



# Texas Jewish Historical Society

November 2020 News Magazine

## Zoom Fall 2020 Board Meeting

The Texas Jewish Historical Society began the 2020 Fall Meeting by offering a virtual Oneg facilitated through Zoom, on Friday, October 23, 2020. Members attended live-streamed services of their choice before joining the TJHS to visit. After catching up on various members and recounting stories of activities or lack thereof, the last person signed off shortly before 10:00 pm!!

The Saturday activities began in the afternoon with a presentation by past president Vickie Vogel. She compared the effect and public reaction of the 1918 flu epidemic to the pandemic of today. The comparisons were astonishing. It was proof that if we don't study history and learn from it, we are sure to repeat it. Few of the members could remember family members even talking about their experiences during the 1918 event. This presentation sparked a lengthy discussion within the membership.


The group was dismissed until 7:00 pm when Havdalah was presented to the membership. Carol and Sandy Dochen, Sharon and Sonny Gerber, Barbara and Ben Rosenberg, and Cynthia and Michael Wolf were the presenters, each doing a separate aspect of the service.

After Havdalah, Mel Eichelbaum spoke about his experiences as a Legal Aid Lawyer. The membership was riveted to his recounting of some of the five cases he argued before the Supreme Court. The presentation was based on his book, *The Legal Aid Lawyer*. Mel was gracious enough to allow an extensive question and answer session which went on almost as long as his initial presentation.

The Sunday TJHS board meeting was well attended with much business to cover, it was also exhilarating to see the effectiveness of each committee and hear the progress happening within the society.

Highlights included a minor change to the parameters of the awards committee to the progress of making the cemetery photographs relevant to history. It was encouraging to hear that the Institute of Texan Cultures is being refreshed during this temporary closure and will continue to showcase the history of Jewish influence in Texas when it is allowed to reopen to the public. An aspect of Zoom is that it has enabled the Speakers Bureau to be very active. Several presentations through TJHS have been made over the last several months.

The Winter Meeting is scheduled for January 29 -31, 2021, and will again be conducted through Zoom. This format is helping to keep the Texas Jewish Historical Society relevant and active.

Put the Winter Meeting on your calendar and join us for another amazing weekend! 

**The Winter Board Meeting will be held via Zoom January 29-31, 2021. Mark your calendars and look for Zoom link prior to the meeting.**



*Saturday afternoon attendees.*

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# Message from the President

by Susan Zack Lewis

I've been corresponding with a childhood friend for almost fifty years.

Marilyn and I became friends while taking

piano lessons from the same teacher. We came from very different backgrounds. Her father worked at Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring, and her mother was an educator who taught in one of our private schools. My parents were merchants. After High School we went our separate ways, connecting rarely, but connecting in Big Spring when she would return to the West Texas area to visit her parents.

I don't remember when we began to write letters to each other. There were usually three or four a year and



I've kept many of them. We decided to continue with real letters, on paper and through the U.S. mail.

In one of her letters, she mentioned that she and her husband, Ted, were concerned about possible damage to their Galveston house after a recent hurricane devastated the area. They live in Houston and this was the first I had heard about the house. In her next letter, she mentioned that it had belonged to her husband's grandparents. A year went by and as we corresponded, she mentioned that her husband was spending a lot of time overseeing the work on the house in Galveston.

This summer she mentioned that they had recently discovered that the house was a "very ecumenical place." Her husband's grandparents built the house more than eighty years ago. After the grandfather died, his wid-

ow found the house too large and too hard to manage, so it was sold. The grandparents were Lutheran, the next three residents were Jewish, and the people from whom Marilyn and Ted purchased the house were Catholic. That comment caught my attention and I broke tradition and gave her a call on my new fangled device, the smart phone!

I've never been a name-dropper, but couldn't resist commenting to Marilyn that I knew Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, who is Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation B'nai Israel in Galveston, and perhaps he could help with some of the history they were missing on the house. She immediately replied that they knew of him and would be thrilled to hear more about the "big house." That was the name Ted remembered his family using when referring to it.

When I contacted Rabbi Jimmy, he immediately told me that I had found one of the residents. He and Shelley had lived in that house and they were the last of the three rabbis to live in it, because it was owned by Temple B'nai Israel. The first resident was Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus and the second was Rabbi Samuel Stahl. Rabbi Stahl and Lynn live in San Antonio and are TJHS members. I looked in the directory and found an

*continued on page 18*

## The Texas Jewish Historical Society November 2020 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 Davie Lou Solka at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) or by mail to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, 512-527-3799. Be sure to include your name and contact information.



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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](http://www.txjhs.org).*

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# Beit Hatfutsot (Museum of the Jewish People) Wants Your Story

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has received a request from the Beit Hatfutsot (Museum of the Jewish People) in Tel Aviv, Israel. Beit Hatfutsot is more than a Museum. This unique global institution tells the ongoing and extraordinary story of the Jewish people. The Museum connects Jewish people to their roots and strengthens their personal and collective Jewish identity, while presenting the contribution of world Jewry to humanity.

The Museum would like to have the story of the Jewish communities

in Texas as a part of their collection. They will take stories from individuals, synagogues, schools, community centers, etc. Visual, photos and videos (preferably digital or scanned) would be welcomed. All aspects of Jewish life can be documented from today or the past, including Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations, religious holidays, weddings, cemeteries, art, any topic of Judaic interest. These will be entered into their collection with due credit.

