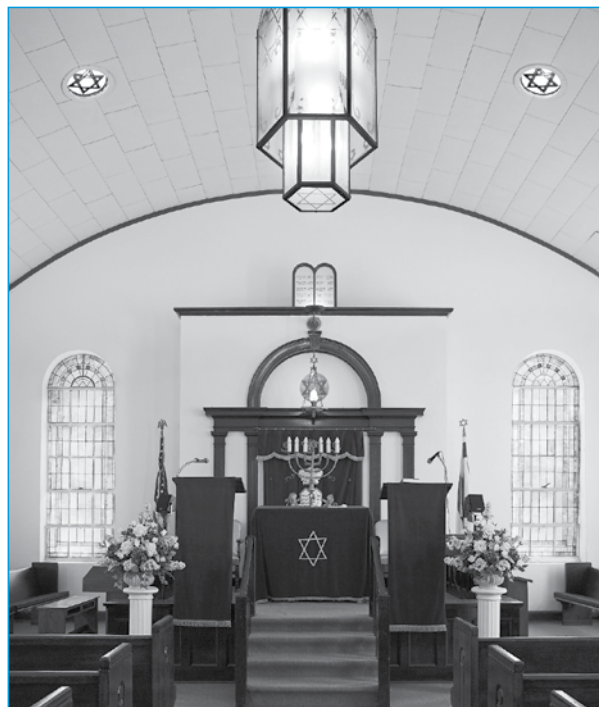
by Hollace Weiner

The destruction that Hurricane Harvey wreaked on Jewish institutions extended beyond Houston to nearby Baytown, where wind-driven water soaked K’Nesseth Israel, a landmark that is now uninhabitable. Restoring the historic synagogue and its community center, which date to 1930, will cost an estimated \$114,000. But unlike in Houston, where TV cameras continue to focus on the damage, there have been few headlines about Baytown to stir sympathy or support.

“We want the eternal light to continue to shine for future generations,” wrote congregants Joan Teter Linares, Shana Bauman and Denise Havenar in a fund-raising appeal. The trio are battling the shul’s insurance company to cover the damages.

“Our synagogue has always been well loved since 1930, attended by third and fourth generations,” they wrote.

Among the charter members of K’Nesseth Israel were the grandparents of Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, founding president of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, and two ancestors of Samuel D. Gruber, president of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments. “The building represents what a group of ‘poor’ Eastern European Jews could build,” Kessler says. In older established Texas towns like Corsicana and Brenham, the Jewish community had “grander” synagogues, but “in many ways, I think Baytown is more representative of the norm. And it’s still being used in its original community.”



The interior of Baytown’s K’Nesseth Israel has a barrel-vaulted ceiling and light fixtures shaped like Stars of David. (Photo by Larry Rose)

The yellow-brick synagogue, which received a Texas Historic Marker in 1992, has a soaring façade with a barrel-vault roof and arched brickwork. Stained-glass windows filter color into the interior. On the ceiling, tiny light fixtures shaped like Stars of David twinkle. The building was the first synagogue designed by Houston architect Lenard Gabert. (Later he designed synagogues in Schulenburg, Wharton, and Houston as well as the first Hillel building at Texas A&M in College Station.)

Thirty families presently belong to K’Nesseth Israel, among them some who drive from Houston, 22 miles away. They are so dedicated to their congregation that volunteers plan to gut the buildings, remove sheetrock,

and salvage wainscoting, hopefully for reuse in the restoration. Contractors will need to be hired for mold remediation, new sheetrock and grouting.

It was a decade ago that Hurricane Ike hit the small-town shul, damaging two-thirds of its adjacent community center—a rectangular structure that was originally a school building. The shul’s insurance company resisted covering most of those repairs, but eventually a settlement was reached. K’Nesseth Israel’s members supervised those repairs in 2008.

Although there has never been a large concentration of Jewish families in Baytown (pop. 76,000), K’Nesseth Israel is the city’s oldest house of worship still in use. What first attracted Jews to the area was the opening in 1915 of the

Goose Creek oilfield. A railroad spur followed. In 1917 Humble Oil, now Exxon, opened the Baytown refinery which grew into one of the world’s largest petrochemical complexes. Jewish merchants, mainly immigrants with Eastern European roots, opened stores to meet the retail needs of refinery workers. The area, near the northern side of Galveston Bay, was composed of three communities—Goose Creek, Pelly and Baytown. It was referred to as the Tri-Cities.

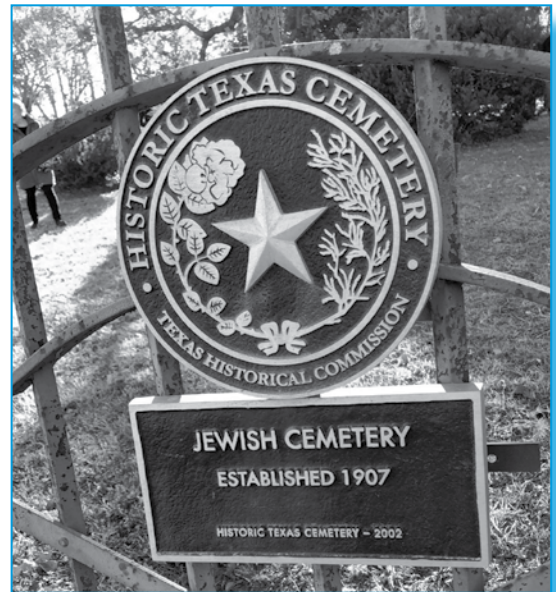
By the 1920s, twelve local Jewish families were renting a building for Friday-night and Saturday-morning services. In 1928, they chartered K’Nesseth Israel. The next year the Tri-Cities Jewish community pledged

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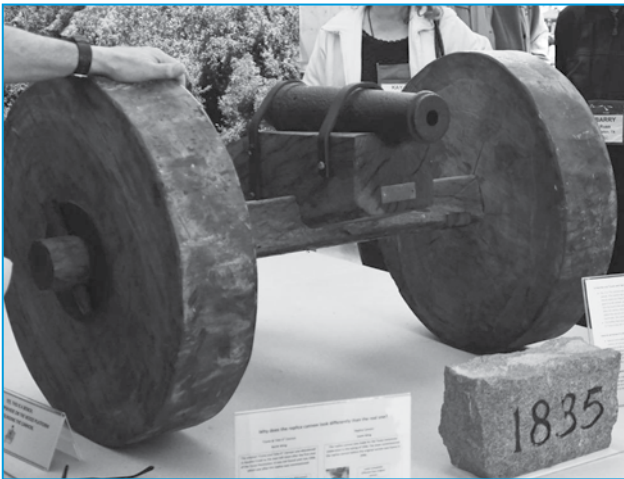
Board Meeting in Gonzales



Barbara Rosenberg interviewed Samylu Rubin about growing up in Gonzales.



Historical Marker at the gate of the Gonzales Jewish Cemetery.



The famous cannon used by the Texans in the War of Independence from Mexico. The response to the Mexican Army when they requested its return was "Come and Take It."



Rabbi Peter Tarlow conducted Shabbat services Friday night.




Gary Whitfield re-enacted and described the experiences of Captain David Levi Kokernot, rogue soldier of the Texas Revolution.



Ghosts Jan Hart (Jeanette Weil Hirsh), Vickie Vogel (Fannie Orinovsky) and Joan Katz (Yetta Michelson Forgotston), told the life stories of these women buried at the Jewish Cemetery in Gonzales.

Notes from the Board Meeting

At the January 2018 Board Meeting in Gonzales, the following occurred:

- Speaker's Bureau Chair Jan Hart reported that Kay Goldman will be speaking at Beth Tikvah in Clear Lake in the spring and Sally Drayer will speak to an Adult Education Class at Temple Shalom in Dallas on April 18, 2018.
- The trip to Panama was cancelled due to failure to meet minimum registration. Vickie Vogel, chair, is looking into a trip to Jewish Toronto in 2019.
- A grant of \$1,000 was awarded to University of Houston's Center for Public History to conduct, video-tape, and transcribe oral histories over the next three years to document the destruction and rebuilding in Meyerland.
- A grant of \$1,000 was awarded to Congregation K'Nesseth Israel of Baytown toward restoration of the synagogue and community center.
- Lynna Kay Shuffield announced that the Texas Historical Commission had approved Historic Texas Cemetery Designation markers for Jewish cemeteries in Gainesville, La Grange, Navasota, and Paris. 



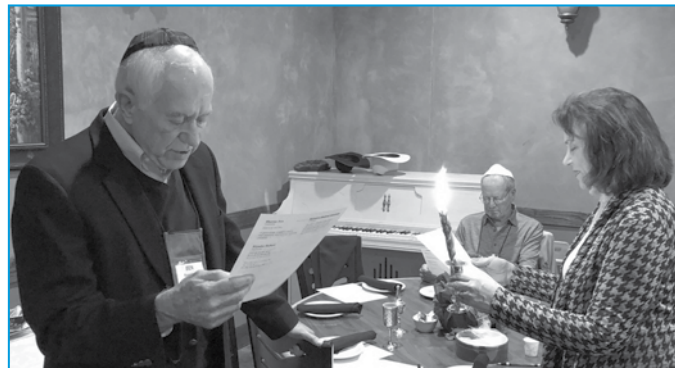
David Vogel, Sonny and Sharon Gerber, Bob Lewis, Sheldon Lippman, Charles Hart, and Sally Drayer (in front) listen to explanations by Sandra Wolff at Gonzalez Jail Museum.



Barbara and Ben Rosenberg chaired the weekend event. Abby Michelson (in back), arranged for the meals and snacks.



Sandra Wolff, Director of the Gonzales County Jail Museum, describes some of the artifacts in the museum collection.



Ben and Barbara Rosenberg led Havdalah services Saturday night.



Nelson Chafetz and Pacey Laves in front of the Texas Historical Marker at the Gonzales County Jail Museum.



