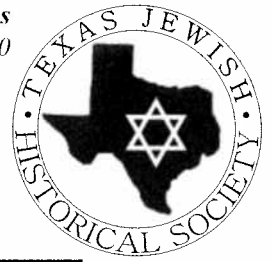


# Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas  
Est. 1980



May, 2008

## TJHS Meetings, 2006-2008

*TJHS meetings are held around the state. In the past two years, we have met in Austin, Abilene, Kingsville, Odessa, Fort Worth, Amarillo, Beaumont, and Waco. Find a meeting near you in 2008, and join us for a weekend of learning and laughter as we explore the history of the Jews of Texas.*

**Amarillo**  
October, 2007



**Abilene**

October, 2006



**Fort Worth**  
July, 2007



**Odessa**  
April, 2007



**Waco**  
April, 2008



**San Angelo**  
July, 2008



Your Photo Here!

**Austin**  
July, 2006



**Beaumont**  
January, 2008



### Meeting Schedule for 2008-2009

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| July 25-27, 2008    | San Angelo, TX   |
| October 24-26, 2008 | El Paso, TX (Joint Meeting with New Mexico Jewish Historical Society) Details on page 5. |
| January 9-11, 2009  | La Grange, TX  |
| March, 2009         | College Station, TX (Annual Gathering, date to be announced)                             |

*Watch your mail for further information about these meetings!*



**Kingsville**  
January, 2007

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# Thank You, TJHS

## A Message from outgoing TJHS President Vickie Vogel

As I step into my new role as a TJHS Past President, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your President. It has been an exciting and personally fulfilling two years. We have accomplished a lot in this time, but there is always so much more to do.

One of my major goals was to visit every part of the state for our quarterly weekends, so that each of you could find, at least once, a meeting within easy travel distance. Some of you took advantage of this effort, but many did not. Our host committees work very hard to offer an interesting and stimulating weekend of activities. I hope in the coming year, more of you will make the time to join us as we travel



Photo by Kristi Grigsby

around, learning about the Jewish history of Texas.

There are many TJHS projects for research and preservation, including the work of our grants committee, book committee, archives, cemetery committee, Texas History Awards, and more. We are also ac-

tive communicators, through our newsletter and the newsletter index project, speakers bureau, traveling exhibit, Institute of Texan Cultures, and our website. Most of these projects were started, completed, or enhanced in the past two years, along with others carried out on an ad hoc basis.

As immediate past president, I will chair the next nominating committee.

We are a volunteer organization. TJHS depends on each of us to play a role, so that we can continue to fulfill our purpose of preserving and disseminating our history. We have hundreds of members. Our next nominating committee will know many of you, but not all. If you would be interested in serving on the TJHS board, or serving as an officer, or helping on a project or a committee, let us know. You can contact me, or email [txjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:txjhs@yahoo.com) or contact our new president, Sally Drayer. And if we call on you, please say, "Yes."

Many of you have helped me do my job these past two years, and I am very grateful. All of us can assure Sally that we will help her during her term of office as well, so that TJHS will continue to grow and improve.



President, 2006-2008

### The Texas Jewish Historical Society May 2008 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 scan at 300 dpi or greater, in .gif, .tif, or .jpg format and send electronically to Assistant Editor Davie Lou Solka at [davielou@solka.net](mailto:davielou@solka.net) or mail to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, 512-527-3799. Be sure to include your name and contact information.

**Publisher-Editor** Alexa Kirk  
**Assistant Editor** Davie Lou Solka  
**Photographer** Marvin Rich

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



**The deadline for  
the August, 2008  
TJHS Newsletter  
is July 18.**

The message of the Texas Jewish Historical Society (USPS) is published four times a year by the Texas Jewish Historical Society, P. O. Box 10193, Austin, Texas 78766-0193, Travis County. Periodical postage paid at Houston, Texas. Postmaster: send address changes to the Texas Jewish Historical Society, P. O. Box 10193, Austin, Texas 78766-0193.

# Tribute

## A Message from incoming TJHS President Sally Drayer

I want to thank the Nominating Committee for having the confidence in me to serve as the next President of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. I have served on the board as Grant Committee Chair and, simultaneously, as Historian. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a special person.

That person kept after me to join the Society, paid my dues for several years, and prodded me to become a more active member...my mother, may she rest in peace, Blanche Ladabaum Sheiness. Without her, I would not hold the position of President.

For those members of the Society who did not know my mother, she joined TJHS after my father, Marvin Sheiness, may he rest in peace, died in 1992. She drove to meetings when she lived in Alice, Texas, and then got rides once she moved to Houston. She went to meetings all over the state and looked forward

to the trips that TJHS took to Shreveport, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; and New Orleans.

If you look in our archives in Austin under Alice, Texas, you will see that Blanche Sheiness contributed to the history of the Jewish community that once existed in Alice, as

well as a history of the Sheiness and Pomerantz (my father's maternal side of the family) families. My mother contributed photos to the Institute of Texan Culture, and to the book sponsored by TJHS, *Deep in the Heart*. She became Historian of TJHS in the

middle 1990s and retained the position until the spring of 2006.

Blanche Sheiness grew up in Laredo, Texas, and attended the University of Texas. She completed her degree in 1937. She taught elementary school in Laredo and met my father through her best friend—who happened to be my father's sister! They were married in September, 1939, and lived in Alice, where they owned Alice Hardware Store for over fifty years. She was a member of the Texas A&M Mothers Club, the Texas' Ex Organization, Alice Music Study Club, and Friends of the Alice Library. The history of the Alice Jewish Community is also located in the South Texas Historical Museum in Alice, thanks to my

mother. She was also an active member of the Order of Eastern Star, and when my brothers and I were in junior and senior high school, she became a Band Mother. She was not just a member of these organizations—she served as President of the Alice Music Club, the Brush County A&M Mother's Club, and the William Adams High School Band Boosters.

My parents were members of B'Nai Israel Synagogue in Corpus Christi, Texas, where my mother was a member of the Sisterhood. She was also a member of the Corpus Christi Chapter of Hadassah.

Many people who knew my mother may not have known she was trilingual—English, Spanish, and French. She also knew enough Yid-



dish to converse with my father, who was fluent. My mother moved to Houston in 1998, where she became active at The Hampton, where she resided until her death.

Blanche Sheiness never knew a stranger. She would talk to

anyone. And playing "Jewish Geography"—that was her cup of tea! If she didn't know you personally, then she probably knew your parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins—or even your families' neighbors! She knew who was related to whom and how all over the state...large cities, small towns—it didn't make a difference.

I took over the position of Historian in the spring of 2006 when my mother, at the age of 92, decided she was getting old and her eyesight wasn't what it once was. She passed away October 17, 2006. I only wish she could have been in Waco to see me installed as President of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. I dedicate my term of office to her memory and hope I do it justice by her love for the Society, its purposes, and the friends she made.

I want to thank the Host Committee in Waco for such a wonderful Annual Gathering on April 4-6, 2008. I know it took a lot of hard work and everyone had a meaningful time together.

The Past Presidents and Board Members have done an outstanding job of giving their time to volunteer for the Society. If you have not done so,

*continued on page 11*



*Blanche Sheiness*

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# Jewish Community Plays Prominent Role in Victoria

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by Pat Hathcock

*Reprinted with permission from the Victoria Advocate, Victoria, Texas.*

*(This article preceded a Board Meeting of the Texas Jewish Historical Society that was held in Victoria in 2005.)*

Beginning with Abraham Levi, who showed up in Victoria in late 1848 or early 1849 and opened a store in the first block of East Constitution Street, there has been a small but important Jewish contingent in the city, contributing to mercantile and financial enterprise and adding an exotic little fillip to the ethnic make-up of the place.

Gary Dunnam, director of the Victoria County Heritage Commission, will address the board (of the Texas Jewish Historical Society) while they are in Victoria. He said, "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."

Abraham Levi is considered sort of the Moses of Victoria Jewish, the man who showed the way. Dunnam said, "Abraham didn't have a college education, but his sons were educated, they married well, and they built nice houses."