You can go to the Museum's database for more information at <https://www.bh.org.il/databases/jewish->

communities or their Visual Documentation database, <https://www.bh.org.il/databases/visual-documentation>.

Family trees may be added to the museum's database. You can find Jewish Family Names at <https://www.bh.org.il/databases/family-names/>. If a family tree was created with the help of a genealogy database, you can send a GEDCOM file of the family tree by uploading it directly to the museum's website at <https://www.bh.org.il/databases/jewish-genealogy/send-us-family-tree/upload-gedcom-file>. 🇺🇸

## From the October 2020 Board Meeting

There have been 733 names added to the cemetery data base as of June 30, 2020, making a total of 45,000 names. Kathy Kravitz is updating and correcting three databases: our TJHS burial database; Find a Grave; and Jewish-Gen's "JOWBR." See her article on page 5 for further information.

The Winter Board Meeting will be January 29-31, 2021 via Zoom.

The Speaker's Bureau has been very active with several presentations in Austin, El Paso, and Houston via Zoom. Contact Gayle Cannon or Jan Hart at [speakersbureau@txjhs.org](mailto:speakersbureau@txjhs.org) to arrange a speaker.

The board approved changing the guidelines of the Awards Committee to allow two awards within a category, not to exceed two per year. Don and

Gertrude Teter (posthumously) and Hollace Weiner will receive the award for Extraordinary Historic Project at the Annual Gathering.

Davie Lou Solka, NEWS MAGAZINE editor, is seeking articles from members whose family came to the U.S. through Galveston during the Galveston Movement years (1907-1914); and articles from members on how they have spent their time in isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic. These will

be ongoing articles; contact Davie Lou at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) if you would like to submit an article.

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History located on the UT campus in Austin is still closed to the public. They do not know when they will reopen, so plans for hiring an intern and for accepting donations are on hold.

Contact Sally Drayer at [archivist@txjhs.org](mailto:archivist@txjhs.org) if you would like to donate items or need more information.

The Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio is still closed to the public, so plans for the updating of the Jewish Exhibit are on hold. They are not accepting items for loan, only for donation. If you would like to donate items, contact Davie Lou Solka at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) for the museum to consider your donation. 🇺🇸





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# What I Did During the Pandemic

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*COVID 19 hit—Texas, the United States, and the world—hard and left a “new normal” for everyone. On March 13, 2020, the order came for all Texans to stay home and only those who had “essential jobs” should go to work. Schools, restaurants, stores, offices, bars, movies, barber and beauty shops were closed by order of the governor. Most people have learned to work from home and several home offices, as well as a place for students to do classes, became a staple in many homes. We have learned that staying home, wearing masks and socially distancing is necessary to curb this virus. So TJHS members have been doing their part. Following are some of the ways that our members have found to stay busy while staying home. Your story is welcome—they will be printed in future issues. Send your story to [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org).*

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## by Vickie Vogel

Is 2020 over yet? I read a lot of books this summer, including Lawrence Wright’s *The End of October*, about a world-changing pandemic. Medical science had known it was coming long enough for him to write a novel and get it published and released about the time the real pandemic hit. It is remarkably prescient.

I had promised myself to wash the woodworks in every year divisible by five, and was annoyed to find 2020 fit the bill, but at least I had extra time to do tasks like this. I finished a scrap quilt I started several years ago and never found time to work on. I made a wall hanging that I’ve been meaning to create for years. With no more excuses, I started practicing the piano every day, and discovered practice improves your playing.

I started watching *Fear the Walking Dead* from the beginning when I learned an episode in season five was filmed at Beth Israel in Austin. We have a lot in common with the *Zombie Apocalypse*, too.

By a fortunate coincidence, I had researched two columns for this *News Magazine* in early March when I visited the TJHS Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. The Center, of course, is closed for now, and I don’t know what the future will bring, but at least I had two arti-

cles ready for you, and found another in my files.

Jan Hart, Chair of the Speaker’s Bureau, asked me if I could do a Zoom class for Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism, because our in-person programs were all cancelled. I told her I couldn’t spell Zoom. Then my world changed again. First, my book club met on Zoom. Then the entire Texas Democratic Convention became a virtual Zoom event, as safety of the participants was paramount. Since I was the chair of the Temporary Resolutions Committee, and also the Permanent Resolutions Committee, I had to get up to speed fast. I chaired multiple meetings on Zoom, and shepherded the resolutions through to the final report to the general session. I attended other committee meetings, as well as the Jewish Caucus, led by Rosalie Weisfeld, a former board member of TJHS and good friend. My greatest thrill was being one of eleven Texans elected to the Democratic National Committee for a four-year term.

By the time the convention was over, I was ready to call Jan back and accept the speaking engagement. I scanned my columns in “For the Archives” and prepared a program I called, “Little Known Texas Jews.” It was fun and informative, and a great opportunity to steer participants to our website where they could read the entire articles and see the pictures and

do further research, if they desired, through the endnotes. I had a great time.

I was asked to do the same program for Temple Mount Sinai in El Paso. By this time, my husband (David) and I were secluded in our mountain cabin, but the internet signal held and the program was completed.

What a time we live in! We can stay in touch with family and friends, old and new, through the miracle of the internet. Before long, TJHS was holding board meetings on Zoom. It was wonderful to see the folks I’m used to seeing four times a year, and hear their voices, in addition to completing the Society’s business. To be connected to the outside world again, after staying indoors for months, was a wonderful experience.