Group that attended the Fall Board Meeting in Gonzales, Texas

— Tied and Tethered (*Geknippt und Gebinden*): Jews in Early Fort Worth —

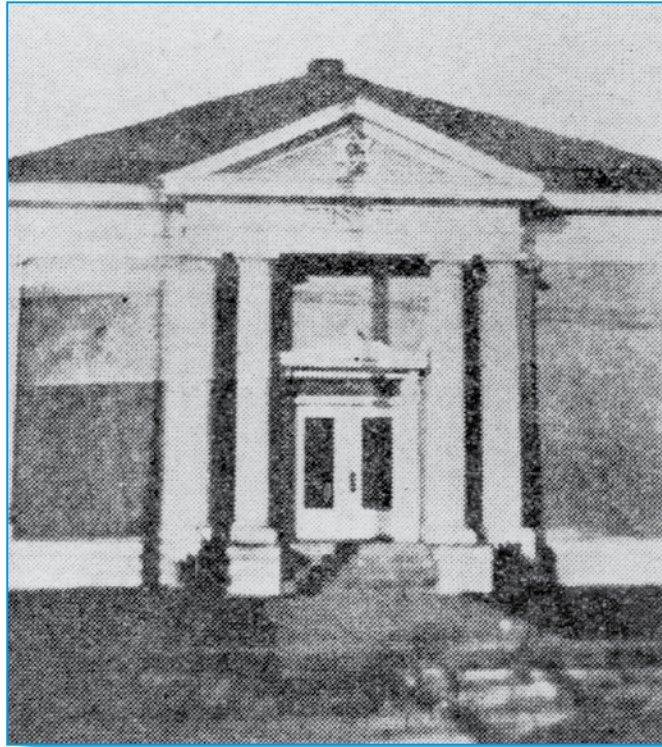
by Hollace Weiner

Condensed from *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. CVII, No. 3, January 2004

During the Eighteen Eighties and the Nineties, Fort Worth had a considerable Jewish population . . . [yet] cold indifference to affairs of a religious nature prevailed.

That was the observation of Fort Worth's first Jewish historian, Flora Weltman Schiff. Writing in 1914 for Chicago's *Reform Advocate*, she reported in a front-page story that the pioneer Jews in her Texas hometown were so irreverent, "the very mention of [worship] services would subject one to ridicule. . . . Such was the reputation of Fort Worth throughout the State of Texas that the mere mention of the name in Jewish circles would suggest the abandonment of all hope for the Jews of that City."

Unlike other major Texas cities—such as Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Galveston—Fort Worth, during the final decades of the nineteenth-century, had no B'nai B'rith lodge and no Reform synagogue. In this frontier county seat, 40 miles west of Dallas, Jewish institutions were slow to develop. When they did, the pattern was unlike most American Jewish communities where the creation of a Hebrew cemetery came first, followed by a burial society that administered charity, then a religious school, and ultimately a congregation. Fort Worth basked in its reputation as a rugged, irreverent town where drunken cowboys unloaded six-shooters into the air and a panther was spotted napping in the middle of a



Beth-El Congregation's first Temple at 601 Taylor Street, 1908 - 1920. (Fort Worth Jewish Archives)

downtown street. Unlike the neighboring county seat of Weatherford, a dry town that promoted itself as a "city of churches," a propensity for prayer was not part of Fort Worth's profile.

Fort Worth's religious laxity, particularly among its 150 Jews, was such that in March 1879 a circuit-riding rabbi from Galveston attempted to start a Sabbath school, to little avail. "There seems to be a lack of zeal among parents," a journalist with the *Jewish South*, an Atlanta, Georgia, weekly, reported three months later. The reporter, Charles Wessolowsky, reprimanded his brethren for having the numbers but not the inclination to follow Jewish traditions.

A Jewish cemetery, Emanuel Hebrew Rest, was not started through

the efforts of Jewish residents, but rather by a civic leader who deeded property in 1879 for several graveyards, including one for the "Israelites" of the city. The Hebrew cemetery's origins demonstrate that Fort Worth's Jews, while an integral part of the landscape, were passive about creating their own religious institutions. A B'nai B'rith lodge, launched by out-of-town organizers from Waco and Dallas in 1876, disintegrated during an economic downturn in the early 1880s. In 1888, a local Jewish resident wrote a letter to the editor of Cincinnati's *American Israelite* lamenting: "We have no congregation, no B'nai B'rith, and the only society we have is the cemetery association . . . and now

interest in that most laudable enterprise is flagging."

Meanwhile, Jewish settlers in other Texas cities—mainly Houston, Victoria, Galveston, San Antonio, Dallas, Waco, Tyler, Gainesville, and even Hempstead—were coalescing into congregations. These pioneer congregations gravitated toward American Reform Judaism which shed ancient traditions like eating kosher meat, wearing yarmulkes, praying in Hebrew, performing weddings under a *chuppah*, and closing their businesses on Shabbat, the most profitable day of the business week. Reform Judaism emphasized moral teachings and stressed Judaism as a religious denomination, rather than an enveloping

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culture. Modeling itself after Protestant denominations, Reform Judaism allowed mixed seating of men and women, organ and choral music.

Despite adaptations allowed by the Reform movement, Fort Worth's pioneer Jews were reluctant to commit to religious institutions. Not that they denied their Jewish identity.



Emanuel Hebrew Rest pictured at an 1898 funeral. The entire Jewish community used the cemetery until 1910 when Congregation Ahavath Sholom objected to the burial of a non-Jewish spouse and started an Orthodox cemetery. Hebrew Rest has received Historic Texas Cemetery designation thanks to efforts of the TJHS. (Photo by Swartz Bros., courtesy Fort Worth Jewish Archives.)

They displayed a sense of cohesion and ethnic homogeneity. Jewish men formed commercial partnerships with other Jews, engaging in business with brothers and brothers-in-law or recruit-



Outing in Forest Park, ca. 1915. Kneeling: Sara Eckert (Gernsbacher); middle row: Libby Simon, Rose Label (Levenson), Ida Fred (Cohn), Dorothy Hornstein, Dora Eckert (Herman); Back row: Fannie Fred (Jacobs); Ida Brodkey (Fred); Fannie Katz (Baum). (Fort Worth Jewish Archives)

ing relatives and Jewish friends in a chain-migration pattern. The Columbia Dry Goods Store, for example, had financial backing from three local Jews: Sol Mayer, a liquor store proprietor, Marcus Alexander, a haberdasher, and Alexander's brother-in-law Joe Pommer. Jake Washer, a men's clothing merchant who arrived from Memphis in 1882, opened a haberdashery and was soon followed by his brother, Nat, and fellow Jews Alphonse and Larry August. These men worked together until 1887

when the Augusts opened a competing store. Sam Levy, a wholesale liquor and cigar distributor who had worked in Dallas and Decatur, took over the Fort Worth-based Casey-Swasey Co. liquor enterprise in the 1880s. Levy employed his stepsons—Alvin and Mannie Kramer—and recruited at least three other Jewish salesmen (Oscar Seligman, Herman Lederman, and Herman Marx) to canvas the countryside.

Socially, groups of Jews gathered for games of whist. Their evening card parties were written up in the social columns of the *Southwestern Jewish Sentiment*, which described the soirees in detail, down to the food served during six-course dinners, the décor, and the prizes: a cut-glass cigar stand for the gents, a satin pin cushion for the ladies, and egg beaters for the losers. Weddings were announced in the Jewish press and the daily papers. The sons and daughters of Fort Worth Jews

often married other Jews from within the local community or out-of-town relatives of business partners. Fort Worth's Jews may not have supported any local religious organizations, but they retained ties with Jewish communities elsewhere. Amongst themselves, they had a strong network of social and business ties. Sociologically, they perceived themselves as an ethnic community, sans formal institutions.

Religion was simply not a priority. These self-reliant individuals had not come to Fort Worth for religion but for the independence and entrepreneurial opportunities inherent on the frontier. They self-selected Fort Worth, making a conscious decision to leave urban landscapes and urban expectations behind. As historian Sander Gilman observes in *Jewries at the Frontier*, many a Jew elects to settle on the margins of settlement because it is perceived as a peripheral space where one may function alone, free of communal expectations. Fort Worth, physically and psychologically, was just such a place, a locale without traditional constraints.

Welcome to Cowtown

Founded in 1849, Fort Worth had begun as a military camp, one of eight strategic outposts between the Rio Grande and the Red River designed to protect Texas settlements from marauding Native American tribes. Fort Worth's strategic location was on a bluff overlooking a twin fork in the Trinity River. The city prided itself on its frontier origins, its nickname (Cowtown), and its location on a feeder road into the Chisholm Trail, one of the Southwest's oldest cattle-to-market routes. As the last major town on the route north to Kansas, Fort Worth became a watering spot for cowboys seeking supplies as well as recreation in the city's Hell's Half Acre. Trail bosses stocked up on flour at Jacob Samuels' dry goods store and sampled tobacco at Harris Eichenbaum's cigar

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shop, establishments owned by Jewish entrepreneurs.

Fort Worth's earliest settlers were young single men drawn to the challenges of the frontier. The city's first Jewish pioneer, German-born Simon Gabert, 20, arrived in 1856. Lured by gold-rush fever, he ventured even further west. He was returning via St. Louis in 1861 when the Civil War erupted, and he enlisted in the Union Army's 4th Regular Missouri Cavalry, aka Fremont's Hussars. By 1880 he was back in Fort Worth with a bullet in his leg, a wife, six children, and a cotton-buying business. The city's second Jewish pioneer, Warsaw-born Jacob Samuels, was 20 when he arrived in 1857 via Louisiana and Waco. When Texas seceded from the Union, Jacob Samuels and his horse joined a unit mustered on Main Street. He served as a cavalryman with Co. F, Waller's Battalion, in Gen. Tom Green's Brigade, Walker's Division of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Private Samuels was skilled

at foraging food for the troops and making harnesses for horses. After the war, he operated a store on the Fort Worth town square. During the Reconstruction era, commerce slowed. He left the city, journeying back to Louisiana where in 1870 he married Bertha Wadel, the daughter of Prussian-Jewish immigrants. The couple's first child, a son named Sidney, was born in Louisiana. The family soon moved back to Texas where five more children were born.