Historian Bob Shook has written a history of Abraham Levi. According to Shook, Levi was an Alsatian, born poor in 1822, who landed in New Orleans in 1846. After stints in Natchez and Liberty, Mississippi, Levi landed in Victoria in 1848 or early 1849 bearing financing for \$3,000 of merchandise advanced by New Orleans merchant Jacob Halfin to his younger brothers, Henry and Levi. Shook wrote that the inventory purchased with the money began the Jewish presence in Victoria commerce.

The first store, in partnership with Henry Halfin and Moses Schwartz, was in the 100 block of West Constitution. This business was soon sold to Levi Stern, and in 1850, Halfin and Levi opened a store advertised in the *Victoria Advocate* as offering "dry goods, groceries, liquors, and pecans in the 'west wing of the Globe House,' a hotel at 116 West Forrest Street."

Connections of blood, matrimony, or Alsatian origin brought more Jewish families to Victoria including, by 1875, the Alexanders, Guggenheims, Halfins, Schwartzes, Silversteins, Apfels, Dreyfuses, Levys, Oppenheimers, Rouffs, and Wertheimers.

Shook wrote that the Jews became Victoria's most successful merchants. The public can see the Alexanders memorialized in the painting of Alexander's Racket Store in the mural on the backwall of the parking lot at Main and Santa Rosa streets.

Levi took a beating in the Civil War, but came back and prospered in retail, land, and banking. Levi Bank and Trust Company was the forebear of Victoria Banks and Trust.

Abraham saw to it that his children got good educations. One of his sons, Godcheaux, was an eminent Victorian for many years, a railroad investor, a merchant and banker, and a leader of both civic and religious activities in the community.

Shook wrote that Godcheaux Levi was the first Texan to establish a scholarship fund at the University of Texas.

Another son, Leo, was educated at the University of Virginia law school and practiced law in Galveston. He gained national recognition as Presi-

dent of B'nai B'rith. He also got national recognition when he petitioned the government of Russia about pogroms in that country.

Shook estimated that the Jewish population of Victoria comprised about 15 families, 50 or 60 souls. A correct date for establishment of a congregation is uncertain, Shook wrote, but by 1875, Victoria-area Jews had established a Hebrew Benevolent Society and a B'nai B'rith lodge.

A Reform congregation was established in 1872, starting on North Main Street, moving to the Masonic Hall on West Forrest, and, in 1823, to the present-day location of B'Nai Israel on North Main.

In a 1973 speech to the county historical commission, Godcheaux L. Levi, great-grandson of Abraham, said that B'nai Israel was founded in 1858 by six families – Dan Alexander, Jacob Guggenheim, Henry and Jacob Halfin, Moses and Isaac Schwartz, Lewis Silverstein, and Abraham Levi. Silverstein was the first president of the congregation, followed by Levi, who continued as president until his death in 1901.

There was an in-and-out flow of people among Victoria's Jews. A living link with the city's Jewish past is Yetta Goltzman, at 95, a history and genealogical reference. She is tiny and voluble, a vivacious personality with one of those wonderful old-woman memories that can call up family connections of people back in 1925. She fell and broke a hip a little while back, but seems to be getting over it pretty well. She had to move to Homewood residence and com-

*continued on page 5*

plains, "All I see is walkers," conceding that she sometimes has to use one herself.

She said, "I was born in Warsaw, Poland, as were my parents. I got here in June of 1920 and in September, I was dropped into a classroom where they were all speaking English."

She said that after a few years, she was selected president of an English literary club on the basis of her top grades. Her speech these many years later is unmarked by any accent except a Southern tinge.

She said that she had to relearn Yiddish after she married Harry Goltzman and found that her in-laws in St. Louis preferred that language.

Her father, Jacob Lazor, operated a shoe shop at 114 E. Constitution St. In 1973, *Advocate* columnist Sidney Weisiger wrote a series of columns on the Jewish pioneers of the city, Jacob Lazor among them. Weisiger wrote that Lazor came to settle, intending to send back to Poland for his family but was unable to bring them because of the intrusion of World War I.

Goltzman said, "My father worked for a while in Galveston for a family named Clark. There was a big flood and he decided he didn't want to bring his family to Galveston.

He was going to go to Colorado to work, but someone told him he would do better if he stayed in this part of Texas. He came to Victoria on New Years Day of 1915, and opened a shoe shop. It was the first shoe shop around to have electric machinery to repair shoes."

"Dad worked for six years to get us here. June 29, 1920 is when we arrived. It was a big day in Victoria. Everybody knew about it," she said.

Goltzman said that a couple of local doctors enlisted another physician headed for Poland for help in getting the family out. The visitor to Poland had to maneuver to get permission for the Lazors to leave.

Goltzman said, "We didn't have birth certificates or records like we do here. Daddy paid \$5,000 to the doctors to get us out."

Weisiger wrote that the newcomers found a refrigerator full of food, a Studebaker in the garage, and even a bicycle for son Morris. It must have looked like a palace to the family from Poland.

"We were very lucky that our neighbors—the Ritchie family—spoke German," she said. "I grew up speaking three languages: Yiddish, German, and Polish, but probably more Polish than anything else because that was what the children that I played with spoke."

She said that she remembers going to Sunday school in the Masonic building before the synagogue was built. "I was married in the new synagogue," she said. She and Harry Goltzman were married for 36 years before he died. She said she never felt any no-

*continued on page 8*

Save the Date for  
*Jewish Life along the Camino Real*



A Joint Meeting of the  
**Texas Jewish Historical Society**  
and the  
**New Mexico Jewish Historical Society**

**October 24-26, 2008**  
**El Paso, Texas**



All TJHS members are invited to join NMJHS members in El Paso for a joint meeting highlighting the Jewish communities along the Camino Real, the "Royal Road" from Mexico City to Santa Fe. Programming includes Friday night services at Temple Mount Sinai, Saturday morning sessions on merchants and immigration, and afternoon tours of the El Paso Museum of History and the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. The Saturday evening banquet will include talks on the Crypto-Jews of the Southwest.

Plan now to attend this exciting weekend and take advantage of the special hotel rate of \$89 at the historic Camino Real Hotel in downtown El Paso. Additional details will be included in the August, 2008 TJHS newsletter.

Co-chairing the weekend are Shari Schwartz and Susan Novick of the TJHS, and Noel Pugach of the NMJHS. If you have any questions, contact them: Shari (sharielp@aol.com; 915-581-5132); Susan (snovick@susannovick.com; 915-892-4302); Noel (npugach@unm.edu).

*We look forward to seeing you in El Paso in October!*

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# A New Building for Temple Emanuel, McAllen: Reflects Growth, Endurance of Jewish Community

by Ryan Holeywell

*Reprinted with permission from the McAllen Monitor, McAllen, Texas.*

Developer Larry Fallek was just seven years old when the city opened its first synagogue almost sixty years ago.

The local Jewish community, which had been traveling to a synagogue in Mercedes for services, felt a great sense of pride in finally having its own building, he recalled.

Now, sixty years later, Fallek is set to help open Temple Emanuel a second time, as the synagogue readies to move to a new building scheduled to open this summer.

Though he attended the existing Temple Emanuel on Main Street for years, he said he's ready to move on to the new facility, which is going up on C Street off Nolana.

"I don't feel any sense of sadness about leaving the building," Fallek said. "The building is a house of God. It commands respect, but it is just a building—a thing. As times change, buildings need to change.

Temple Emanuel started with twenty-eight people, according to Norma Albert, one of the original members. Now the Temple has about 160 members, according to Rabbi Steven Rosenberg. Some think even more will join when the new building opens.

Rosenberg attributes his Temple's growth in the increasing number of jobs drawing Jewish people to the Rio Grande Valley. He hopes the Temple will be a center for Jewish social and cultural life, in addition to a place of worship.

The 15,000 square foot building offers seating in the main sanctuary for 200, a chapel to handle overflow, a

social hall that seats 300, a library and five classrooms to handle the approximately sixty Sunday school students.

The synagogue chose McAllen based Boultinghouse Simpson Architects to design the new building. Rosenberg felt it was important to go with a local architect because "we wanted our building to fit in with the rest of the architecture in the area."

Ray Urdaz, the project manager who helped design the building, said it is a contemporary yet traditional piece of architecture.

The building features a veneer made of Jerusalem stone, the same material that comprises the Western Wall. "When you see that, it gives a feeling that this is an unmistakable part of the history and heritage," Rabbi Rosenberg said.