I signed up for a Zoom account and started scheduling “Happy Hours,” art walks, “dinner dates” with far-flung friends, and a Halloween costume party with virtual cash prizes.

I got an email from the American Zionist Movement about a free eight-week Zoom beginner Hebrew class. Why not? I have the time. I already knew the early class stuff, except she threw me a curve when she said, “Remember how you were taught to say ‘what’s your name’ years ago?” Why yes, I did remember. “Well, we don’t say that anymore. Here’s the new way.” Wow! If language keeps

*continued on page 5*




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# Updating of Texas Jewish Burials Records

by Kathy Kravitz

I continue to work on Texas Jewish burial records. The three databases I am updating or correcting are: our TJHS Burial database; Find a Grave; and JewishGen's "JOWBR." I have thousands of gravestone photos which our members have taken in about fifty Texas cemeteries. For each cemetery, I determine the names of the deceased as shown in the photos. If Find a Grave has no memorial for a person, I create one; if it has no photo, I add one. I compare the data on the TJHS burial database to Find a Grave and to JewishGen's "JOWBR" to create a spreadsheet of all the names and associated dates and places of birth/death, etc. The spreadsheets indicate additions and/or corrections to be made in our TJHS data base and are sent to Sheldon Lippman. A similar spreadsheet is sent to JewishGen. Separately, I look for indications of military service and send that information to

Hershel Sheiness for his Texas Jewish Veterans database.

It is not uncommon to find discrepancies among these databases. Using Ancestry.com, I look for documents that help determine, with greater certainty, what is correct. However, mistakes are inevitable. If you find that the TJHS burial database has an error or an omission for someone you know, please contact Rusty Milstein at [hrmilstein@prodigy.net](mailto:hrmilstein@prodigy.net). If you find an error in a memorial on Find a Grave you can click on the "Suggest Edits" button, and insert the correct information; be sure to click "Save Suggestions." In my experience, many, but not all, memorial "owners" will correct the memorial. Please note that I am unable to correct any memorials that I have not created. If you have any questions about this work, you may contact me at [kathyckravitz@gmail.com](mailto:kathyckravitz@gmail.com). 

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## *What I Did During the Pandemic, continued from page 4*

changing, we have to keep studying. I scrolled through the Gallery view to see if I knew any of the other 200 people in the class, and found Rosalie Weisfeld. Rosalie's brother was battling Covid-19, so she had a lot on her plate at this time.

I loved the class, and also the weekly study sessions, and again felt connected, while learning new vocabulary and brushing up rusty skills. It made me remember a promise I made to our guide when we visited Japan in 2006. I had learned a few flashy phrases for the trip, and my guide was impressed (the Japanese are impressed when any American can say a few words in Japanese) and made me promise that I would continue studying. Okay, it's fourteen years later, but I found a free beginner Japanese

course online and signed up. At last, I fulfilled my promise to Kikui-san.


Kabbalat Shabbat is available online from many synagogues. We often watch Central Synagogue in New York City, and have added the service from B'Nai Vail while we are in Colorado. When we sing the MiSheberach, I think about all my vulnerable friends and send special protective thoughts their way. We know a number of folks who have been infected, and two have died.

Yes, summer vacation (and now the fall) for all of us was different from any in the last hundred years. We have to learn to live in a new way. I hope you found new experiences, and were able to overcome the challenges. We can get through this. Stay safe, and keep in touch. 

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# Speaker's Bureau

by Jan Siegel Hart

The Speaker's Bureau has been operating on ZOOM since the Pandemic. If your group would like a program, contact Gayle Cannon or Jan Hart at [speakersbureau@txjhs.org](mailto:speakersbureau@txjhs.org) to request a speaker on various topics. Topics range from unknown early Texas Jews to how to navigate Texas Portals, to the history of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, as well as B'nai Abraham Synagogue's move from Brenham to Austin, and tips on how to take family oral histories. 

## Corrections

In our last issue, Larry Holtzman from Brownsville submitted an article about his cousin who contracted polio in Brownsville, and discussed her case and the polio epidemic of the fifties. The following paragraph was inadvertently omitted from his story:

With the success of the polio vaccine, Jonas Salk, at age thirty-nine, became one of the most celebrated scientists in the world. Dr. Salk was Jewish, born to Daniel and Dora Salk, who were Jewish immigrants from Lithuania. Jonas Salk chose to be a researcher instead of becoming a practicing physician. He refused a patent for his work, saying the vaccine belonged to the people, and that to patent it would be like "patenting the Sun." Leading drug manufacturers made the vaccine available, and more than four hundred million doses were distributed between 1952 and 1962, reducing the cases of polio by ninety percent. By the end of the century, the polio scare had become a faint memory in the United States. 

# — Jewish Athletes with Icy Connections —

## *Dallas Texans American Hockey League Team*

by Irv Osterer and Gregg Philipson

There have been world-class Jewish athletes as far back as sports information has been recorded. Take the example of Daniel Mendoza who was a world champion Jewish boxer in England from 1792 to 1795. Many of us know Jewish athletes of great notoriety like Mark Spitz, Hank Greenberg, Fanny Rosenfeld, Sandy Koufax, Lillian Copeland and a myriad of others. But like the name Daniel Mendoza, many people have never heard of Manny Cotlow, Chubby “Porky” Levine, or Sammy Lavitt. These are three Jewish hockey players who skated for the “Dallas Texans” American Hockey League team during the 1940’s.