Another Jewish pioneer in Fort Worth was teenager Isidore Carb, a

Singer Sewing Machine salesman. Carb ventured to Texas from New Orleans in 1872 in search of cowboys. The train went as far as Dallas, a city that disappointed him because there were no cowboys or Indians there. Selling his possessions to buy a horse and buckboard, Carb proceeded to Fort

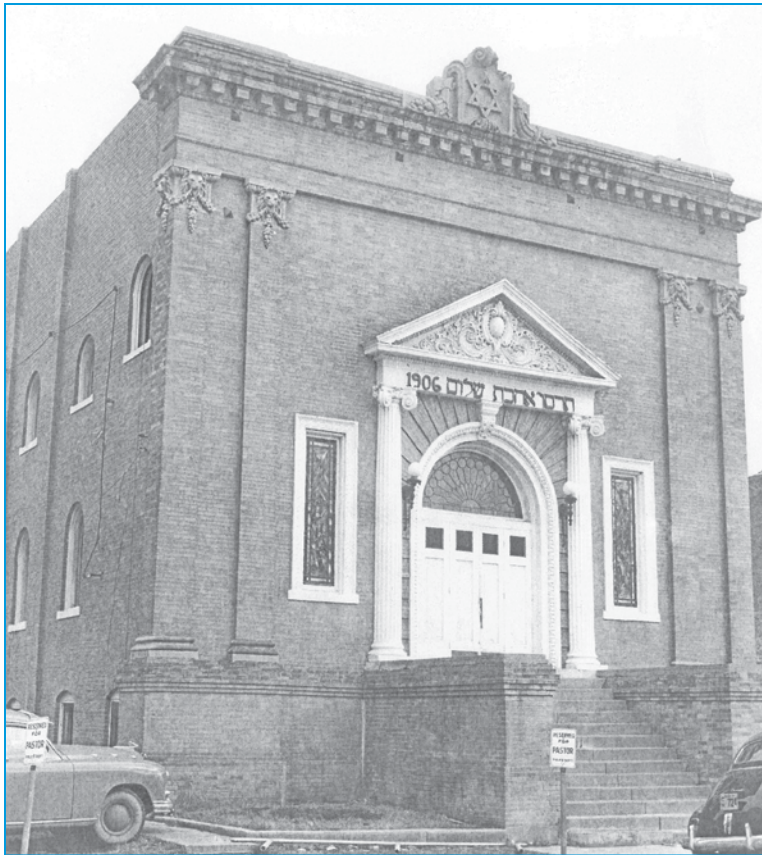
native of Alsace, to follow.

The Carb and Samuels families were living in Fort Worth during July 1876 when pioneers and merchants pitched in with money, labor, and provisions to construct the last miles of track connecting Fort Worth to the nation's rails. Teams of horses were supplied by Ike Gronsky, a colorful Russian Jew who had immigrated via Canada. With the Texas & Pacific Railroad's arrival, the local Jewish population blossomed as trains brought to Fort Worth dozens of traders, peddlers, hucksters, and shopkeepers.

Still, Jewish settlers trickled into Texas at a slow, irregular pace compared with the migration of Jews to cities in the nation's Northeast. Texas' Jewish population grew from an estimated 200 at the time of independence in 1836 to approximately 5,000 in 1880. These Texas Jews were largely secular souls of German and Alsatian heritage. They were not refugees fleeing Europe for their lives,

but entrepreneurs seeking opportunities on American soil.

After the Civil War, a large portion of the Jews who moved to Texas were migrants from the Deep South, refugees from Confederate regions ravaged by Union armies. The railroad-construction boom in Texas, beginning in the 1870s, facilitated their arrival in the Lone Star State. The Carb brothers, for example, were born in Hillsboro, Mississippi, on a family farm torched by Union soldiers. Joseph Mayer, a Union Army



Ahavath Sholom's shul at 819 Taylor St. served the congregation from 1906 to 1950. (Fort Worth Jewish Archives)

Worth. According to his son David's autobiographical novel, *Sunrise in the West*, Carb wrote home: "I'm here in Fort Worth now, and I'm gonna stay . . . It's got cowboys and everything. . . . There's only a few houses, and then a great big thick forest, and on the other side of that just plains that are all white dust. There's buffaloes and bears and Indians and cowboys out there . . . They's no railroad comes here but I like it." Isidore Carb's enthusiasm persuaded his older brother, Charles, his sisters Sarah, Bertha, and Annette, and his widowed mother, Babette, a

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veteran, his wife Amanda, their three small children, and Joseph's brother Jake were living in Indianapolis when they decided to move south to Texas in 1876 and open a liquor store. They fit a typical pattern of frontier entrepreneurs for whom business was the primary draw. Religion was perhaps secondary or tertiary in their lives. This demographic pattern was to change.

Half a world away, the assassination of Russian Czar Alexander II on March 13, 1881, unleashed reactionary violence against Jews who became the scapegoats for his murder. Pogroms erupted across Russia. A drastic set of decrees, the first enacted during May 1882, authorized eviction of Jews from non-Jewish villages, and later from the Russian interior and cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. Jewish homes were pillaged and tens of thousands of Jews slaughtered. Mass migrations to America's shores began, averaging more than 100,000 refugees a year. Unlike previous waves of Jews to America, this flood-tide brought involuntary immigrants, traumatized travelers, people accustomed to insular communities where the practice of Judaism had scarcely changed since the Middle Ages. Peniless, these refugees arrived speaking Yiddish and lacking the *savoir-faire* that marked the adventurous, more secular Jews of previous migrations.

Again, the trickle of Jews into Fort Worth was slow. Among the first from this wave of refugees were Rachael and Joseph Jacobs who arrived in the early 1880s and opened a restaurant and saloon. When their nephew Moses Shanblum, 30, reached New York harbor in 1887, he followed them to Texas. Borrowing money from fellow Jews, Shanblum filled a backpack with household notions and peddled to surrounding farm and ranch towns. With his earnings, he bought a cart, then a horse and buggy, and finally opened

his own fruit stand. By 1891 he was raising a family with his young wife, Gitel, also a refugee.

Dozens more destitute Jews from Russia followed him to this Western town. Among them was his younger brother, Louis "L.F." Shanblum, 22, who fled Warsaw where he was studying law until a czarist decree blocked Jews from the legal profession. In Fort Worth, like his brother, L.F. borrowed money to fill a peddler's pack.

Moses Shanblum, however, was adamant that a backpack was not enough. The Jews of Fort Worth needed a place of worship, a communal dwelling where they could connect with each other and the faith of their ancestors. In traditional Judaism, the basic congregational unit is a minyan of ten adult men who convene for worship twice a day, morning and evening, and give spiritual support to those in mourning. To Moses Shanblum's dismay, this basic unit was absent in his new hometown. "When I came to Fort Worth in the year 1887, I found only six Jewish families who worshipped in a private house on the Holidays," he wrote in a memoir published in the *Jewish Monitor* on December 11, 1925. Judaism was becoming a casualty as immigrants acquired the ways of the new land. Shanblum began organizing a minyan that met in homes and stores. He envisioned much more—a shul. Wearing his trademark black coat and black derby—a decidedly alien form of dress in West Texas—Moses Shanblum went door to door, shop to shop, and from peddler to peddler persuading fellow Jews "that a synagogue was more important than a new buggy or suit." It was time to create a congregation.

On October 9, 1892, Moses Shanblum, his uncle, and his brother were among more than a dozen Jewish men who gathered in the living room of another immigrant, William Goldstein. According to minutes written in

Yiddish, they organized Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Hebrew for Love of Peace, reflecting the sentiment that had brought them to America. They elected officers, with Goldstein president; Moses Shanblum, vice-president; his uncle, Joe Jacobs, secretary; and scrap-iron dealer J.B. Colton, treasurer. Within two years, the congregation purchased a \$1,000 lot at Jarvis and Hemphill streets, a remote corner twenty blocks away from the courthouse square. By 1895 the men had raised another \$640 to construct Fort Worth's first Jewish house of worship. But attendance was low. Shanblum was confident that greater participation would follow if the synagogue relocated closer to areas of Jewish concentration. (There were not, and never would be enough Jews in Fort Worth to constitute a Jewish neighborhood.) By 1899, Shanblum had raised \$1,600 to purchase a 50-by-100-foot downtown lot at 819 Taylor Street, a thoroughfare already home to several churches. Two years later, Ahavath Sholom's little frame synagogue was moved from Hemphill to Taylor Street, giving Jews a visible place in the small, local religious constellation.

Ahavath Sholom's charter members were mainly recent Russian immigrants, refugees of the pogrom era. They modeled their congregation after institutions left behind in the shtetls of Eastern Europe. But for Fort Worth's longtime Jews, especially those born or raised in America, the shul was an uncomfortable space. They were too much a part of the Texas mainstream to feel at ease in an institution where women sat behind a curtain, where prayers were chanted in Hebrew, and where board minutes were written in Yiddish.

Almost all of the Jews who had settled in Fort Worth prior to the pogrom era remained unaffiliated with the new synagogue. Notably absent

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from the synagogue roster were Civil War veterans Simon Gabert, Joseph Mayer (whose son, Max, did legal work for the synagogue), and Philip Greenwall. The latter, a Louisiana native, managed the Greenwall Opera House. Nat Washer, whose tenor voice was so melodious he sang in local church choirs, did not join Ahavath Sholom, nor did any of the men who had once affiliated with the defunct B'nai B'rith lodge. Haberdashers Larry and Alphonse August did not affiliate, nor did their wealthy cousin, Felix Bath, an attorney and cotton broker. Bath donated money to Ahavath Sholom but would not participate.

The establishment of Ahavath Sholom did prod the city's unaffiliated Jews to revive the dormant cemetery association. Under the leadership of Babette Carb, the Emanuel Hebrew Association was reactivated in 1896 with monthly dues, meetings, and a roster that climbed to 95 persons.

The entire Jewish community participated in annual Purim balls, masquerade parties to which the public was invited. Fort Worth's Purim ball of 1896 was attended by Mayor B.B. Paddock and written up in the next day's *Fort Worth Gazette*, indicating the Jewish community's high profile and its involvement in the fabric of the town.