The interior also features a thirty-five-foot ceiling, which the Rabbi said he hopes will make those who enter "feel spiritually lifted and inspired."

Ascalon Studios from New Jersey has created some of the building's interior features. "There is not one thing that has to carry over in every Jewish temple," said Urdaz, referring to the building's architecture. "Every temple is different...the important things are the religious items in the Temple itself."

Ascalon Studios is designing the Temple's Ark, which will be colorful, and will possibly feature a mosaic. Those colors will reflect the diversity of the Temple's members who come from all over the world, said Rabbi Rosenberg.



*After 60 years, the area will enjoy a new synagogue set to open in the late summer of 2008 near Nolana in McAllen. The image shown here is an artist's rendering of what the new building will look like.*

The studio is also designing a Torah reading table and an eternal light. "It's rewarding to do this kind of work," said Eric Ascalon, the studio's general manager. "They're entrusting us with creating their worship environment. We're very fortunate to be able to do that."

The Temple holds a lot of memories for Albert, the long-time member of the synagogue. Her father, Adolph Westerman, was its first president. Albert said she's sad to see the old Temple go—it will be sold to a Christian congregation—but members believe it's time for a building that can serve the next generation of the Valley's burgeoning Jewish population.

"We say 'from generation to generation' meaning our obligation is to create a link in the chain of tradition stronger than the one before it," Rosenberg said. "We're doing that, establishing a strong link in the chain, so our children and their children will have a wonderful place to be." ❁

# Adah Isaacs Menken:

## An Actress Who Scandalized New York

by W. T. Block

During her thrill-packed lifespan of only thirty-three years, Adah Isaacs Menken only lived in East Texas for about two years. She soon became world-famous from San Francisco to Vienna.



However, she was seldom truthful about her origins, and much of it remains obscure even today. It now appears certain, though, that the alluring lady was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in June, 1835, the daughter of a French Creole beauty and a quadroon father named Auguste Theodore.

At an early age, Adah displayed an exceptional precocity as a child, quickly learning to speak French and Spanish fluently, and she danced as a young ballerina at the local opera house. By 1854, she reputedly was attending Nacogdoches University, and a year later was giving Shakespeare readings at Liberty, Texas (*Liberty Gazette*, October 8, 1855). During that year, she published some poetry prior to marrying a Jewish musician named Alexander Isaac Menken on April 3, 1856 in Livingston, Texas. The couple soon returned to his home in Cincinnati, Ohio. Despite four marriages and divorces in a few short years, Adah kept her Menken surname as her stage name for the remainder of her life.

In Cincinnati, Adah embraced Judaism with a passion, and added Yiddish, Hebrew, and German to her speech repertoire. Her poetry soon appeared in the *Cincinnati Israelite* and the *New York Sunday Mercury*.

One Jewish publication called her the first Jewish "superstar."

Menken first appeared on the New York stage in *The Soldier's Daughter* in March, 1859. In June, 1861, she first played the role of "Mazeppa," a melodrama based on Lord Byron's poem, and her closing scene was to ride a horse offstage, wearing only flesh-colored tights or a body suit, which scandalized the social mores of the New Yorkers of 1861.

When at the same time Menken cropped her hair and began smoking cigarettes in public, her husband divorced her, and Adah fled to San Francisco, where Mazeppa performances were readily accepted with relish. At the peak of her popularity, Menken received \$500 for each Mazeppa performance, and she



quickly amassed a sizeable fortune for that Civil War era.

Although Menken was only a mediocre poet, she received much encouragement and adulation from other writers of note. Her circle of close friends in America included Bret Harte, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry Longfellow, and Joaquin Miller. In Europe, her coterie of admirers included Charles Dickens, George

Sand, Charles Reade, Dante Rossetti, and Alexander Dumas (both Junior and Senior). Her only published volume of poetry, "Infelicia," was dedicated to Charles Dickens in 1868.

Menken had two sons born as a result of her marriages, but each child died in infancy. When she played Mazeppa in Europe, both London and Paris went wild. When Dumas, Sr. expressed more

than normal adulation for Adah, she left Paris for London. In London, she also appeared on stage in several dramatic roles, including "Dick Turpin" and "The French Spy."



Alas, by January, 1868, tuberculosis and a life of dissipation had devastated the beauty of the former captivating enchantress, and suddenly London grew cold and indifferent toward her. Her wealth had disappeared like a comet and she returned to Paris, hoping to regain her popularity in a revival of "The Pirates of the Savane." Instead, she spent her last two months in bed and died on August 10, 1868. She is buried in the Jewish quarter of Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.

Both Europe and America quickly forgot Adah Menken. Nevertheless, her biographies appear in at least seven different volumes, some occupying entire books. Always true to her faith, Menken refused to perform on the stage during any of the Jewish High Holy Days. ❁

## In Memoriam

**MARJORIE MEYER ARSHT** of Bellaire, Texas, died on January 27, 2008, in Houston, Texas. She is survived by her son, Alan Arsht and his wife, Audrey, of New York City; her daughter, Leslye Arsht of Arlington, Virginia; five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren; her sister, Elene Davis; and her long-time friend and companion, Marie Murray.

**A. ROBERT BEER**, of Cedar Creek Lake and Dallas, Texas, died February 26, 2008. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Geraldine "Gerry" Beer. He is survived by his wife, Rachel McClung Beer of Cedar Creek Lake; his sons, David of Dallas, and Alfred of Bethesda, Maryland and five grandchildren.

**ESTHER "ESSIE" ELSNER** of Odessa and Dallas, Texas, died January 24, 2008. She is survived by her husband, Roy Elsner; her son, Phil Elsner and his fiancé Pam Hiller; her daughter, Susan Elsner Furman; five grandchildren: Elliott (California), Jeffrey (Texas Tech), and Heather Elsner (Dallas), and Amanda "Amy" and Jason Furman; and nieces Sylvie Nedow Greenberg (Marvin) of Dallas and Rachelle Nedow of El Paso. Essie attended many TJHS meetings when her husband, Roy, was a member of the Board, and her daughter Susan edited the Society's newsletter.



**MANET EVELYN DAVIS SCHEPPS** of

Bellaire, Texas, died on March 29, 2008. She is survived by her husband, A. I. Schepps; her children, Nancy and Arthur Brand, Marion and Dennis Schepps, and Gilda and Warren Sprung; numerous grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren; her brother and sister-in-law, Jerrell I. and Annette Davis; sister Sonia Bloom; brother-in-law, Harmon Schepps; and many nieces and nephews.



**MAY THEIR MEMORIES  
BE A BLESSING.**

### 12th Annual Jewish Arts Fest of Dallas

The Jewish Community Center of Dallas will once again host the 12th Annual Jewish Arts Fest on Sunday, August 17, at the Morton Meyerson Symphony Center. The Arts Fest will be from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM. There will be theatrical presentations, concerts, speakers, international arts and crafts, and food and drink in the food court for purchase.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society will have a table there, along with other Metroplex synagogues and organizations. Last year, many people stopped at the table to visit and learn about the Society. This year, the Society will be participating in the raffle. If you live in the Metroplex and wish to help at the table, please contact Sally Drayer at 972-459-7298 or [sdrayer@yahoo.com](mailto:sdrayer@yahoo.com).

## Speakers Bureau

When an organization asks TJHS for a speaker, we will suggest those on our list who match the criteria. That organization is responsible for making contact with the speaker and handling any de-

tails. No remuneration (other than expenses, lodging, meals, etc.) is provided to the speaker. If you would like to be included in this database, please email the Society at [txjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:txjhs@yahoo.com).

*Jewish Community in Victoria, cont.  
from page 5*

ticeable discrimination in Victoria. "We just didn't pay any attention to it," she said. "We had our religion, the other fellow had his religion. We all got along." She says there are few of the families left from the early 20th century. "The children moved to the cities, looking for opportunities."

Her children, Barbara, 71, and Leonard, 69, live in St. Louis and Sugar Land, respectively. But still, she said, Jewish people keep coming to Victoria, at least in numbers large enough to keep the membership of B'nai Israel at a pretty steady level and they have enough interest to look back on a long history in Victoria.