The AHL started after a meeting in Cleveland on October 4, 1936, where officials from the International Hockey League and the Canadian-American Hockey League announced the for-



*Sam Lavitt*

mation of a combined circuit called the “International-American Hockey League.” After their 1939-40 season the I-AHL renamed itself the American Hockey League. The league was well received and operated successfully for decades.

The Dallas Texans were formed as a professional minor league ice hockey team in the fall of 1941 as part of the American Hockey Association. They played their first game at Fair Park Ice Arena on November 6, 1941, against the St. Paul Saints. There was a crowd of more than 4,000 spectators. The 1941-42 season proved to be the only season for the Texans. However, their record of 12 wins out of 50 games played was not the cause. It turns out that the entire AHA would end operations after only one season due to the United States entry into World War II. The good news is that the Texans would reappear as a United States Hockey League team from 1945 to 1949. The Texans played their home games in the Dallas Ice Arena. Due to rising expenses the Texans dropped out of the USHL following the 1948-49 season.



### **Manny Cotlow (1914 – 2005)**

Born in Minneapolis, Cotlow was one of the few early American born players. He was an AHA veteran, with stops in St Louis, Minneapolis, Omaha, and St Paul. He even played in one exhibition game for the New York Rangers before arriving in Texas to play with

Dallas. He was an AHA All-Star that season. He enlisted in the United States Army and played for the United States Coast Guard Cutters in the EHL 1942-45, winning the league championship. Cotlow played a season in 1944-45 with AHL Providence before finishing his career with two productive seasons with the Oakland Oaks in the Pacific Coast League.

### **Sam Lavitt (1922 – 2012)**

Lavitt was a Winnipeg native who played three years in the AHA with the Omaha Knights before coming to the Texans. He logged seven hundred combat hours as a Royal Canadian Air Force pilot flying C47s in the Burma Theater during World War II. He returned to pro hockey after the war and was a member of the 1950-51 AHL champion Calder Cup winning Cleveland Barons. He finished his career in the WHL with Seattle.

### **Sam “Porky” Levine (1908 – 1970)**

Levine was born in Russia and educated in Timmins, Ontario. He tended goal professionally in the CPHL, PCHL, IHL and AHA from 1927 to

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# — This Jewish Girl Moves to Texas —

by Bonnie Flamer

When my husband and I left Los Angeles for Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1968, I had no idea what an experience I was in for. I had lived in Los Angeles my whole life except for ten months in Columbus, Ohio, where my husband earned his master's degree at Ohio State University—Go Buckeyes!

After finishing school, my husband went to basic training and we (meaning me, too, since we were married), were told to report for duty in San Antonio at Lackland Air Force Base for three months. When he finished basic we were told to await an assignment. We were going to Texas?

Our household goods were sent directly to Sheppard Air Force Base, near Wichita Falls, Texas, which was to be our new home for the next four years. We travelled by car across the southwest completely on Highway 10, passing through El Paso, Texas.

Wichita Falls, Texas is located in



*Mike Flamer at Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas.*

what is called the “Panhandle” or top of the Lone Star state near the Oklahoma border. The nearest big city is Fort Worth, Texas, which is over one-hundred miles away. As we drove into the outskirts of town we noticed oil derricks and that the area was pretty barren. Not green like Los Angeles.

Historically, in 1910, a handful of Jewish families lived there. But, by 1911-1918, a large oil strike transformed Wichita Falls into an “oil boom town.” That brought in many more Jewish families who mostly opened up retail stores. I subsequently learned that with the oil, came another early industry, the railroad.

When we arrived the personnel on the base told us we didn't have availability there as yet, and that we had to find hous-

ing off the base, in town. So, we rented a small house in a quiet neighborhood near the base. Well, actually it was all quiet. It was a town of 100,000 people that year. This house proved to be our first introduction to the local culture.

We moved in and checked things out only to find that there was not a light in the garage. We called the landlord and he sent his brother over to see if he could help. He conveniently lived across the street. He came over to have a look. He flicked the switch several times, up and down, on and off, and nothing happened.

Then he said in a thick Texas drawl, “You ain't got no B-U-B!” In my head I quickly, well, not so quickly surmised that he meant BULB. Well that was very obvious to me, but, maybe because I was of the female persuasion, he thought I didn't know that! But, was he going to provide a BUB for us?

Then the next Texas language lesson was learned at the gas station, as I wanted to have everything under the hood checked out after our cross-country trip. The attendant looked here and there, pulled out that long stick and said, “You ain't got no AWL?” My brain was now starting to interpret “TexEnglish” faster now, and I knew he meant OIL.

We heard “Y'all come back!” over and over every day. It was a mainstay of the culture.

From 1968-1972, we lived on Sheppard Air Force Base as we even-

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*Mike Flamer with unidentified child on left and daughter, Michele on right.*





*Mike & Bonnie Flamer*

tually moved to base housing. My two children were born there one and a half years apart, and I became active in the local temple sisterhood. The House of Jacob synagogue at the time was a conservative congregation and it did not have a rabbi. The community was so small they could not afford one, but the eldest gentleman member became the lay leader. This was a very new concept to learn, but it worked very well. There were twenty to thirty Jewish families living in Wichita Falls in 1968. Unlike my Jewish experience in Los Angeles, this was surprising but gave me insight as to how things work in smaller communities across the country. We became friends with Julius Kruger, who was the son of Max Kruger, who owned a jewelry store in Wichita Falls (on the corner of Ohio and 8th Street) and Midland. Another family I remember was Abe and Marion Kaufman, who had a son named David.