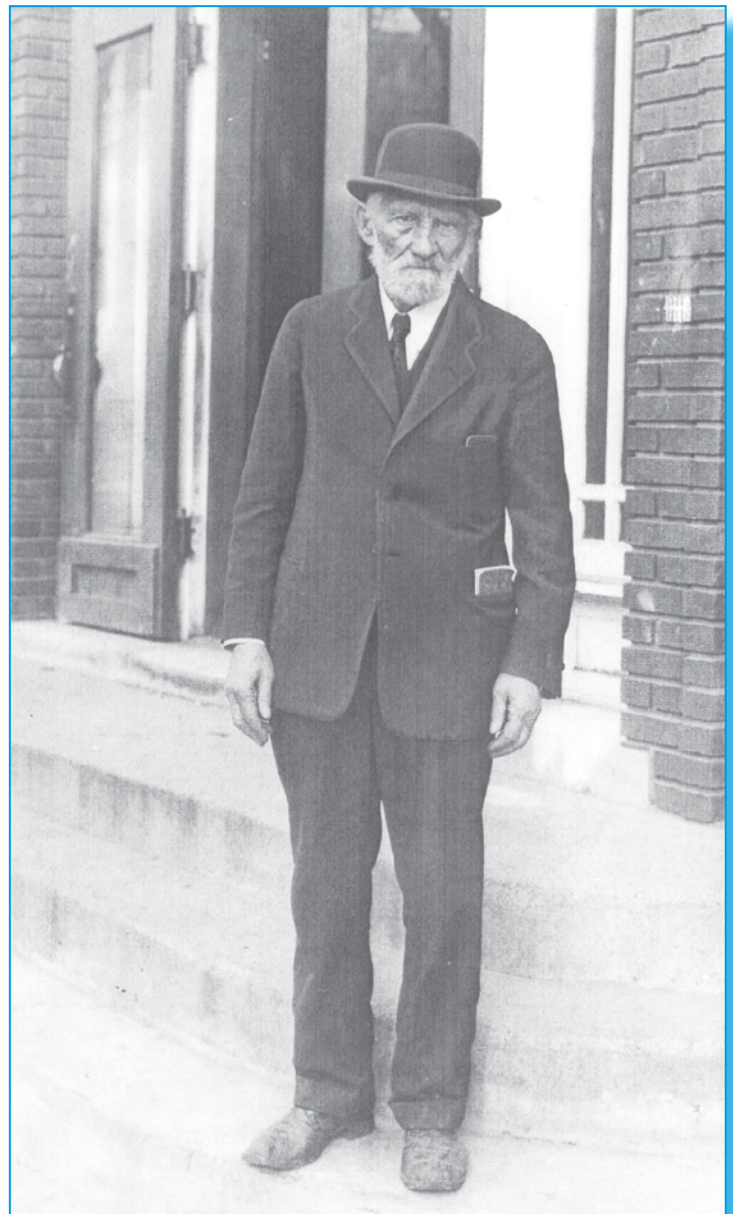
Leadership

In 1900 efforts to organize Reform Jews gained momentum with the arrival of Henry Gernsbacher, a Weatherford entrepreneur, politician, and civic leader. The New Orleans-born Gernsbacher was a kitchenware merchant and a member of Fort Worth's Knights of Pythias lodge. The main reason Gernsbacher, his wife Julia, and their six sons moved to Fort Worth was to affiliate with a Jewish community. "In the neighboring town of Weatherford ... neither he, nor his family had the advantage of social intercourse with the people of his faith, and the elder

members of his family were reared in ignorance of Jewish affairs, social and religious," according to the city's first Jewish historian, Flora Schiff. Shortly after Gernsbacher's arrival in Fort Worth, he spearheaded the movement to organize American Jewish institutions.

In June 1901, Gernsbacher learned that B'nai B'rith's Gulf Coast region, headquartered in New Orleans, had passed a resolution to organize "a number of new lodges . . . during the next six months." He contacted

regional representatives and on the date of their arrival in late July, he called a meeting at the Knights of Pythias Hall to launch a Fort Worth B'nai B'rith lodge. "About 40 of our prominent Israelites assembled . . . and under the auspices of Mr. Charles Sanger of Waco and Mr. [William] Waldstein of Dallas assisted by Messrs. A. Weber, L. Hirschhorn and Jules Dreyfus of Dallas, effected the organization of a lodge of the Independent Order of the B'nai B'rith,"



Polish immigrant Moses Shanblum was the founder in 1892 of Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth's first Jewish congregation. In this 1940s photo he is standing on the steps of the congregation's second shul. Note the siddur in his pocket and his cowboy boots. (Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries)

the *Southwestern Jewish Sentiment* reported.

The Fort Worth lodge's charter members were merchants and professionals who reflected the city's Jewish demographic mix. A number of the "brothers" were Eastern European immigrants, founders and officers at Ahavath Sholom. Others hailed from

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— Royal Brin: Dean of the Appellate Bar —

by Brooks Igo

Reprinted with permission from *The Texas Lawbook*, April 13, 2016

Royal Brin is the husband of Carol Brin, who was a member of the panel that spoke about growing up in Gonzales at the TJHS meeting in January.

It was December, 1941. Royal Brin was driving along Harvard Square on his way to begin a graduate fellowship program at Harvard Law School when he heard the devastating news. The Imperial Japanese Navy had conducted a deadly surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. The next day, the United States declared war on Japan.

Brin decided to change his plans. He applied for a commission in the Navy and ended up serving through the end of World War II, mostly in the South Pacific. While serving at a base in Guadalcanal, Brin's fellow servicemen found out he was a lawyer. He soon became the base's legal officer and set up shop in a small hut with an inconspicuous sign that read "Guadalcanal Legal Office." It was his first job as a newly-minted lawyer.

Despite being engaged in one of the most pivotal campaigns of the South Pacific theater, Brin managed to prepare for his life after the war. He used a Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory to write to law firms in his hometown of Dallas about a job after completion of his service. He wrote to six law firms and ended up securing a job with Strasburger & Price. Brin celebrated his 71st anniversary at the firm in March 2017. His long



Royal Brin, Naval Officer stationed in the South Pacific during World War II.

and successful career has earned his reputation as one of the deans of the Texas appellate bar. When he joined the firm in 1946, he was the eighth lawyer in the firm. Today, the Dallas-based firm has more than 230 lawyers in five Texas counties and outposts in New York, Mexico City, and Washington, D.C.

The ninety-seven-year-old Brin continues to show up at the office

every day. His wife, Carol, insists that "he get out of the house for a few hours." One can find him walking the forty-third floor, attending one of the appellate section's meetings, or enjoying a cup of coffee.

Brin grew up in South Dallas on Forest Avenue, which is now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. He graduated from what is now James Madison High School and received his law degree from the University of Texas. When he began his practice at Strasburger as a courthouse runner, he soon handled everything from workman's compensation claims to defending insurance companies in personal injury and death cases. One of his early cases came when the firm's founder, Henry Strasburger, asked him to represent the former mayor of Lubbock in a dispute regarding the ownership of a television station in West Texas. It was a significant case because the former mayor, Dub Miller, was also Strasburger's cousin. Brin tried the case and won

it. As a token of appreciation, Miller gave Brin a book with the words "A Million Thanks" inscribed on the spine. When he opened the book, "thanks" was written on every line of every page. "I've never counted the number of 'thanks,' but I've always assumed that there were a million of them," said Brin.

As his career developed, Brin ended up carving out an expertise and focus in appellate law through his colleague Hobert Price, who was one of the first lawyers in Texas to treat appellate law as a specialty. At that time, most trial lawyers handled their own appeals. Price created one of the first appellate sections at a law firm in the state. Brin took the reins of the practice when Price retired.

The biggest case of Brin's career resulted from the famous *Pennzoil v. Texaco* litigation in which a jury awarded Pennzoil more than ten billion dollars. Brin said he was approached by both sides to work on an appeal after the initial verdict, but he decided to work with Pennzoil and legendary trial lawyer Joe Jamail. "One of the smartest things Pennzoil did was to hire Joe Jamail," he said. "He knew how to talk to a jury." Texaco argued on appeal that the judge who issued the verdict was not authorized to sit on the case. The original trial judge was unable to finish the case, so a retired judge came on. Brin and Pennzoil asserted that the judge was qualified to sit and won the appeal.

Brin is known to be soft-spoken and mild-mannered, but Michael Jung, chair of the Strasburger's appel-

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Tennessee, Indiana, Louisiana, and Germany. The lodge's elected leaders included Gernsbacher and L.F. Shanblum, the Warsaw law student who had become an affluent Texas scrap-iron dealer. The common denominator among these Jewish men appears to have been commercial success.

Three months after the B'nai B'rith lodge got its start, Jeanette Miriam Goldberg of Jefferson, an organizer with the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), traveled across the state with a parallel mission. Her visit to Fort Worth led to an October meeting at the Delaware Hotel and formation of a local NCJW section with 26 charter members. Unlike the new B'nai B'rith lodge, with its mix of men from East European and American backgrounds, the local Council drew only five women from the Orthodox Jewish community. Nationally, the NCJW appealed to educated American women, the so-called German-Jewish elite with ties to Reform rather than traditional congregations. The creation in Fort Worth of both an NCJW section and a B'nai B'rith lodge helped move the unaffiliated Jews closer to creating a Reform congregation. There were now two institutional nuclei from which to draw support for future organizing efforts.

As the Jewish High Holy Days

neared in the fall of 1902, Gernsbacher convened another meeting, again at the Knights of Pythias Hall. This time, according to the minutes, he issued a call to Jewish men who desired to hold "independent" religious "services for the coming holidays on the Reform plan." Over the next few weeks, 43 men pledged monthly dues to support a congregation named Beth-El, Hebrew for House of God. They rented a hall for worship services and elected Sam Levy to serve as president, Marcus Alexander as vice president, and Gernsbacher as treasurer. Isidore Carb, the group's secretary, wrote to Dallas's Temple Emanu-El asking to borrow a Torah and shofar during the High Holy Days.