*Editor's Note: Yetta Lazor Goltzman died in Victoria on January 4, 2008. ❖*



# TJHS Cruise Report

by Vickie Vogel

Eighteen TJHS members and friends flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico in February to visit Jewish historical sites in the Caribbean. Most arrived in time for Saturday morning services at Temple Beth Shalom.

"Bendito eres Tú, Adonai, quien bendice a Su pueblo Israel con paz."

The service and the prayerbook were in English, Hebrew, and Spanish. Founded in the 1960's, Beth Shalom has some fifty member families with rotating rabbis. Rabbi

Larry Rubinstein, who lives in San Juan for part of the year, welcomed us and after a light luncheon, gave us a brief history of the congregation. The building was originally a restaurant and hotel before it was bought and remodeled as a synagogue. Rabbi Moti Rotem left the San Juan congregation for Waco's Temple Rodef Shalom, giving us a Texas connection.

Jews have been in Puerto Rico since the 1500's, settling first in Ponce and later San Juan. There are some 2,500 Jews in Puerto Rico, 1,500 of them in San Juan.<sup>1</sup>

Keith Rosen, of Houston Historical Tours, was our group leader. He arranged a bus tour of San Juan which

included one of the old Spanish forts. We ended the day at the Bacardi Distillery for a tour and a sample.

On Sunday, we boarded the Adventure of the Seas (Royal Caribbean)

destination was our main reason for taking the cruise. Willemstad, Curaçao is home to the oldest synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.

Settled by the Dutch who encouraged Jewish immigrants, Curaçao hosted some 2,500 Jews by 1790. By the early 1800's, Jews formed half of the population. Since Curaçao is an arid island and not suited to agriculture, the Jews turned to trade. Our first stop was the old Beth Haim Cemetery adjacent to a large oil refinery on the outskirts of town. The last burial here was in the 1960s. The 2,500 horizontal markers account for half of the 5,000 burials. A posted sign announces that it is forbidden to leave pebbles on the graves. The guide said the wind blowing them across the markers erodes them, but surely the belching smokestacks of the refineries are a far greater source of erosion.

The writing on the markers is barely legible, but there are many clear depictions of deathbed scenes (such as people mourning a woman lying in bed as someone holds the newborn baby) and other symbols of



Top row, left to right: Maurice and Sandy Feldman, Barbara and Ben Rosenberg, and Rusty Milstein. Middle row: Blanche Gewirtz, Mildred Marcus, Vickie and David Vogel, and Keith Rosen. Front Row: Phyllis Feldman, Lynn Greenberg, Lee Ann Ayres, Judy Leonard, Jan and Bruce Levin, and Maida Goodman

and set sail. Monday was a relaxing day at sea. Keith gave a talk on "The History of Jews and Jewish Institutions in the Caribbean." We had plenty of time to put on our best bib and tucker for that evening's formal dinner.

Our first port of call in the Netherlands Antilles was Oranjestad, Aruba and each of us followed our own interests, taking an optional ship's tour, participating in a water activity, shopping, or just relaxing at the beach. The following day's



David and Vickie Vogel celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on the cruise.

continued on page 10

death and the fleeting nature of life, such as an hourglass, a cut-down tree, or a skull and crossbones.

On the way back to town, we passed a two-year-old Orthodox synagogue in an upscale neighborhood. At Landhuis Bloemhof, a Jewish mer-

chant plantation that has been in the hands of one Curaçao family for almost a hundred years, a family member welcomed us to the 1735 building that now houses art exhibitions and offers workshops. In the lush grounds behind the house, an original bathhouse with two stone bathtubs is connected by an aqueduct to a well for its water supply.<sup>2</sup> There are no rivers and only a few springs on the island. Residents drink distilled sea water, and of course the excellent blue Curaçao liqueur made from laraha, the "golden orange of Curaçao."

En route to the synagogue, we drove past the newer Jewish cemetery which contains graves from 1860 to the present. Across from Mikve Israel is an imposing yellow and white building that looks very much like a church. Our guide explained that a Reform group broke away and built this edifice, but as their numbers decreased, they rejoined Mikve Israel. Temple Emanu-El has been restored as a heritage site and houses the prosecutor's office.

Mikve Israel was established in 1651 as a Sephardi Portuguese congregation, and the current building dates from 1732. Services have been



Cruise passengers at the historic Curaçao synagogue.

held there ever since, making it the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere. The most striking feature of this synagogue and the one in St. Tho-

mas is the sand-covered floor. We received various explanations for this, involving everything from the Sinai to the Spanish Inquisition. There are eighteen Torah scrolls here. The oldest has been placed in the adjacent museum and dates from the 14th century. They have 350 members and a Hazzan but no rabbi. The massive candle chandeliers are still lit on the High Holy Days.<sup>3</sup>

During another day at sea, Keith lectured on the topic of "Contemporary Jewish Culture in the Islands" and we prepared for our second formal night.

On Friday, we docked in St. Maarten for another day on our own. Some took a tour and others enjoyed the beach or shopping.

Our final day on the ship was spent in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. The Dutch and the Danes were early rulers. A small Jewish community was established in Charlotte Amalie, which in 1796 founded the historic synagogue Beracha Veshalom Vegmiluth Hasidim (or the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas) the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the United States.<sup>4</sup> It was destroyed in a fire in 1823 and rebuilt. The current building dates

from 1833 and, as in Curaçao, has floors covered with sand.<sup>5</sup>

To reach the synagogue, we had to climb a steep incline known as Synagogue Hill. The Saturday morning service was conducted by Cantorial Soloist Diane Becker Krasnick as Rabbi Arthur Starr was on safari. Today, the congregation is part of the Reform movement.

The furnishings are original and also date to 1833. The benches, the Ark and the Bima are all mahogany, which used to flourish on the islands. The chandeliers are of Baccarat crystal, and the candles are lit for Rosh Hashanah and Kol Nidre. The menorah behind the Bima is of Moroccan origin and dates back to the 11th century. There are six Torah scrolls.



Arriving for services at the historic synagogue Beracha Veshalom Vegmiluth Hasidim (or the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas).

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The first confirmation in the Western Hemisphere occurred here on October 14, 1843.

In 1850, there were 400 Jews in St. Thomas, half the Caucasian population. There have been two Jewish governors. According to some estimates, about 400 Jews call St. Thomas



At Beth Haim Cemetery, Curaçao

home today. One hundred ten families pay dues, sixty of whom are there full time.<sup>6</sup>

With time to spare between disembarking and flights home, some members of the group explored San Juan and the surrounding area.

Besides visiting these wonderful

Jewish sites and enjoying the other amenities of the ship and the islands, we enjoyed being with a congenial group of travelers for good food and good times. We thank Keith Rosen for working with Brentwood Travels to put the trip together. Participants were Lee Ann Ayres and Blanche Gewirtz from Silver Spring, Maryland; Maurice and Sandy Feldman from Baltimore; Phyllis Feldman and Pam Rafferty from Frisco; Lynn Greenberg and Keith Rosen of Houston; Maida Goodman of Dallas; Judy Leonard and Mildred Marcus of El Paso; Jan and Bruce Levin of Albuquerque; Rusty Milstein of Longview; Ben and Barbara Rosenberg of Sugar Land; and David and Vickie Vogel of La Grange.

**(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> You can learn more about Beth Shalom at <http://www.tbspr.org/>

[ourtemple/people/](http://ourtemple/people/)

- <sup>2</sup> To learn more of Landhuis Bloemhof today, see [http://www.bloemhof.an/about\\_us.php](http://www.bloemhof.an/about_us.php)
- <sup>3</sup> For more information visit <http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=106837>
- <sup>4</sup> The Touro Synagogue in Rhode Island was abandoned during the Revolutionary War.
- <sup>5</sup> Besides Curaçao and St. Thomas, Surinam and Kingston, Jamaica synagogues also have sand floors.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.onepaper.com/synagogue/?v=d&i=&s=St.+Thomas+Synagogue:Welcome&p=%28null%29>

*Message from President, continued from page 3*

take the time to thank them at future meetings. And if called upon, I hope you accept the task of helping the Society in some way. We can't exist without your continued membership and support.

Texas Jewish Historical Society exists to preserve the settlement and history of Jews in Texas. Keep family memories alive by writing articles for our newsletter, or by submitting written or oral histories to our archives in Austin...if not for yourself, then for future generations.