Historically, in the early 1900s, Wichita Falls, due to the oil boom, grew from 8,000 residents to 40,000. By 1920, the city had nineteen oil refineries, and forty-seven factories. This emergence as an oil center drew a growing number of Jews. By 1927 there were 505 Jews living in Wichita Falls.

After a few months of being away from home, I really started to

miss the things we take for granted in big cities like Los Angeles—like bagels and fresh challah. So, I did make them from scratch... and in the case of the bagels, I began then and there to appreciate buying them from the delicatessen. You have to make the dough, let it rise, form them and then boil them and then bake them. Who knew they were so difficult to make? Oy veh! I also started to miss good Chinese food which was our staple on Sunday nights.

For so-so Chinese food in Wichita Falls, there was only one restaurant, and they served two ethnic cuisines—Mexican and Chinese. I was grossed out when one night they ran out of fried rice and substituted the Mexican rice. Yuck! After that we drove all the way to Lawton, Oklahoma, where there was a good Chinese restaurant.

On the base, we service people would hold Friday night services and either the base chaplain, who was a rabbi, or a lay leader would lead the services. There were perhaps eight or ten families, about fifteen or twenty single people, with about thirty people total on the base, so we usually had a good attendance at services. Most of the families were older and had come after graduate school or were the doctors on base. The congregation in town would invite us to join them, and we rotated location for spending the holidays together. One Hanukah we celebrated on base, and we were able to use the main kitchen. The base vernacular for the kitchen was the Mess Hall. The head chef on base took it upon himself to take our recipes and multiply them for fifty to sixty people. They would make the latkes for us with their machines. Peeling and grating all those potatoes would not have been fun, and we would bring all the accoutrements, such as sour cream and applesauce. We left the recipe



*Bonnie Flamer with son, Kenneth.*

with them knowing we were in good hands. They made the batter from about seventy-five potatoes and we would finish by frying them. When we came to cook the latkes, we realized that they had misread the recipe and had used thirty tablespoons of salt instead of thirty teaspoons! We used the short order grill in the kitchen, which they had cleaned and koshered for us, and proceeded to cook the latkes. They came out great. So, I guess you can't put too much salt in latkes.

When we went into town for services the first time, it was hard to contain my laughter. Hearing our traditional prayers with a Texas accent would come out sounding like, "*Baa roo ch Ataa Adinoy, Elllo Haaa-nu Mellach Haaoolum.*" The drawl almost made it unrecognizable. Of course, the Texas natives thought that we, especially the set of doctors that came from Chicago and New York, all had accents, too.

The House of Jacob had so few families to support it financially that the group had to be very creative as to how to raise money to keep the doors open. To my surprise we were to raise the needed money by, believe it or not, catering Baptist weddings! You heard me right—we catered Baptist weddings. It wasn't really hard to do.

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# 1918 Pandemic and the Jews

*Vickie Vogel presented the following program at the Texas Jewish Historical Society Zoom Fall Board Meeting October 24, 2020. Many comments were made comparing the pandemic of 1918 (also known as the Spanish flu) to Covid-19. Several members recalled hearing that relatives died of the flu around that time, but were not told any stories about it.*

The pandemic of 1918 coincided with a major wave of immigration to the United States between 1880 and the 1920s, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe. The foreign born are often stigmatized as disease carriers whose presence endangers their hosts, but the 1918 influenza struck all groups and classes, so no single immigrant group was blamed.

Unlike Covid-19, which is most lethal to older people, the Spanish Flu was more likely to kill those in the prime of their lives, between the ages of twenty and forty. One theory was that the flu of 1898 was mild, and a bad flu season happens every twenty years. That meant the children of 1898 had not built up any immunity. Or perhaps a cytokine storm was more likely in those with vigorous immune systems. The 1918-1919 pandemic killed an estimated 20-100 million people worldwide. The CDC estimates the U.S. death toll was 675,000. People were so frightened; suicide was not unknown.

A major factor in this tragedy is the fact that the world was at war. Over 32,000 Americans in the armed forces died in US military camps, and another 18,000 in Europe. Although the Spanish Flu killed more people than four years of combat during World War I, Americans in the fall of 1918 wanted to celebrate their victory in the Great War and forget the pandemic.

Many caught this crowd disease by ignoring orders and rushing into

	Beth Israel, Houston	Shearith Israel, Dallas	Ahavath Sholom, Fort Worth	Agudas Achim, San Antonio	Temple Mount Sinai, El Paso
<b>Total Burials</b>	24	27	14	20	15
<b>Oct</b>	5	7	3	6	6
<b>Dec</b>	5	7	3	7	0
<b>1913</b>	13	14	1	5	4
<b>1922</b>	15	18	6	7	5

*Burials in 1918 compared to 1913 and 1922.*

the streets to celebrate the armistice on November 11, 1918. The many victory parades that came at the end of World War I helped to spread this disease even further around the globe and it would continue in waves through the summer of 1919 until enough people became immune to stop its spread. It died out, but at a deadly cost.

The Spanish influenza did not originate in Spain, although some of the earliest cases were identified there. Some blamed the Germans for using flu germs as a weapon of war. They theorized that covert German submarine landings had disseminated the germs, maybe inside a theater, or in the air along the coast. German soldiers, though, were dying too. They called the disease Flanders fever. There is some evidence that its origin was an army camp, Camp Riley, in Kansas. Evangelist Billy Sunday preached it was caused by so much sin and hate in the world. So, there were conspiracy theories.