On October 11, 1902, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* published a

one-column article announcing, "Reformed Jews Are Organized." The story noted that Beth-El's 43 charter members included 25 "heads of families." The implication was that some of the founders, like Henry Gernsbacher's sons Aaron, 17, and Jake, 20, were single and living at home. Other charter members, like Joseph Mayer, 58, lived with married children and grandchildren. Still others, like Isadore Marx, were bachelors living alone or with siblings, nieces, and nephews. To the *Star-Telegram*, Beth-El's members may have appeared to hail from 25 separate households, but their interrelationships reduced them to perhaps ten extended families. To use a Yiddish expression, they were *geknipt und gebunden*—tied and tethered—in-

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Royal Brin, continued from page 11



Carol and Royal Brin

late practice, says that is not always the case, especially in court. "I liken Royal to a desert flower," Jung said. "He opens up and blooms during a rainstorm."

In addition to his legal savvy, Brin is revered around the office for his magic tricks. Though he has been a practicing attorney for over seventy years, he has been a practicing magician for much longer. He became interested in magic at the age of eight, when a great uncle pulled coins from behind Brin's ear.

He honed his craft in his early

years and eventually joined the International Brotherhood of Magicians. He served as President of the organization in 1969-1970, and faithfully attended the annual conventions until 2015.

Brin has seen several changes in the legal profession, including changing from using carbon paper for his copies to using mimeographs, copy machines and now computers. Another significant change is the increased specialization of young lawyers. While lawyers of his vintage handled a wide variety of matters, today's up-and-comers are encouraged to develop an expertise in a particular subject.

"In one way it is a loss," said Brin. "It would help with the development of lawyers to have broad experience, along with more trial experience." Brin's single most important piece of advice for junior lawyers today is to find a mentor in the field in which you want to practice. 🇺🇸

TJHS on Facebook

Did you know that TJHS has a Facebook page? Like us at [https://](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Texas-Jewish-Historical-Society/187629054741368)

www.facebook.com/pages/Texas-Jewish-Historical-Society/187629054741368.



From Our Archives

This column is based on information in the TJHS Collection, housed at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas campus in Austin. It has been supplemented with online research. If you have corrections or additions, please submit them in writing to the TJHS editor at editor@txjhs.org. We want our archives to be as complete as possible.

— The Denn Family of Bay City, Part 2 —

Gunman Slugs Herman Denn Drama

by Vickie Vogel

In our last issue, we learned how Joe and Blima (Bertha) Denn started a new life in Bay City, Texas, with a grocery store, and had three sons: Herman, Sidney, and Manuel. Now, we will see what happened to their sons.

The Denn brothers had always been close. Manuel assumed he'd work at the family

grocery store after the war, and that's what he did until he joined Herman. Herman had been working at a liquor store in Houston when he decided to go into business for himself in Bay City in August, 1947. A G.I. surplus place in Houston agreed to load them up with merchandise (surplus tools, clothing, etc.) with part of it bought on time. Herman filled his 1939 Plymouth with merchandise. Aunt Esther (Bertha's sister) gave them space in her store. Their merchandise sold right away, so Herman and his wife, Rosie,

went back for more, and Bay City Surplus was born. Esther turned the entire location over to them, and she moved to Wharton in 1954 and had a store there for ten years.

Later in 1947, Sidney bought into the business with his brothers. Herman saw a store going out of business and bought all their fishing tackle. The Dennes didn't hunt or fish growing up. In 1948, Herman and Manuel went to San Antonio to look for merchandise, and a fellow sold them a bunch of shotguns. By 1951, the surplus store

and Denn's sold retail.²

Denn Brothers Sporting Goods also dabbled in other fields over the years, buying and selling shoes and coins. They sold Panasonic/Sony televisions and Honda/Harley Davidson motorcycles. They opened a Honda motorcycle repair shop.³ Around 1970 they started making their own trophies, doing the engraving themselves. From 1983, Denn's provided screen printing for t-shirts, and furnished school uniforms for athletic teams. The store

had evolved into a sporting goods establishment at 1904 Seventh Street. Jake Oshman, of competitor Oshman's Sporting Goods, helped them obtain hard-to-get merchandise.¹ Oshman's first store was in Bay City, and Joe was friends with Mr. Oshman. They sold wholesale



Front row: Joe and Rose Denn. Back row: Gertie and Sidney Denn, Helen and Manuel Denn, Rosie Ray and Herman Denn. Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.

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Denn Brothers Sporting Goods, 1947. Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.

offered basic equipment for almost all sports found in the area. Sidney could restring your old baseball glove or burn your name into it with his soldering iron. At Christmas time, a customer recalled, Sidney Denn told him this is the time of year you might come into the store and catch the Denn

brothers standing around the cash register singing the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."⁴

Denn Brothers made national news when *U. S. News and World Report* ran an article focusing on family businesses trying to keep the company alive when the next generation had no interest in continuing it. Just as none of Joe's children wanted to take over the grocery business, none of the Denn children wanted to take over the store. The magazine had run across the Denns in a book about the history of Jews in the United States and decided to do a story on them. "This is the land of opportunity. If you want to work hard, you can make it. Bay City has been good to us. We've made lots of friends," Herman was quoted as saying. Manuel quipped, "If you work hard and be honest, you'll get in *U. S. News and World Report*."⁵

The most dramatic incident at Denn's Sporting

Goods occurred in December 1958 when armed gunmen kidnapped seven men, including Herman, in a burglary attempt. The seven men left a meeting of the Bay City softball association around 9:30 PM and went to open the store to look at uniform samples, surprising the burglars. The men were marched at gunpoint out of the store. All but Herman were put in one car and told to follow them, or they would kill Herman. When the ringleader realized Herman's car was low on gas, he pulled off the road, planning to commandeer the following car. When the second car saw the gunman on foot, they sped away. Ordering Denn back in the car, they gave chase to the other car. Seeing a chance to cut his lights and pull off on a side road, the car with the six men managed to escape and find a house where they could phone the sheriff.

The kidnapping touched off one of the greatest manhunts the area had ever known with over 100 area law officers involved. Roadblocks were set up in Palacios, Richmond, Wharton,

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Herman Denn. Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.

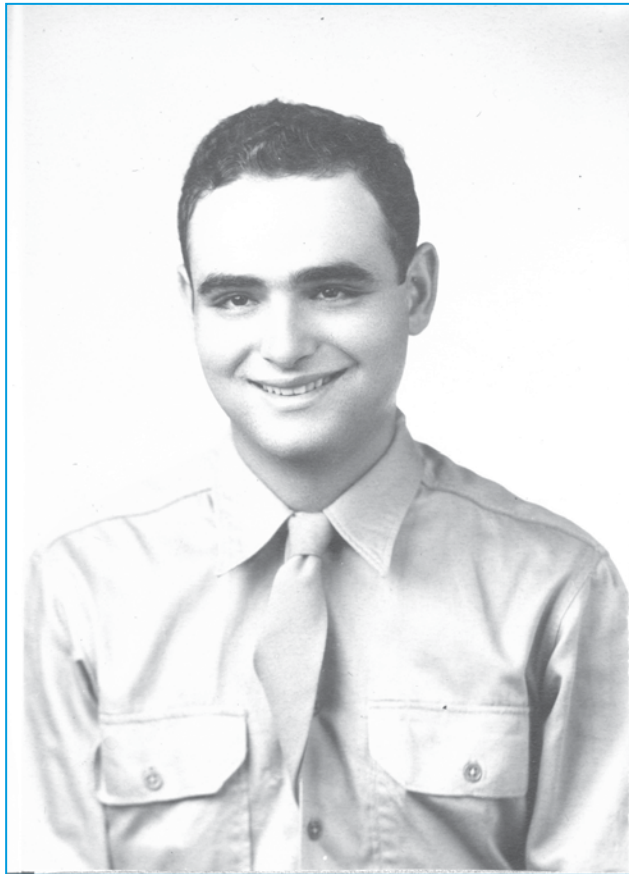
Port Lavaca, and Edna. Meanwhile, two youths who had been under surveillance for suspicion of burglary were questioned and identified the ringleader. The search continued for Denn.

After a wild ride at high speeds in Denn's station wagon which ended when it ran out of gas, Herman was forced from the car, pistol whipped and left for dead along a farm road near Wadsworth. He feigned unconsciousness, and the assailant ran away. After about 20 minutes, he staggered to a nearby house, but they told the bloody man to go away and refused to help. He managed to get to the next house where an African-American couple took him in, bandaged his head, and drove him to the hospital. Twelve stitches closed his worst wound; he was listed in fair condition.

The ringleader somehow made his way home and was arrested hiding in a closet. The kidnapped men were able to identify him. A large burglary ring of twelve persons, most of them teenagers, was exposed as each one arrested identified others. At least ten burglaries over a six-month period were cleared. Much of the merchandise was recovered.

The front-page headline in the *Bay City Daily Tribune* read "Gunman Slugs Herman Denn."⁶ A photograph of Herman in the hospital bed with his head bandaged reveals a smile through the pain. Widespread press coverage with Herman's photo also appeared in *The Matagorda County Tribune*.⁷

In the early 1960s, the Denn brothers' wives opened Nichols Street Furniture selling antiques. Soon they bought The House of Bargains on Thirteenth Street which sold clothing, antiques and general housewares. Twelve years later, they opened a new furniture store, Denn's Furniture and Gifts.



Manuel Denn. Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.

After Rosie and Manuel's deaths at the end of 1995, Denn Brothers Sporting Goods was sold in 1996 to Edwin Gay, who announced the name would change to Denn Sports Headquarters. The brothers had been in business for over fifty years. "Everybody has to give up sometime," Herman said.⁸ He retired, but Sidney continued to work in the store until his death in November. The store was moved to a newly-built modern location on the Matagorda highway in 1997. By August 2001, it had ceased to exist.

Just as Herman, Sidney, and Manuel had memories of growing up with Joe and Bertha (Blima), their children had stories about growing up in the Denn brothers' families. Herman and Rosie had two daughters: Mirl and Belinda. Four sons were born to Sidney and Gertrude: Bernard Ralph (Houston, November 29, 1949); Steven

Howard (Houston, February 8, 1952); Brian Alan (Bay City, September 1, 1955) and Meyer (Bay City, August 15, 1962). Manuel and Helen had one daughter, Debbie, and one son, Avrom.