I am honored to serve as your President and look forward to working with the Board. I hope to see many of you as we learn about Texas Jewry through our quarterly Board Meetings and our Annual Gatherings.

*Sally Drayer*

President, 2008-2009

## 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. The only expense to the borrower will be the shipping of the exhibit back 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 Jack Gerrick at 817-927-8765 or email him at [texbed@aol.com](mailto:texbed@aol.com).

# Hyman Asher Perlstein: From Blacksmith to Capitalist

by Beverly Williams

*(The following is a part of one of the chapters in Ms. Williams' Master's thesis as presented at the TJHS Board Meeting in Beaumont, January, 2008)*

Born in Punia, Lithuania, on February 19, 1869, Hyman Asher Perlstein was the eldest child and the only son of four surviving children born to Aryeh Leib and Tzirleh "Cherry" Gordon Perlstein. From ages four to ten, he studied the Old Testament and the Talmud in rabbinical school, but his father's death in 1880 from injuries sustained in a wagon accident set Perlstein's life on a different course.

H. O. Gordon, Tzirleh's brother had immigrated to Houston, Texas as a youth to escape the beating of a cruel stepmother. After her husband's death, Gordon urged his sister-in-law to send the boy to him, writing of the freedoms and opportunities in America. It was a sacrifice, but she agreed. In 1883, fourteen-year old Perlstein, accompanied by an uncle, began the nine-day voyage in steerage from Hamburg to America on the German steamer *Ruhig*. They landed in New York, then traveled by train to Houston, where Gordon met them and took Perlstein to his home.

While working at various jobs, the youth tackled his first big challenge of learning English. During his first year in Houston, Perlstein attended English language night classes along with his younger cousins, and spent his days working as a delivery boy and floor cleaner in his uncle's store. In a year, he learned English well enough to speak comfortably, but he learned to write only his name. He quickly realized the opportunities for success that his new home held and set the goal of acquiring enough money to bring his

mother and sisters to Texas as soon as possible.

At fifteen, he worked as a vegetable peddler, but quit four months later because the job had no future. He then tried selling chickens, but a poultry cholera

struck, and his stock died. He tried, but failed to sell tin ware. Short stints as a bellboy and ice cream maker's helper followed. Finally, his uncle advised Perlstein to learn a trade because he lacked the basic education needed for professional employment.

The years 1885-1889 gave Perlstein the occupation that would take him to Beaumont. He secured work as a blacksmith's helper for 25¢ a day. One day, a circus proprietor came in with a rush order for 300 tent pole bands, which the shop owner felt would be impossible to supply. However, he gave the task to Perlstein, who turned out 100 the first day and the remaining 200 the next, receiving a pay raise for his efforts. Two more job changes found him at Hoops and Isaacs under a twelve-month contract for 50¢ a day, which was raised to 75¢ after six months and \$2.50 during his last month there. His last job in Houston included work on the old Post Office building for \$3.00 a day with an extra \$2.25 for fashioning tools for the workmen. That money helped him to pay up his debts and give a little



Hyman Asher Perlstein

money to the people who had helped him. In spite of his pay raises and expertise, Perlstein never rose above the rank of blacksmith's helper to mechanic. Nevertheless, during his last two years in Houston, he operated a shop in Westheimer's Stable on the corner of San Jacinto and Congress streets.

While working in Houston, Perlstein faithfully sent money to his mother in Russia. After a six-month detention at the Russian border, during which Perlstein moved to Beaumont, the family was reunited when they passed through the city on their way to Houston in 1889.

Due to the large number of blacksmiths in Houston, the city held no opportunity for Perlstein. His uncle, therefore, advised him "to begin in a small town and grow with it." So Perlstein sold his shop on August 19, 1889, boarded the Texas and New Orleans train with a ticket to the "eastern Texas boundary of Orange, Texas." He carried a worn imitation-leather coin purse with his life savings of \$21.90 and a bag containing his work clothes, an extra white shirt, a black bow tie, bandannas, a photograph, and a lunch.

The train stopped "beside the little makeshift box-car station in Beaumont," and Perlstein stepped off the wooden coach, thinking he had reached his destination. By the light of an oil lamp, he noticed that the depot's sign read Beaumont, so he crossed the street to the Crosby House hotel lobby to wait for the train to depart. He fell asleep, however, and awoke when the whistle sounded as the train departed for Orange. He was momentarily stunned, then noticed a small wooden

*continued on page 13*

lighted shack called "The House that Jack Built." So he went in, drank coffee, ate his sandwich, and waited for daylight.

Daylight came, and the shriek of sawmill whistles at 5:00, 5:30, and 6:00 AM heralded the beginning of a workday. To see what the town offered him in the way of employment, Perlstein left the restaurant, taking care where he walked because several days of rain had puddled and mud-died the streets. He looked east down the tracks toward the river where he saw some lights, so he crossed a wooden bridge and turned north on Main Street where he passed the Weiss home, the First National Bank, a grocery store, the Ogden Brothers saloon, and a telegraph office which sat across the street from Henry Solinsky's dry goods store. Turning west on Crockett, he passed Welch's grocery, the Loeb Cigar Store, the Wilson Hardware Company, M. Hecht's Dry Goods store, and further on, Leon Levy's store. Turning south on Pearl, he retraced his steps past Jack's café, then heard what he had been seeking before he saw it—the solid musical clang of hammer on anvil. A blacksmith shop sat behind a saddlery; the harness-maker, Carlie Burnett, directed him to Tom Ridley, the smith known to all as Uncle Tom.

At first glance, Ridley thought Perlstein was a young boy. He was wearing a white shirt, black bow tie, tight fitting overcoat, and pull-on shoes, and stood a slim five feet eight and one-half inches tall. But his arms were steel, and his hands large and capable. When he asked the smith for a job, Ridley looked skeptical. But Perlstein assured him that he was a blacksmith's helper. So he was hired for \$.50 a day and made arrangements for lodging at Nash's Boarding House for \$1.00 a week.

During the next two years,

Perlstein worked twelve-hour days and attended Dr. Levy's English classes three nights a week. By this time, Perlstein had built a solid reputation in the city, and many of the town's elite refused to let any other smith shoe their livestock or repair their buggy wheels.

Perlstein's ambitions to succeed did not wane after his family immigrated, for he had another goal in mind. He had a photograph on his night stand of Miriam Rose Gordon, called Mammies by her family. She was a distant cousin, born September 12, 1871, in Marijampole, Lithuania. Her parents, Isaac and Chiena Deborah Malach Gordon, had brought their family to Chicago before Perlstein came to Houston. Shortly before the Gordons departed, he and his mother visited them. Perlstein became enchanted by Mamie, although no word passed between them. When he and his mother left, he impulsively snatched her photograph and hid it in his shirt, unnoticed by either family. He did not see her again until January, 1893 when he heard that Mamie was visiting their uncle's family in Houston. He wrote a letter of introduction asking if he could visit and take her for a buggy ride. She accepted, mentioning that a neighbor, a traveling salesman, had been showing her around the city. Perlstein became nervous, so he withdrew some of his savings, bought a new suit complete with hat and shoes, and purchased a ring in hopes that Mamie would favor his proposal. She tentatively accepted, and after securing her parents' approval, they were wed by Rabbi Rosenstein at a Houston synagogue on March 19, 1893.

In Beaumont, the Perlsteins rented a home at the corner of Orleans and Fannin streets, and their first daughter, Lillian, was born on April 23, 1894, and joined by Ethel on October 31, 1895. Perlstein believed that the first

major purchase any family made should be a home of their own and he had already begun planning theirs. In 1896, he purchased three lots at the corner of Liberty Avenue and Janes Street for \$2,000. Two years later, sorrow struck when Ethel died of an unspecified childhood illness on February 22, 1899. Eleanor's birth on September 3, 1899, assuaged their grief, and Juliet's arrival on July 2, 1908, completed their family.