One problem was, to maintain wartime morale, neither national nor local government officials told the truth. In the spring of 1918, U.S. doctors had noticed an unusual increase of influenza in military camps and in some cities. Because we were at war, officials chose to suppress news of illness among soldiers. They didn't want to cause a panic. So, they called it the "Spanish" flu. Spain was not involved in the war, so when the epi-

demic broke out, they reported it. The U.S. and others tried to keep it quiet or downplay it. Even after Philadelphia began digging mass graves and banned public gatherings, one newspaper wrote, "This is not a public health measure. There is no cause for alarm." Trust in authority disintegrated, and at its core, society is based on trust. Not knowing who or what to believe, people also lost trust in one another.

How does immigration factor into this? When Americans thought of health menaces from abroad, it was not the flu that sprang to mind. It was tuberculosis, typhus, cholera, trachoma. If immigrants were sick, they could become a public charge, so new immigrants were carefully checked before they could enter.

The problem of immigration was the same that we face today. Foreign-born labor was and is critical to American industry, and Americans wanted healthy people who would work and be able to support themselves. Overall rejection rates were low, 2-3%. Then as now, nativism existed - the fear of the foreign-born. Immigration had already slowed to the U.S. because of the war. Different groups of immigrants were labeled as the carriers of specific diseases. Irish immigrants were thought of as the bearers of cholera. Italian immigrants were blamed for polio, even though they had a lower death rate,

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but the highest infection rate except for the native born. Tuberculosis was called the Jewish disease or the tailor's disease. Trachoma was also associated with Jews.

In 1900, a Chinese immigrant in San Francisco died of bubonic plague, and nativism panic followed. Chinatown was quarantined and some called for it to be burned to the ground. Asians on the streets were forcibly inoculated with a vaccine still in the testing stage. The Chinese had at various times been blamed for leprosy, venereal disease, in addition to bubonic plague.

During the current coronavirus pandemic, Chinese and Asians have been blamed and discriminated against because the disease originated in China. Asian-Americans have faced racist attacks, and there have been reports of Chinese businesses seeing a downturn in customers. Rutgers University's Martin J. Blaser, a historian and professor of medicine and microbiology, sees parallels to how Jews were treated during past outbreaks of disease.

"It's the same mob mentality," Blaser said. "Finding a victim. Unfortunately for Chinese people, they've borne the brunt of this so far."

Two of the biggest immigrant groups in the turn of the last century wave of immigration were Southern Italians and Eastern European Jews. Fortunately, the Jewish community had immigrant doctors, organizations, newspapers, religious groups to bear the burden of providing information and assistance. They knew how to communicate with their newcomers, and that was a big help. They were in a strange place, there was a language barrier, and a deadly disease. The foreign-born needed information and assistance in coping with influenza. Jewish organizations disseminated public health information to their community in culturally sensitive manners and in the languages the newcomers understood, offering crucial services

to immigrants and American public health officials.

Immigrants were spared the blame in the U.S. because tens of thousands of young, strong men in the military were dying. How could that be the result of inferior immigrant bodies? And immigrants seemed less menacing because of restrictive immigration laws that had slowed the influx of foreigners. Besides, 500,000 foreign-born soldiers of forty-six nationalities served in our wartime army. Nativism was directed primarily at those of German heritage as wartime jingoism replaced nativist rhetoric.

In Denver, there was a large number of Italians and anti-Italian feeling. It was the home of many tuberculosis sanatoria with a lot of immigrant patients. The Ku Klux Klan was active. Part of the problem was anti-Catholic feeling from the predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The epidemic was hanging on in their neighborhoods. In the Jewish quarter of Denver, the West Colfax neighborhood, the epidemic was under control. Many of Denver's Jewish community were native-born and were assimilated members of the middle class. They were not considered a threat to the public. Many of the more recently arrived Eastern European Jews, however, were patients in the various sanatoria and already under medical supervision.

History had taught the Jews that they must deflect blame for the pandemic away from Jewish immigrants or anti-Semitism would flourish. In Denver, public health officials praised the Jewish community for its response and compliance with recommended protection from the disease.

Influenza was not a reportable disease in 1918, so there is not a lot of data on how it affected ethnic communities, but there's reason to believe new immigrants had a higher mortality rate - highest among Canadian, Russian, Austrian, and Polish nativity

as well as Italian. One study showed Southern and Eastern European immigrants were major carriers of the disease. Why would they be so vulnerable? One hypothesis is that they were young workers from agricultural communities where they were unlikely to have been exposed to influenza early in their lives and had no acquired immunity. Of course, poverty, long working hours, and malnourishment left immigrants vulnerable to illness.

Individual physicians of ethnic groups were critical, as were medical institutions organized and supported by religious groups. Jewish hospitals had been organized from the mid-19th century. German Jews in Cincinnati and New York created culturally sensitive environments with kosher food, rabbinical chaplains, and religious services. At Boston's Beth Israel Hospital, 250 patients with influenza were admitted in the fall of 1918. Mortality was 25%, similar to other hospitals. Several nurses were infected and one died.

At Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, eighty-five nurses contracted influenza, eighteen developed pneumonia, but they all stayed at their posts as long as they could. Student nurses at Mount Sinai's training school were instructed to disband and go home, but they voted unanimously to stay. The staff at Baltimore's Hebrew Hospital made home visits to treat victims.