At Gertrude's unveiling, her niece (Manuel and Helen's daughter) Debbie Denn Berliner recalled childhood memories playing at Aunt Rosie's house ("She'd let us do anything we wanted") and Aunt Gertie's with her cousin Mirl (Rosie's daughter) and two of Gertrude's sons, "Bubba" (Bernard) and "Stevie." Rosie and Gertie lived a block apart, so it was easy for the cousins to get together. Gertie's house was a "kid magnet," and there was always a ball game going on in the yard. Debbie said Aunt Gertie could either go crazy or "let us run wild," and she opted for the latter. There were always lots of Cokes

(which covers any soda in Texas) and snacks like Twinkies and Snowballs. Debbie and Mirl never tired of Aunt Gertie's stories about going to high school with actress Gale Storm.⁹

Scouting was big in the Denn clan. One year Debbie wanted to sell the most Girl Scout cookies and win a trip to camp. Aunt Gertie went through her address book, wrote a little script, and sat Debbie down at the phone. She sold 113 boxes of cookies and won the trip.

Gertie was an avid reader and read all the best sellers. On one of Debbie's visits, Gertrude had just finished reading Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, considered quite racy at the time. When Debbie asked about it, Gertie gave it to her to read, and Debbie never forgot that trust.

It was Gertie's job to make the matzoh balls for Passover, and she

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taught Debbie the secret to making them light and fluffy. She played the piano at Debbie's wedding, and encouraged her sons' musical abilities, helping them form a group, The Den-

the track telling him not to jump off. At the last moment, there was a hole under the track and Avrom dropped into it as the train threw on its brakes and roared overhead. Bernard dragged

tery, the village, and interviews with villagers. His great-great-grandparents are buried there. (You can copy the link from the endnotes, or you can go to YouTube.com and enter

Meyer Denn in the search box.)¹⁴ Meyer wrote a one-page summary of his family's history which is in our archives and was the starting point for this article. He worked as the Executive Director of the Pacific Jewish Center in Venice, California where he collaborated with many Hollywood celebrities such as Elliot Gould, Dr. Armand Hammer, and others. Sidney and Gertie had their photo made with Elliot Gould and with Jay Leno.¹⁵

The Denns



*Manuel, Herman and Sidney Denn at Denn Brothers Sporting Goods, Bay City, in 1989.
Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.*

nocrats. Gertie was a gifted pianist, playing mostly by ear, and played the piano at various Jewish community events, and at Seven Acres every Saturday afternoon from the time she moved back to Houston in 1996 until her death. There are YouTube videos of her playing, without sheet music, at the age of 88.^{10,11}

Sidney and Gertie's house backed up to the railroad track, and the kids played on it. Debbie's brother Avrom recalled one night his cousin Bernard came and woke him up and told him to follow him. He led him to a curve in the railroad track and instructed him to get on the track and when the midnight train comes, run like mad along the track. After threats, Avrom did as he was told. The train got closer and closer with Bernard running alongside

Avrom from the hole and they ran as fast as they could towards the house. The train personnel banged on their door and Gertie asked what was going on. They said two boys caused them to stop the train and ran into this house. Gertie saw Bernard in the corner giggling and she knew what had happened. She soothed the railroad men, then took her belt to Bernard.

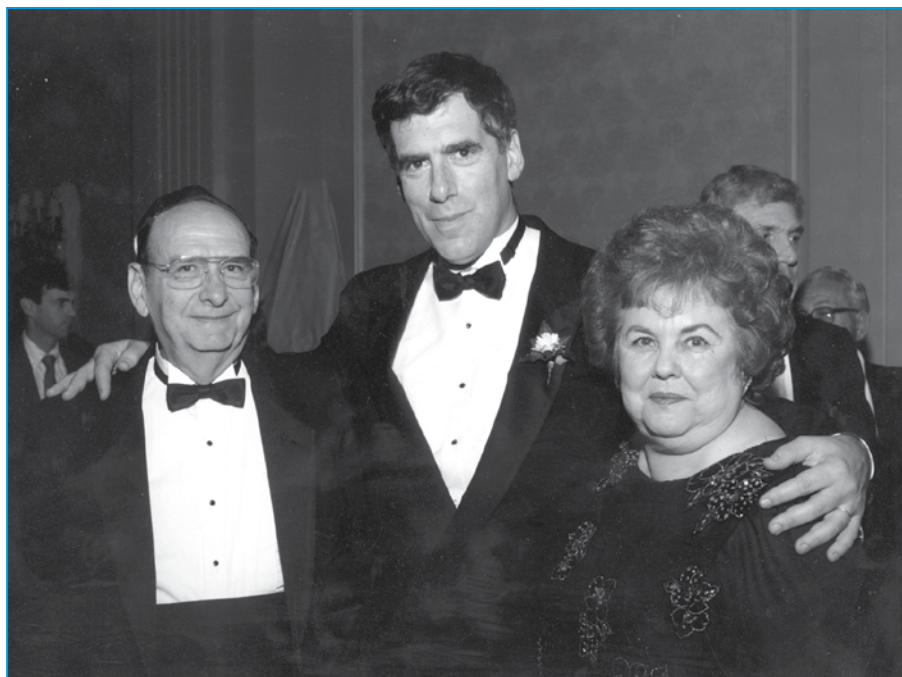
Bernard and Steven were always getting Avrom into trouble, but then Avrom and Brian did the same thing to young Meyer when he joined the family. "We had a great time growing up," said Avrom, "and Aunt Gertie made it all possible."¹²

Sidney and Gertie's youngest son, Meyer,¹³ traveled to Slovakia to visit his ancestors' home towns. He placed videos on YouTube.com of the ceme-

were active in many organizations. Joe and his three sons served on the board of Shearith Israel in Wharton. They were all Masons and officers of Beth David Center in Bay City. At least three of them were members of B'nai B'rith, the VFW, and the American Legion. Other organizations having Denns as members include the Sons of Herman, Jewish War Veterans, the Lions Club, Fraternal Order of the Eagle, Shriners, Scottish Rite, and Rice Belt Kiwanis (where Sidney served as president several times). Sidney was also on the first Home Rule Charter Commission for Bay City.

Bertha and her three daughters-in-law were also active in civic organizations. All belonged to Hadassah. At least two belonged to Eastern Star, the

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Sidney and Gertie Denn with actor Elliot Gould. Photo courtesy of Meyer Denn.

VFW Auxiliary, the American Legion, and Shearith Israel Sisterhood. Other organizations with a Denn member included the Brownies, the Girl Scouts, Young Judea, Epsilon Sigma Alpha sorority, and the Fraternal Order of Eagles.

Findagrave.com lists nine Dennes in the Shearith Israel Cemetery in Wharton.¹⁶ Bertha Denn died in 1954. There is a photo of her and Joe, and a photo of their store. Joe died in 1981. His Findagrave site includes a photo of him and his second wife, Rose, who died in 1976. Joe and Bertha's youngest, Manuel, was the first son to die, in 1995. A photo of him in uniform is included on the Findagrave site. Manuel's wife, Helen, died in 1997.

Sidney Denn died in 1996 in Bay City. His entry includes a photograph of his tombstone, a photo of Sidney in uniform, and one of Sidney and Gertie with Elliot Gould. Herman, the oldest brother, died in 2002 in Houston. His wife, Rosie Ray, died in 1995 in Bay City, and Findagrave has lovely photos of her as well.¹⁷ Gertie died in 2015. Her Findagrave site includes photos of her at the piano at age 90.¹⁸

For three generations, the Denn family played a role in the economic success of Bay City. As Richard Knapik, a Chamber of Commerce director, said, "Denn Brothers has been one of the cornerstones of the Bay City business community. It's a sad day when one of them dies."¹⁹

Endnotes

- ¹ Meyer Denn made a series of oral interviews available on YouTube. Thanks to them, we know the Denn brothers had lovely Texas accents. Herman, Sidney, and Manuel were interviewed in 1989. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9MJiksY3Pk>
- ² http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/denn_bros.htm
- ³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/143082235761520/>
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ Thanh Tran, "Denn Brothers Faced With Dilemma, Children Not Interested in Family Business," *The Daily Tribune* (Bay City), date unknown.
- ⁶ "Gunman Slugs Herman Denn," *The Daily Tribune* (Bay City), December 11, 1958, page 1. In Meyer Denn's files.
- ⁷ The ringleader went to prison, vow-

ing to kill Herman when he got out. Many years later, a business associate of Steve Denn met a man who said he was the kidnapper as a crazy kid, and asked him to convey apologies to Herman for the pain he had caused. Email Meyer Denn, October 2, 2017

- ⁸ "New Faces: Denn Bros. Changes Hands, Keeps Namesake," *Bay City Daily Tribune*, March 14, 1996, cited in http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/denn_bros.htm
- ⁹ Gale Storm was an American actress and singer who starred in two popular television programs of the 1950s, *My Little Margie* and *The Gale Storm Show*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gale_Storm
- ¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Os6Kme19bO8&pbjreload=10>
- ¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JXMNp9kWbc>
- ¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfHJhW95oFM>
- ¹³ Sidney and Gertie's son Bernard married Gail Botsford, and they lived in California. Steve married Dena Rosenthal. They lived in Dallas. Brian and wife Aviva Maharani lived at Mitzpe Jericho, Israel. Meyer attended the University of Texas at Austin after graduating Bay City High School in 1980. On April 4, 1981, Meyer became the youngest person in Bay City to be elected to a city council position. He beat the incumbent and another challenger. Meyer did not seek a second term in 1983, because he wanted to complete his college degree. He took an extensive tour of Europe and did genealogical research in Czechoslovakia and Poland. During the fall semester of 1984, Meyer studied at Hebrew University before returning to UT Austin. Meyer and Brian made *aliyah* to Israel. Meyer returned, and has served as executive director of the Center of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas for ten years.
- ¹⁴ You can also find videos of Gertrude

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Save the Date

April 13-15, 2018

Annual Gathering and
Board Meeting in Fort
Worth, Texas

July 14-15, 2018

Workshop Board Meeting in
Rockdale, Texas

**November 10-11,
2018**

NMJHS Fall Conference,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

—Mazel Tov—

to the following **TJHS**
Members

Sharon & Sonny Gerber, of
Houston, on the marriage of their
son, Dr. Jonathan Asher Gerber
to Hayley Shawn Nadler on Sep-
tember 16, 2017.