Perlstein was not satisfied with being the town's blacksmith; he wanted more. He began to acquire land around his shop and eventually owned much of the block. Just as his uncle had done for him, in 1892 he sponsored his nephew, Alex Feigelson, and taught him the blacksmith trade. By 1899, Perlstein had added wagons and carriages to his stock and had renamed his business the Southern Carriage Works. He sold the shop to Feigelson and in 1902 erected a brick building on Fannin Street to house a new farm implement business, the Beaumont Implement Company. At one point, he sold automobiles and during one car-buying trip to Detroit, calmly wrote out a personal check to cover his purchases and freight. The uneasy seller wired Perlstein's bank in Beaumont and was told: "If Perlstein gives check to cover purchase (of) whole city of Detroit, honor it." Meanwhile, he continued to buy land in areas neglected by other people, knowing that the city would grow to include it in the future.

As Perlstein's business enterprises expanded, events in January, 1901 shook the world and put Beaumont on the map. January 10 began like an ordinary day, but in an area known as Big Hill or Sour Springs Mound, located about four miles south of town, the months-long drilling efforts of Capt. Anthony Lucas finally paid off.

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Within minutes, the drillers heard a roar as a geyser of oil "shot through the top of the derrick in a solid six-inch stream" that spewed over 150 feet high giving birth to the world most famous oil field, Spindletop. For ten days, oil flowed at the rate of a barrel a second before the well was capped.

Meanwhile in Beaumont, business proceeded as usual until about noon. Perlstein had just stepped outside his shop to go home for his noonday meal when the Stratford brothers came tearing down the street in a horse-drawn wagon to proclaim that Patillo Higgins had been right. The Big Hill held oil, and Captain Anthony Lucas had brought in a gusher.

Telephone and telegraph lines cracked, and within days, Beaumont's

population of 9,000 had doubled in size while real estate sales boomed.

Speculators from all over the world flooded the city, and land in the oilfield changed hands so rapidly that a single site would have multiple owners registered in the county deed book at the end of the day.

Perlstein had sat on the sidelines during the first boom, but in 1902, he, R. M. Mothner, and Charles Paggi brought in a gusher in the Perlstein-Schramm block, on a spot where Captain Anthony Lucas had previously failed.

In 1902, Perlstein, his brothers-in-law Jake Gordon and Sam Rosen, and his father-in-law, Isaac Gordon, bought property in Fort Worth and helped finance an eight-mile streetcar line that

began at an amusement park that they built and terminated at the present-day stockyards. They also built a power plant. But by 1906, Perlstein grew tired of the many out-of-town trips, so he sold his interests.

In Beaumont, Perlstein was not satisfied to be just an oil well owner, for he had a wilder dream. In 1907, he announced plans to construct a \$100,000 six-story all brick building complete with elevators on his property at the corner of Pearl and Fannin streets, the original site of the blacksmith shop. It would be the city's first skyscraper,

first large brick structure, and the tallest building between Houston and New Orleans. Before the first brick was laid, he secured a long-term lease with the S. H. Kress Co. for the ground floor, which Kress would share with the Stephen's Drug Store. Medical offices would occupy the top floor, and general business offices would fill the remainder.

Perlstein was also involved in other local business ventures. He directed the Milam Oil and Gas Company, was President of the Home Building and Loan Company, and was vice-president of the Beaumont Cotton Compress Company and the Beaumont Export and Import Company. He was one of the original underwriters for the South Coast Life Insurance Company and a member of its Board of Directors. He helped finance and build the Hotel Beaumont and La Salle Hotel. He served as secretary-treasurer and director of the Cherokee Development Company and the Marion Cass Development Company. He served with the port authority and was a trustee of the East Beaumont Townsite Company.

Unfortunately, Perlstein's successes were punctuated by financial disasters, which would have broken a weaker man. While working his first smithing job in Houston, he bought two ponies to ride to work. The first had to be sold because it kicked and bucked and the second caught lockjaw and died. Those and other small disappointments foreshadowed worse to come, for on the night of August 4, 1944, a fire started in the second floor and gutted the Perlstein building. Firemen and equipment came from surrounding areas, and Perlstein sat on the curb outside the Jefferson Theater and watched as they battled the fire for hours, but the building was a total loss. He felt devastated, but his son-

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## — Contributions —

*The following donations have been received by the Texas Jewish Historical Society since January, 2007.*

**In Memory of Fay Brachman From** *Mitzi and Rusty Milstein*

**In Memory of Bob Beer From** *Ima Joy Gandler*

**In Memory of Essie Elsner From** *Mitzi and Rusty Milstein, Davie Lou and Jack Solka*

**In Memory of Harry Marks From** *Mr. and Mrs. Jack Super*

**In Memory of Blanche Sheiness From** *Mr. and Mrs. Rusty Milstein*

**In Honor of Charles Nathan** on his 95th birthday **From** *Vickie and David Vogel*

**In Honor of Ruth and Charles Nathan** on their 25th anniversary **From** *Vickie and David Vogel*

**In Honor of Mrs. Karol Musher** on receiving the Hadassah Woman of Courage Award **From** *Mimi and Michael Berkowitz*

in-law, Charles Weinbaum, husband of his daughter Eleanor, saved him. Weinbaum owned an insurance agency, which was in the undamaged building next door. He had underwritten policies on both the building and the rent income, and Perlstein continued to receive revenues until the structure was replaced.

Since America was at war, building materials were scarce, and Perlstein waited two years before replacing his dream with a five-story edifice. All his former tenants, including S. H. Kress waited to lease space in the new building.

Perlstein became involved in the civic life of Beaumont. He joined the Masonic Lodge, attaining 32nd degree ranking, and became a Knight Templar. He was a member of the Rotary Club, served on the board of the Chamber of Commerce, and during the city's fourth war bond loan drive, he alone sold over \$400,000 in bonds.

There was one organization that invited Perlstein to become a member that he politely declined. One day, he received a strange phone call from a person who did not identify himself. When the caller identified his organization as the Ku Klux Klan, Perlstein thanked him for the invitation, and without explanation, declined.

Hyman and Mamie Perlstein always remembered the less fortunate and aided many charitable and philanthropic causes. He helped organize the Community Chest and served on its board of directors, and he gave the Red Cross an ambulance. He was a member of the Municipal Hospital Board, and in honor of his and Mamie's fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1943, he contributed an iron lung to the hospital. He became the first Jew in the United State to serve on a board of directors for the YMCA. During the Great Depression, many of his ten-

ants could not pay their rent so he let them stay until the economy rebounded. The couple never turned down someone in need or the request of a worthy cause.

Perlstein was devoted to his Jewish faith and never outgrew his early rabbinic education. Soon after his arrival in Beaumont, he joined Beaumont's Jewish community and regularly attended Friday evening services. In September, 1895, he helped organize Congregation Emanuel, now Temple Emanuel, and was elected their first secretary.

He served on the building committee for the first synagogue that was constructed in 1901, and during his term as president in 1910, he was instrumental in hiring the congregation's longest-serving Rabbi, Dr. Samuel Rosinger. Perlstein chaired the building committee for the second synagogue built in 1923. He donated a Torah to the congregation, gave land for a religious school and community center, and was a lifetime board member. In 1943, the congregation honored him for his many contributions.

Temple Emanuel was not the only entity to honor Perlstein. In 1934, the Masonic Lodge honored him as their oldest living member. The war loan collection committee presented him with a German helmet for selling the most war bonds in its fourth drive. In 1947, the Exchange Club presented him with their Golden Deeds Award, the highest honor any citizen could garner. In 1948, the Rotary Club bestowed upon him Emeritus Honorary Member status for his thirty-three years of service.

Of all his personal achievements, Perlstein considered his proudest moment to have been when the country that he loved and honored accepted his application for citizenship on November 16, 1920.

Mamie Perlstein's devotion to their

ethnic and religious heritage equaled her husband's, and she immersed herself in synagogue work after coming to Beaumont. She was a member of the Ladies Benevolent Society, a charter member of the Council of Jewish Women, a member of Hadassah, and in 1920, she helped to organize the Temple Emanuel Sisterhood. She held "silver teas" and other events in her home to help raise funds for charity. Often, she was the one who suggested to her husband which of the many charities they should support.