Other immigrant groups were not so fortunate. In El Paso, influenza hit the barrios hard. Twenty-two Mexican-Americans with flu were discovered in a single room. Not many doctors or nurses could speak Spanish and there was no hospital in the area. The Anglo community was unwilling to spend money to serve the Latinx community.

After the Italians, the largest group of immigrants in this era were Jews. Anti-Semitism and charges that the Jewish body was inherently inferior to

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the Christian body were common in Europe. Dr. Maurice Fishberg, a Russian-born doctor collected data to refute the charges that Jewish immigrants were sicker than the general population. He argued that impoverished lives with long hours in filthy sweatshops, nights in ill-ventilated tenements, and low wages explained any differences.

The *Jewish Daily Forward* had a circulation of 200,000 at its height. Editor Abraham Cahan stressed the community's health and well-being among other causes, and he explained the illness to the Jewish immigrant community and encouraged reporting cases. The *Forward* kept the community informed and advised them how to stay safe.

The *Forward* advised readers don't use hand towels in public places. Don't drink from cups that others had used. Yiddish-speaking Jews were reminded to be careful in ice-cream soda places: do not drink if the glass has not been completely and appropriately cleaned. There were warnings against public spitting and using handkerchiefs, clothes or bedding that an ill person had used. In a community where many smoked, pipe smokers were reminded, "Do not smoke from a pipe that has been in another's mouth." While few Jewish immigrant households in this era had their own telephones, many used public phones and were reminded, "When you speak on the telephone, keep your mouth farther from the receiver."

They were urged to heed the health commissioner's directives. Ultimately, the *Forward* blamed capitalism for the epidemic. They supported the Board of Health's order that landlords not wait until November 1 to supply heat to their tenants, the date they were

legally required to. "They [landlords] know that for every dollar that they save on coal, a father of children, a mother of babies might pay with [his or her] life."

Jews had learned to be self-sufficient, so they could not be accused of burdening the community. New York's Jewish community formed a kehillah, a communal organization to govern itself. Communalism could allow newcomers to share burdens of their existence in a way that American individualism did not. Although it only lasted from 1908 to 1922, the New York Kehillah published the names of sixty-five Jewish organizations in New York where help and information were available during the influenza epidemic. The Workmen's Circle or Arbeiter Ring, offered medical assistance and funeral assistance. During the height of the epidemic, there were fourteen to sixteen funerals a day among Circle members, an unprecedented daily toll.

The head of the Beit Din of New York announced that Jews sitting shiva "can and must be lenient with regard to the laws of mourning." It was okay to go around outside for a few hours each day on account of health. The bereaved were told they could buy food and need not go barefoot, "even at home, but wear shoes in order not to catch a cold. G-d forbid."

In Palestine, forty-two people were diagnosed with the Spanish flu in Shaare Zedek Medical Center in 1918; four of them died. There are few records, but we know that Haifa was also hard hit.

San Francisco's health department had many Jews employed in important positions,

including Lawrence Arnstein, who helped organize the Red Cross response to the disease. Matilda Esberg, president of the Congregation Emanu-El Sisterhood, was also involved in overseeing the response. Not only were Jews not blamed for the 1918 pandemic, they played a pivotal role in combating it.

There are a lot of similarities between our behavior in 1918 and 2020. Health officials knew influenza was contagious, and people should stay home, close their businesses, socially distance, and wear masks to protect others. There was a small minority who refused to wear masks. They called them muzzles, germ shields, dirt traps. They made people look like pigs. They snipped holes in their masks to smoke cigars. Masks stoked political division, became a symbol of government overreach, inspiring protests and defiant bare-face gatherings. Thousands of Americans were dying... and the infection spread.

San Francisco became the first city to make masks mandatory. They had to be four layers thick. The penalty was \$5-10 or ten days' imprisonment. City prisons swelled to standing room only. A mask-slacker blacksmith stood in front of a drugstore, urging a crowd to dispose of their masks. It was bunk, he said. A hoax. A health inspector tried to lead him into the drugstore to buy a mask. The blacksmith struck him with a sack of silver dollars and knocked him down and started beating him. The inspector fired four times with his revolver. The blacksmith and two bystanders were injured. The blacksmith

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was arrested for disturbing the peace and assault. The inspector was charged with assault with a deadly weapon.

After four weeks, the mask ordinance expired. The spread had been halted, but a second wave occurred and talk of masks recurred. A bomb was defused outside the office of the chief health officer. A medical historian has written, "Things were violent and aggressive, but it was because people were losing money. It wasn't about a constitutional issue; it was a money issue." In 1918, there was no government assistance to speak of.

When the mask ordinance went back into effect in December of 1918, the Anti-Mask League was formed by a political opponent of the mayor. The masks became a political symbol. They argued the ordinance was unconstitutional.

The second wave had struck in October, and during that month, 100,000 of its victims died in the United States alone. By October 4, thirty-five Texas counties reported about two thousand cases. By the end of the month, that number had multiplied to an astonishing 106,978 new cases. Eleven African-American workers on a remote Angelina County farm died without ever receiving any medical help at all.

Dr. Curtis Atkinson of Wichita Falls was the Post Surgeon at the hospital at Call Field, a training facility during the war. His memories of the day the influenza arrived included the suddenness of it. There was a football game in progress and players started dropping. The commanding officer ordered the game stopped and told sentinels to let no one in. Ambulances rushed men to the hospital which soon filled to capacity. Tents were turned into emergency hospitals. So many men were sick the regular routine was brought to a standstill.