**The deadline for
the May 2018 TJHS
News Magazine is
Friday, April 6.**

Kids' Corner



We would like to include a children's corner in our News Magazine so that when each issue arrives it can be shared with younger family members. The "corner" could be simply sharing family history or the history of where the family lives. Or it could be a more general item about how Jewish Texans have forged a place in the state's history. Send your stories to Jane Manaster at janeman@earthlink.net

Denn Family, continued from page 17


Denn playing the piano and interviews with the Denn brothers.

¹⁵ http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/family_denn_sidney.htm.

¹⁶ https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gs_r&GSiman=1&GScid=712505&GSfn=&GSln=Denn.

¹⁷ http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/family_denn_herman.htm.

¹⁸ <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Denn&GSfn=Gertrude&GSbyrel=all&GSdyrel=all&GSob=n&GRid=183903677&df=all&>.

¹⁹ *Daily Tribune*, December 1995 found in http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/family_denn_manuel.htm. 

You Can Help Recruit New Members

by Jane Manaster
TJHS Third Vice President

As one of the founding members of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, I realize that it's time to recruit younger members; we can draw on the children and grandchildren of the current membership.


A suggestion on how to remedy this concern is to offer memberships as Wedding, Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah gifts. The memberships could be for one to three years depending on how generous the gift is. This would be a good introduction to an organization that we find so interesting.

Does TJHS Have Your Current Email Address?

Is your email address current? Has it changed since the 2015 directory was printed? Have you changed email providers? If so, please send Marc Wormser an email at c2aggie@gmail.com so that he can update your information in the database. To reduce postage cost



and printing delays, we are going to be electronically sending as much mail as possible, so don't be left out or behind—send your current information today!

Please put "email change" in the subject line and with your name in the text of your message, send it today! Thank you. 



Texas Jewish Historical Society Grant Application

The mission of the Texas Jewish Historical Society is to expand and enhance the knowledge and understanding of the Jewish presence in Texas and the history of Jews from their first arrival in the State to the present.

We solicit applications for research projects that are in this spirit.
Deadlines for submission are March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1.

Application Form

The Texas Jewish Historical Society will consider applications from individuals and non-profit organizations in any written or visual media. Attach additional sheets as necessary.

Contact Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ Cell: (_____) _____

Email: _____

Title and Description of project.

Briefly outline personal and professional background information that support this application.

What is the anticipated budget for the project? Are you seeking additional support from elsewhere?

Please detail the timeline of your project.

Completed project must acknowledge TJHS support. A copy or account of the completed project should be submitted to the Society's archive at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Send applications to: TJHS Grant Committee: P.O. Box 10193, Austin TX 78766-0193, or email to grantchair@txjhs.org.

Meet Your Board

David Beer, TJHS immediate past president, was born and raised in Dallas. He worked in the restaurant business for eleven years, before joining the family real estate business. He is in his 35th year of representing buyers and sellers in real estate in Dallas. David is Chair of the Nominating Committee.



Doug Braudaway is from Del Rio, and teaches government and history at Southwest Texas Junior College in Del Rio. He is married to Willie, who is also a TJHS Board Member, and they have five children and fifteen grandchildren. Doug enjoys writing history and historic marker applications.



Willie Braudaway is a native of Iowa, but has been a Texan since 1990. She is the librarian at Southwest Texas Junior College in Del Rio. She and her husband, Doug, also a TJHS board member, live in Del



Rio. Her passion is family history and she is a History Consultant for Church of Latter-day Saints. Willie is proud to be the mother of five and grandmother to fifteen wonderful people!

Howard "Rusty" Milstein was born in Longview and still lives there. He is retired from Industrial Steel Wholesale and is married to Mitzi Mil-



stein, TJHS Board Member. Rusty is a retired state level soccer referee; administrator, treasurer, lay-leader, and schlepper for Temple Emanu-El in Longview; and has performed in a community theatre production of "Fiddler on the Roof." He and Mitzi are the main reason there is still a congregation in Longview. They have three children, Randy, Jeff and Amy. Rusty attended the University of Texas, Austin, and was a member of Phi Sigma Delta fraternity. He was president of TJHS (2010-2012).

Deidra B. Cizon lives in Dallas with her husband, Gordon, who is also a TJHS Board Member. She is a native of Fort



Worth and is a member of Dallas' Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue and Fort Worth's Beth-El Congregation. Deidra is Chair of the Traveling Exhibit.

Jack Gerrick lives in Fort Worth with his wife, Joyce. He is a past president of TJHS (2000-2002) and is one of the Co-Chairs of the TJHS Annual Gathering that will be in Fort Worth in April.



Marilyn Jorrie was raised in San Antonio. She moved to Colorado when she was seventeen and lives in Boulder. She travels to San Antonio frequently to conduct business. Her special interest is keeping her Pullen and Jorrie relatives involved in their history.

H. P. (Pacey) Laves was born and raised in Austin. He graduated from University of Texas in Austin, where he was a member of Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity. He joined



the family business, Laves Jewelry and Benold Jewelers, and worked until they were sold. He and his wife, Myra, have three daughters, three sons-in-law, and seven grandchildren. He is a past

continued on page 21

president of Downtown Optimist Club and is a Mason-Scottish Rite-Shriner. Pacey's special interest is UT sports.

Barbara Rosenberg, past TJHS president (1995-1998), lives in Sugar Land, Texas, with her husband, Ben, TJHS treasurer. She is a native Texan who was

born and grew up in San Angelo, and is a first generation American. Her family owned the Hollywood Shoppe and Boston Store in San Angelo. She attended the University of Texas, Austin and graduated at age twenty, when she married Ben. They moved to Houston and she attended University of Houston, graduate school for a degree in speech pathology. She has worked in schools, hospitals, and has had a private practice. She and Ben enjoy traveling. Barbara is a volunteer in Jewish Chaplaincy; a docent for the Fort Bend Museums; a member of an advisory committee (CAP) for a chemical company; and a former volunteer for the county historical commission. Barbara recently chaired the Winter Board Meeting in Gonzales for TJHS.

Lynna Kay Shuffield, TJHS Cemetery Historical Designation chair, is a military historian who lives in Houston and is a genealogy consultant for the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her research has led to

Historic Texas Cemetery medallions for more than a dozen Jewish cemeteries.

Hollace Weiner, Grant Chair, lives in Fort Worth and is one of the Co-Chairs of the 2018 Annual Gathering in April. She is the director of the Fort Worth Jewish Archives and is a journalist, historian, and an author.

Gary P. Whitfield lives in Fort Worth, and is a former coach and teacher. He retired from the Air Force Reserve where he was a small arms instructor. He is a former Data Collector (Field) RTI and is a past chairman of the Tarrant County Historical Commission. Gary is one of the Co-Chairs of the 2018 Annual Gathering in Fort Worth in April.

Abigail (Abbi) Glosserman Michelson was born in Lockhart and still lives there. She graduated from the University of Texas in Austin and is a member of Alpha

Epsilon Phi sorority. She taught school in Dallas before she married David J. (Buddy) Michelson who lived in Gonzales. Abbi and Buddy lived in Gonzales when they were first married, and after ten years moved to Lockhart. Her children, Jeffrey and his wife, Shelley, live in Lockhart and her other son, Jon, lives in Austin. She loves to travel, entertain, and be with people. Abbi is always willing to help with all meetings—especially the hospitality room!

Sherry LeVine Zander grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and moved to Dallas, where she now lives, in 1984. She has worked in the radio

broadcast industry and is a high school art teacher. She researched, photographed, and wrote about small town synagogues throughout the United States. She and her husband, Ron, have two college-age daughters. 🇺🇸

Please Note:

If you are sending a check to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, please indicate the purpose of the check—dues, gift, contribution, etc.

Honor or Memorialize a Friend or a Loved One With a Donation to the TJHS Endowment Fund

When you honor or memorialize a friend or a loved one with a donation to the Texas Jewish Historical Society's Endowment Fund, you help support important programs. Send the honoree's full name, type of honor (memorial, congratulations, or occasion—birthday, anniversary, award, new child or grandchild, etc.) and your name, along with a check in the amount of your choice, to

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

Baytown, continued from page 3

\$18,000 to buy land, hire an architect, and construct the shul.

Initially services were Orthodox. They quickly morphed into what the late Don Teter described as "Southern Orthodox." By that he meant that Sabbath-evening services started

exceptionally early, "so that some members might catch the second half of the Friday night football game." On Saturday morning, services began "quite early so the merchants could open their stores by 9:00 AM." Teter, a chemical engineer at General Tire & Rubber Co., wrote a 13,000-word history of K'Nesseth Israel titled *Oil Gevalt*.

Teter's colorful narrative recounts how, on the High Holidays, Dave Aron (Jimmy Kessler's grandfather) and Mose Sumner (Sam Gruber's great-uncle) sold *aliyahs* from the pulpit. Each auctioneer chanted a sing-song sales pitch that ended with a thump on the bible as *aliyahs* went to the highest

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*Exterior of Baytown's K'Nesseth Israel, designed by architect Lenard Gabert and constructed in 1930.
(Photo by Larry Rose)*

We need Your Stories!

We are earnestly looking for stories with ties to Texas Jewish history! Any kind of story about your family history or your Temple's history can fill the pages of our News Magazine. Everyone has a story to tell, long or short. To submit your story, or if you need help writing your story, contact Jack Solka at jack@solka.net or 512-527-3799.