Hyman Asher Perlstein died on December 7, 1948. During the funeral eulogy, his bosom friend and spiritual leader, Dr. Samuel Rosinger said, "Hyman Perlstein was not an individual, he was an institution." He left giant footprints for his descendants to follow, and in his Golden Deed address, Rosinger expressed "the hope that the children of Mr. Perlstein would carry on in the footsteps of their father, and on and on for generations." At least one of them surely did. 🇺🇸

## Attention Board Members, Committee Chairs, and Committee Members

In order to be reimbursed for monies spent for TJHS, you must fill out the Authorize Reimbursement Form from Treasurer Ruth Nathan. You may contact her at [rcsparkles@aol.com](mailto:rcsparkles@aol.com), 713-728-3139 (phone), or 713-728-0381 (fax).

*This form **MUST** be obtained **BEFORE** spending the money!*

# Babbette Samuels Day Held Friday, March 14, 2008

by Janet Jacobs

Reprinted with permission from the Corsicana Daily Sun, Corsicana, Texas.

Friday, March 14, 2008 was declared Babbette Samuels Day in Corsicana, both in honor of a busy woman who has contributed to the city for more than 50 years, and to celebrate her 80th birthday. The proclamation was signed by Mayor C.L. "Buster" Brown at 10:00 AM at city hall, and a reception followed at 10:30 AM at the Corsicana Public Library.

Originally from Port Arthur, Samuels and her husband, Irwin, moved to Corsicana in 1951. There, they reared three children and the energetic Samuels dived into a whirlwind of child-related activities such as PTA, Bluebirds, Camp Fire, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and band parents groups. In the summer, they took the children on long vacations to national parks and other states in their station wagon. Samuels recalled washing out the family's laundry at night in the sink, but every day she and her family were perfectly dressed, she in heels and a dress, as they toured their way around cities like San Francisco.

Samuels later dedicated herself to community-related work, including vol-

unteering at the synagogue and library. More recently, she's busy serving on Chamber of Commerce committees, city parks commission, and the Navarro County Historical Society.

She's still a regular docent at the Cook Center, helps maintain the Hebrew Cemetery, and recently performed in Warehouse Living Arts productions of *Oklahoma!* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. "Somebody's got to do it," Samuels said, "I just like doing things and being with people."

Her parents and brother died at relatively young ages, and that makes her particularly grateful for having reached 80. "It's been fun. I'm certainly not bored. I need more hours in the day. There's just not enough time to do everything," Samuels said.

In addition to her community service work, she also sends out a daily email of humor and inspirational messages, and she works out at the YMCA three times a week. "It keeps me going. I get on the elliptical for 50 minutes. It keeps your strength up," she said. Although she's turning 80, Samuels said she has no intention of quitting her activities, although she



*Babbette Samuels stands in front of a painting in the Pearce Collection at Navarro College, where she volunteers as a docent. Friday, March 14, 2008 was Babbette Samuels Day in Corsicana.*

might give up tending her garden. "As long as my lawn mower hold out, I'll keep doing it," she said. "If I have to buy a new lawnmower, I'll stop doing it. I don't want to slow down," she added. "That's no fun."

## Needed: A Few Good Men and Women

by Don Teter

We have received a lot of good comments from people all over the country on the book that we published in 1996, *Texas Jewish Burials*. Now, twelve years later, the book should have an update with the many burials that have occurred since then. With a membership of 800 to 900 people, we are looking for at least twenty volunteers who

are capable of doing the job. It requires members from all areas of the state and provides a wonderful opportunity to enjoy a springtime outing.

Gertrude and I are no longer physically able to do the work that we did twelve years ago, but we will gladly instruct and counsel willing volunteers. A group of two working together is the ideal situation.

Contact me if you are willing to consider working on this project.

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



# 28th Annual Gathering a Resounding Success!

by Sally Drayer

Over one hundred TJHS members and friends enjoyed a successful 28th Annual Gathering weekend in Waco, April 4-6. Our weekend began Friday night at Temple Rodef Shalom with a delicious Shabbat meal, followed by services conducted by Rabbi Moti Rotem. Members of the congregation and TJHS members Charles and Jan Hart were honored by sitting on the

bimah. A wonderful Oneg Shabbat, hosted by the Temple Sisterhood, followed services.

On Saturday morning, members and guests were treated to three local speakers. Our first speaker was Ellen Brown, Archivist of the Texas Collection at Baylor University. Ms. Brown had a beautiful display of pictures and documents for members to view

throughout the room, and gave a slide presentation of early Waco Jewry. Ms. Brown was followed by Mr. Leonard Gorin, 92 years young of Waco, who gave us a marvelous look into his life by his presentation. Mr. Gorin was followed by Rabbi Mordecai Podet who spoke of personal reminiscences of Waco Jewry.

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## Can You Help?

*The following letters were received by TJHS. If you can help, please contact Ms. Faber, Ms. Benoit, or Mr. Wertsman.*

**Dear TJHS,**

I am a writer and historian associated with the Historical Society of Harford County, Maryland. I'm currently looking for information about an actress with the stage name Adelaide Prince.

Her maiden name was Rubenstein; her parents were named Solomon and Mary. I'm not sure if Adelaide was her "real" name or an assumed name. I suspect her "real" name may have started with a "J," based on 1880 federal census records for Millican, Texas, where she lived and was educated before beginning her career in amateur theatricals in Galveston.

Can you please advise me on the best way to proceed to find more information about this Texas family? Thanks for your help!

Dinah Faber  
Bel Air, Maryland  
belairbooths@msn.com

**Dear TJHS,**

I am a historian/researcher in Temple, Texas (Bell County), commis-

sioned to compile bios on mayors of our city. Augustus Lewy was mayor of the city from October, 1886 to August, 1889—a significant time in the city's early history. He later became city attorney for San Antonio, Texas (Bexar County).

The city was founded by the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway in 1881, and within a few years, it was the second-most-favored city on the line, next to Galveston, the company's headquarters. The GC&SF later merged with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. So many of the GC&SF's early founders and stockholders (but not all) were Jewish: Heidenheimer, Rosenburg, etc., and many towns established by the railroad during this time bear their names.

Do you have any other information on Lewy or an obituary? I am very eager to make him "flesh and blood" rather than just a name on a page. I particularly want to know whether he was associated with the GC&SF during this time.

I also manage Hillcrest Cemetery, the large, historic cemetery in Temple.

I found an interesting quote written by Dr. Alexander Dienst, noted Texas historian who is buried here. His essay about the cemetery appeared in the 1903 edition of the Temple Times: "Here is one place, where we discovered that the classes can live in harmony—the rich, the poor, the cultured, the Jew, the Gentile, the pagan—all nationalities who dwell side by side." We have so many Jews (observant and otherwise) buried here, even from the city's earliest days. Hopefully, I will be able to document them in coming years.

Thank you for any information you can provide about Augustus Lewy.

Patty Benoit, Temple, Texas  
pkbenoit@stonemedia.com

**Dear TJHS,**

I am in the process of researching the topic of Romanian Jews in the USA (History, achievements, personalities). Please send any relevant materials to:

Vladimir F. Wertsman,  
Chair of Publishing & Multicultural  
Materials Committee, EMIE Round  
Table, American Library Association

# TJHS 28th Annual Gathering



*TJHS members in the Chapel at Greene Family Camp in Bruceville.*



*Dr. Suzanne Seriff, project co-director and curator "Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America Through Galveston Island" coming soon to the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. Dr. Seriff was the speaker for the banquet Saturday night.*



*Phil and Elaine Alban*



*Arnold Miller shows TJHS members a map of Greene Family Camp.*

## in Waco, April 4-6, 2008



*Left to right: Davie Lou Solka, Jack Solka, and Loui Dobin.*



*TJHS 2008-2009 officers, board, and members.*



*Bob "Tumbleweed Smith" and Susan Lewis.*



*TJHS's newly elected president, Sally Drayer, presents the Past President's Pin to Vickie Vogel.*



*Charles Hart  
installs  
Sally Drayer as  
President of TJHS.*

Following the speakers, TJHS members boarded two buses and went to Greene Family Camp in Bruceville, a short twenty minutes south of Waco. We were met by Arnold Miller of Waco. Mr. Miller has been a member of the Texas-Oklahoma Camp Committee for over thirty years and serves as Chair of the Greene Family Camp Committee Speakers. Mr. Miller took us on a short walking tour of the camp, followed by lunch in the dining hall. After lunch, we heard from Louie Dobin who has been director of the camp for over twenty years. Af-



*Annual Gathering Chair,  
Ima Joy Gandler*



*Davie Lou Solka and Rabbi Mordecai Podet.*

ter the trip to Greene Family Camp, members either returned to the hotel or went in a bus to visit Hebrew Rest Cemetery.

Saturday evening Havdalah services were led

by Rabbi Rotem, followed by our dinner banquet. Our guest speaker was Suzanne Seriff, Ph.D., Project Co-director and Curator from the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum located in Austin. Dr. Seriff's discussion and slide show presentation was entitled "Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America Through Galveston Island." When Dr. Seriff opened her presentation to questions, many members of TJHS gave personal family histories and she walked away with more people to contact! The presentation was just a peek at the contents

of the "Galveston Immigration Project" which will be opening in February, 2009 at the Bob Bullock Museum.

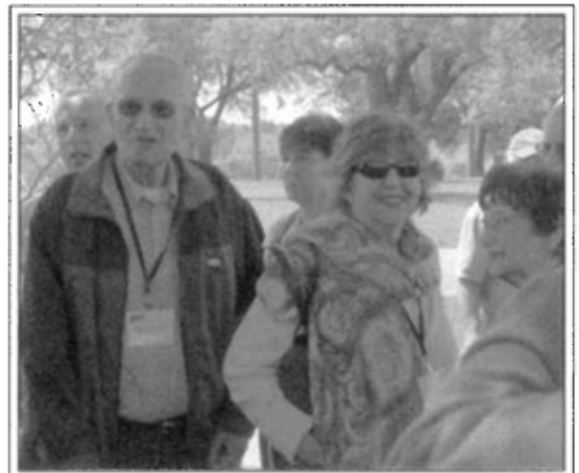
Sunday morning's board meeting closed out the Annual Gathering with the installation of



*Harold Kametsky and Shirley Rich ride in the back and Larry Wilk rides in front as Yvonne Miller takes a driving tour of Greene Family Camp in a golf cart.*

the new Executive Board and Board of Directors. On behalf of TJHS, a personal special recognition again to all the former TJHS presidents who were in attendance...you give the rest of us such inspiration to continue to be active in the society.

Thank you again to Ima Joy Gandler and all those on her committee who did such an outstanding job and made the 28th Annual Gathering a fantastic weekend in central Texas. A personal special thank you to Joyce & Alfred Hiller (Katrina transplants to Texas)...the Hospitality Room desserts were delectable! ❁



*Ralph & Chana Robinowitz.*

# Welcome New Members!

January 1, 2008 - March 30, 2008

## Beer, Taryne & David

7707 Tophill Lane  
Dallas, TX 75248  
214-334-4002

## Cizon, Deidra & Gordon

7015 Brookshire Drive  
Dallas, TX 75230  
214-361-7179  
gcizon@swbell.net

## Clark, Roberta Sunni

1601 Feta Court  
Cedar Park, TX 78613  
rsunni@gmail.com

## Feldman, Sandy & Maurice

11 Slade Avenue, #601  
Baltimore, MD 21208  
410-484-6171  
410-484-1015 Fax  
mauricefeldman@comcast.net

## Fisheran, Daniel

308 Shady Hill Drive  
Richardson, TX 75080

## Klein, Patricia (Golob) & Gerald

4355 Thomas Glen  
Beaumont, TX 77706  
409-651-0810  
gpklein65@aol.com

## Lynn, Elayne

4604 Westchester Drive  
Waco, TX 76710  
254-776-7817  
254-717-4222 Cell  
elynnl@hotmail.com

## Malick, Leah & James

5350 Rutherglenn  
Houston, TX 77096

## Solomon, Jenny

4920 Overton Avenue  
Fort Worth, TX 76133  
817-921-4845  
817-991-9321 Cell  
chilemaven@sbcglobal.net

## Update

Please update the following entry in  
your directory:

### Rosenfield, Sheila

5217 Old Spicewood Springs Rd., Apt. 1903  
Austin, TX 78731  
ssrosenfield@gmail.com

## Has Your Address Changed?

If you have any changes in your  
information, please send those  
changes to Leon Brachman at  
3720 Autumn Dr., Fort Worth,  
TX 76109, call him at  
817-924-9207, or email him at  
leonhb@flash.net.

## San Antonio Jewish War Veterans Post Seeks to Identify Graves of Veterans

The San Antonio Jewish War Veterans Post 753 would like to give all deceased Jewish military veterans the recognition they deserve on appropriate holidays such as Memorial Day and/or Veterans Day. If you know of a Jewish male or female veteran buried in a San Antonio

cemetery, please identify them to us.

In addition to the veteran's name and cemetery, the following information is needed: Cemetery plot number, if applicable, branch of service, dates of service, campaigns served in,

if killed in action and where, and any medals of commendation received.

Please send the information to Herschel L. Sheiness at 210-494-8768; 718 Mello Oak, San Antonio, TX 78258, or email: jsheines@swbell.net. ✪

Visit us on the web at [www.txjhs.org](http://www.txjhs.org)

www.txjhs.org

# Honor or Memorialize a Friend or a Loved One With a Donation to the Endowment Fund of The Texas Jewish Historical Society

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, and occasion—birthday, anniversary, award, new child or grandchild, etc.) and your name, along with a check in the amount of your choice to:

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

Your support of Texas Jewish Historical Society's programs is greatly appreciated and will be recognized in an issue of the quarterly news magazine. Thank you.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Gratefully acknowledges your gift to its Endowment Fund in the amount of

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

In honor/memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acknowledge To:**

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Donor Information:**

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## 28th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy August 17-22 Chicago



The conference will be at the Chicago Marriott Downtown on the "Magnificent Mile." This annual conference is the premier event for Jewish Genealogists.

Attendees from around the world gather to learn, share expertise, and find others researching the same surnames, towns, and countries.

*All are welcome, from beginners to experienced genealogists.*

The IAJGS is proud to co-host this conference with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois and the Illiana Jewish Genealogical Society  
Please visit the website at: [www.Chicago2008.org](http://www.Chicago2008.org).

### MAZEL TOV to the following Texas Jewish Historical Society members:

**SALLY DRAYER**, TJHS President, on the marriage of her daughter, Rachel, to Josh McNary in Taos, New Mexico, on April 12, 2008. Rachel is granddaughter of the late Blanche & Marvin Sheiness. She and Josh will be living in Lander, Wyoming.

*Please send information for this column to Davie Lou Solka at [davielou@solka.net](mailto:davielou@solka.net).  
Thanks.*



# Texas Jewish Historical Society 2008-2009

## Officers

### *President*

Sally Drayer (Dallas)

### *1st Vice-President*

David Hoffman (Evant)

### *2nd Vice-President*

Rusty Milstein (Longview)

### *3rd Vice-President*

Jane Guzman (Dallas)

### *Treasurer*

Ruth Nathan (Houston)

### *Recording Secretary*

David Leff (Houston)

### *Corresponding Secretary*

Samylu Rubin (Dallas)

### *Parliamentarian*

Herman Morris (Fort Worth)

### *Historian*

Sheila Rosenfield (Austin)

### *Archivist*

Ima Joy Gandler (Waco)

## Board of Trustees 2007-2009

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Douglas Braudaway (Del Rio)

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Frank Kasman (Midland)

Barbara Lack (Victoria)

Yetta Leshin (Corpus Christi)

Michael Levine (Waco)

Ruth Litwin (Plano)

Mabel Massin (Houston)

Mitzi Milstein (Longview)

Susan Goodman Novick (El Paso)

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Marc Wormser (Corpus Christi)

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Max Stool (San Antonio)

David Vogel (La Grange)

Hollace Weiner (Fort Worth)

Sherry Zander (Dallas)

Rotating Member (Various)

## TJHS Archives and Records

For information concerning items that can be sent to the TJHS Records section of the Center for American History in Austin, please go to the TJHS website and click on TJHS Archives.

## TJHS Matching Funds

The Texas Jewish Historical Society accepts matching funds from corporations. Please advise if your gift can be used in this manner.

## TJHS Grant Money

Grant money is available from TJHS. For guidelines and information, contact Annette and Howard Lackman at [arlack@sbcglobal.net](mailto:arlack@sbcglobal.net) or 817-543-2156.