In Memoriam

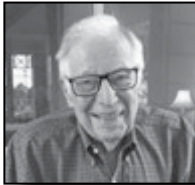


Helaine Danziger Birnberg, TJHS member, Corpus Christi and Houston, died on November 15, 2017, in Houston. She is survived by her children, Carol (Jerry) Sonkin and Gerry (Louise) Birnberg; four grandchildren and their spouses; nine great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

Helaine Relda Goldstein Grogin, TJHS member, Houston died on November 18, 2017, in Houston. She is survived by her husband, Gerald Grogin; children, Gary Gail, and Courtney; three grandchildren, and sister, Melanie Fogel.



Dr. Howard Lackman, past TJHS board member, died on November 26, 2017, in Arlington, TX. He is survived by his wife, Annette Robinson Lackman; children, Samara (Andy) and Jed (Leslie); three grandchildren; and sister, Elaine.



David M. Leff, past TJHS board member, Houston, died on November 9, 2017, in Houston. He is survived by his children, Dr. Stanley (Marion) Leff, Sharan (Jack Schlossberg) Zwick, and Tina (Yomtov) MenashePur; six grandchildren; and twelve great-grandchildren.



Leonard "Lenny" Swartz, TJHS member, Beaumont, died on October 30, 2017. His wife, Marie "Mongie" Eisen Swartz, predeceased him August 10, 2017. He is survived by his children, Gary (Gail) and Bruce Swartz; two grandchildren and their spouses; and five great-grandchildren.

**May their memories
be a blessing.**

Baytown, continued from page 22


bidders. In 1943, the congregation celebrated its financial stability by burning the mortgage.

In 1948, the Tri-Cities consolidated to form the city of Baytown. By then, K'Nesseth Israel's membership had grown to 47 families (around 200 people). From 1930 to 1953, fulltime rabbis led the congregation. There was a Hebrew school, but only for boys studying for bar mitzvah. As members moved or passed away, the congregation shrank in size yet always remained solvent.

K'Nesseth Israel no longer auctions off *aliyahs*. To raise money this time around, the congregation is applying for an emergency grant from the Texas Historical Commission; funds from Jewish Federations in San Antonio and Houston; and initiating a capital campaign of current members, former members, and their

descendants. The congregation has allocated \$17,000 from its savings toward restoration. The Texas Jewish Historical Society approved a \$1,000 grant. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to Congregation K'Nesseth Israel, P.O. Box 702, Baytown, TX, 77522-0702.

Until Hurricane Harvey's winds blew water into the sanctuary through louvers and soaked the walls, K'Nesseth Israel held services one Friday a month as well as on the High Holidays, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Purim and Shavuot. Hadassah meetings were held in the community center.

Congregants are determined to restore their landmark and to draw strength and spirituality from its deep roots. Later this year, K'Nesseth Israel is planning to celebrate the congregation's 90th anniversary. 


Grants Awarded at the Gonzales Board Meeting on January 14, 2018

Report by Hollace Weiner

Documenting Disaster in Jewish Meyerland. The Board approved a \$1,000 grant for the University of Houston's Center for Public History to conduct, videotape, and transcribe oral histories over the next three years to document the destruction and rebuilding in Meyerland. The university describes the research into Meyerland as a "crucial component" of a larger, \$150,000 study about the "resiliency" of Houston in the wake of the catastrophic hurricane of 2017. The

Meyerland interviews will be coordinated by Dr. Bernice Heilbrunn of the Melton & More Scholars Program and the Jewish Learning Project at Congregation Beth Yeshurun. All oral histories will be recorded, transcribed, and placed online. The interviews will present the human and community experience of the storm in Meyerland, while providing material for policymakers to consider as the city plans abatement policies for storms yet to come.


The application was submitted by Dr. R. Todd Romero, associate director of the Center for Public History. Dr. Mark Goldberg, director of Jewish Studies at the university, is deeply involved in this project.

Baytown: Restoring Congregation K'Nesseth Israel. The Board approved a \$1,000 grant toward restoration of the synagogue and community building damaged by Hurricane Harvey. 

Chronicles: A Publication of the Texas Jewish Historical Society

In the fall of 1992, the Board of Directors of the Texas Jewish Historical Society authorized publication of an academic, peer-review journal to be named *Chronicles*. Its one and only issue was published in 1994. *Chronicles'* editor was the late Howard Lackman, professor of history of the University of Texas at Arlington, who passed away November 26, 2017. The lone issue of *Chronicles* included four articles plus "fragmenta," or recollections, from seven Texans.

One of the main articles, written by historian Samuel Gruber, was titled, "Why Save the Historical Brenham Synagogue?" In 2014, the TJHS played a significant role in saving that synagogue when the building was moved to Austin's Dell Campus.

Other contributors to *Chronicles* were Brigitte Altman, Phillip Pfeiffer Brown, Miriam Chodorow, Gay Deutsch, Richard E. Goldsmith, Milford Jacobs, Tom Kellam, Bernard Moses, Shirley Schuster, and Donald Teter. 




President's Message, continued from page 2

registration form that is included in this issue for further details about the weekend. Please send it in now while you are thinking about it!

It is time to pay 2018 dues, and if you have not already done so, please send yours in now. We are very pleased that we have over thirty new members since the beginning of this term and hope to add many more—but we want YOU to come join us at meetings. This is an added bonus to your membership—renewing long-time friendships and making new ones. Our board meetings are open to ALL members of the Society, and we welcome you to each and every one.

I hope you will join us in Fort Worth.

Davie Lou Solka 

Contributions

The following donations have been received by the
Texas Jewish Historical Society:


In Memory of	From
Howard Lackman	Jennifer & Nathan Koppel
Notice sent to Jed Lackman	
In Honor of	From
Mitzi & Nelson Chafetz	Michael & Elaine Chafetz
Audrey & Louis Kariel	Mark Kariel & Al Risher
Dorothy Rogoff, on her 100th birthday	Amy Milstein

Tied and Tethered continued from page 12

terrelated at so many levels that their family trees intersected at multiple points. They formed a veritable cousins club.

Despite the Reform congregation's late start, layers of commercial, familial, and fraternal ties linked members in overlapping spheres. They shared a pride of place, a sense of kinship, and a feeling that Beth-El Congregation was an extension of home and business. The young, rugged, independent Jews who had ventured to Fort Worth decades before, spurning organized religion, were now mature business leaders in their forties, fifties, and sixties. Many had children and grandchildren for whom formal religion would be important.

As these developments occurred within the Jewish community, changes were brewing in the city's business climate. The Chisholm Trail era was long past. Fort Worth had become a railroad hub. By 1900 its population had grown to 27,000 residents, including more than 600 Jews. During the summer of 1902, Fort Worth business leaders and city commissioners persuaded Swift and Armour, two giant Chicago meatpacking companies, to invest \$10 million in Fort Worth for regional plants. These packinghouses would create thousands of jobs and transform Fort Worth into a regional economic capital, a magnet for related industries as well as retailers and bankers. The city was coming of age. The Inter-urban, an electric trolley, inaugurated hourly service between Fort Worth and Dallas. Cowtown had moved well beyond frontier status and was courting respectability. Institutions were changing and stabilizing. The city began promoting its virtues in an effort to lure laborers with families.

Religious institutions became more esteemed. In 1900, the Chamber of Commerce boasted that three new churches were under construction, a fact that might have been ignored or overlooked a decade before. As the city climbed toward its next phase of development, so, too, did its Jewish residents, with two synagogues within walking distance from the courthouse square. The city was maturing, and so was the Jewish community. 

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*Nominating Committee: David Beer, chair; Jack
Gerrick, Samyly Rubin, Gary Whitfield*

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512-506-8709
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Jeffrey Josephs

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Cell: 512-799-8740
jeffrey_josephs@yahoo.com

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512-992-2104
hedg007@aol.com

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713-665-8019

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910 W. 15½ St.
Houston, TX 77008
mjriskind@aol.com

Millie (Rubin) Rosenberg

13700 Sage Grouse Dr., #1702
Austin, TX 78729
561-889-8931
milher66@hotmail.com

Mark & Elizbeth (Cohen) Toubin

3502 Drummond
Houston, TX 77025

If you have any changes in your information, please contact


Marc Wormser

1601 S. Riviera Ct.,
Pearland, TX 77581
832-288-3494
c2aggie@gmail.com

Guess This Member



We have a winner! Sally Drayer, TJHS Historian/Archivist, guessed that this handsome young man is none other than David Beer. Congratulations, Sally—your dues are now paid for 2018!

Stay tuned for more Guess This Member in coming issues! 

Your Help Needed

The American Jewish Archives

is looking for photos that show the American flag on the bimah. They would like to acquire a collection of late 19th and early 20th century (before 1920) photos. Some of these photos may actually go back to the 1870s.


Please check to see if you have photos showing the American flag on the bimah or the flag bunting inside the sanctuary in your old confirmation photos, anniversary or wedding photos, Fourth of July photos, etc.

You may submit a hard copy or a high-quality scan of the photo to Dr.



Gary Zola, executive director at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center for the American Jewish Archives. For more information, please contact him at gpzola@huc.edu.

The Cemetery Committee

thanks all who have helped with the recording of Jewish burials/cremations in Texas. But we still need help from many of you who live outside the major cities. If you learn of a Jewish death in Texas in your locale, please send that information to Rusty Milstein, hrmlstein@prodigy.net. Your help is appreciated. 



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TJHS Traveling Exhibit

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has compiled two museum quality photo exhibits, with explanations depicting early Jewish life and contributions.



Both exhibits highlight the lives of Jews in Texas since the early part of the century.

Each exhibit is comprised of approximately thirty-six photographs that can either be self-standing with an easel back or hung on a wall. There is no charge for the exhibits and they will be shipped prepaid

freight via UPS in waterproof boxes to your location. There will be the expense of prepaid freight back to the shipper via UPS ground.

The exhibits have been displayed

in various locations in Texas and other parts of the United States, including Rhode Island and California. They are an excellent program for schools, congregations, and other organizations. To schedule the exhibits, please contact Deidra Cizon at dbcizon@swbell.net or 214-361-7179.

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☐ Please **update** my information.

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☐ Special interests, professional background, talents _____

Who suggested TJHS to you?

Name: _____

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