The oilfields at Burkburnett were in poor shape in the winter of 1918. Sanitary conditions were bad. A medi-

cal officer and army nurse made daily trips for over a month to care for the sick and needy.

Concordia Cemetery in El Paso had sections for Mormons, Masons, Catholics who were U.S. citizens and Catholics who weren't, buffalo soldiers, Jews, and Chinese. Fort Bliss soldiers were probably the bulk of the victims. The chief of police caught it; detectives and several Texas Rangers died from it. Businesses closed. By the end of 1918, six hundred El Pasoans had died from the flu, when the city's population was about one-tenth of what it is now (682,669).

The soldiers at Camp Bowie in Fort Worth were hit hard. The flu spread quickly, and on September 27, it was reported that there were eighty-one cases in the camp. Well aware of the devastation the flu had wrought in other U.S. cities, most notably at military camps, Fort Worth was, understandably, taking the situation seriously. Dallas leaders, on the other hand, were minimizing the need for concern. On September 29, the Dallas Morning News had a report titled "Influenza Scare is Rapidly Subsiding" — the upshot was that forty-four cases of "bad colds" had been reported in the city, but there was nothing to worry about. In the opinion of the military and civil doctors, the Spanish Influenza scare was unwarranted by local conditions. The few cases of grippie, it was claimed, were to be expected as the result of the recent rainy weather. Just two days later, though, officials were jolted out of their complacency when the (reported) cases jumped to seventy-four.

It was estimated that there were 9,000 cases of Spanish Influenza in Dallas that fall. By the middle of December, when the worst of the outbreak was over, it was reported that there had been over four hundred deaths attributed to the flu and pneumonia in just two and a half months.

Seven hundred cases of influenza were reported to exist among the

soldiers at Camp Logan, near Houston. Conditions at the camp were so bad that medical personnel had to erect temporary emergency hospitals to care for patients.

What about the Jews? There's not a lot of data for individual groups. A statistical search on Texas Jewish deaths in 1918 through findagrave.com reveals a trend. (See chart) Burials in 1918 in five Jewish cemeteries in Texas (Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and El Paso) by month reveals clusters in October and December. October was deadly, but when deaths slowed in November, folks let their guard down, rushed out to celebrate the armistice November 11 and a few weeks later, there was another wave in December. The cause of death is not often shown on this website, but some entries have additional information. Sgt. Nathan J. Black entered the Aviation Corps in 1918, and was sent to Camp Mabry, where he died in October of influenza at the age of twenty-two. Another victim's death certificate stated the cause was pneumonia with Spanish flu listed as the secondary cause.

Roughly half the burials in 1918 occurred in October and December. Compared to the numbers five years earlier and five years later, it becomes obvious that the Spanish flu hit Texas Jewish communities hard, with roughly twice as many deaths as the compared years.

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society in the summer issue of their newsletter called *Legacy* has a good article on the epidemic in New Mexico. The governor ordered the closing of all schools, courts, houses of worship and other public places. All business activity came to a standstill. People were warned to avoid over-eating, working too hard, unventilated rooms, coughing, spitting on the ground, and, curiously, drinking whiskey. Some turned to curanderos (native

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healers) or patent medicine. Vicks VapoRub falsely claimed to prevent or cure the flu. Eating fresh lemons was encouraged, or lots of onions. At least no one would come within six feet of them! Taos mandated masks.

Over 15,000 New Mexicans caught the flu and a high percentage died of it or pneumonia within hours. At least one member of almost every family caught it. All two hundred residents of one town had the flu. There were mass graves; coffins couldn't be made fast enough. Clergymen of all faiths pitched in, including Rabbi Moise Bergman of Albuquerque. He was active in interfaith activities, he sold Liberty Bonds during the war, and helped organize a rally to honor General Pershing, the American commander in Europe. When the epidemic struck Albuquerque, he helped convert a tuberculosis facility to a makeshift hospital for the flu. He raised money for food and medicine. He took a reporter to visit a dying man who was living in poverty to publicize the problem. He helped raise \$10,000 for orphaned children and widows whose wage-earners had died of the flu. He wholeheartedly supported the city commission's decision to extend the quarantine. He said, "It is hard to answer the man who says his business has been hurt by the quarantine but it will be impossible to answer the one who says my child has died because of the neglect of the state."

Business people disagreed, including some of his congregants such as J. A. Weinman, proprietor of the Golden Rule Dry Goods Co. who said "further restriction is entirely useless." More than 1000 New Mexicans died, four times as many who died serving in World War I.

One of the interesting items I ran across in researching plagues and Jews was the practice in some Eastern European Jewish communities of the Black Wedding. One plague-fighting ritual that took root was the grave-


side wedding, which was also known as the plague wedding, or *shvartze khasene* in Yiddish, and likely originated during the cholera outbreaks that ravaged Europe through the 19th century. The thinking behind a *shvartze khasene* was that holding a sacred ceremony among the dead would make the participants and witnesses more likely candidates for divine intervention as, in the Jewish tradition, weddings bring people closer to God. Another old Jewish folk remedy for combating illness involved covering a sick woman with a wedding gown.

For plague weddings, the bride and groom exchanged vows in a cemetery because being surrounded by death was thought to make the holy ritual even more appealing to God. The 1918 wedding between Harry Fleckman and Dora Wisman in Winnipeg was one of a handful of black weddings recorded in North America during the pandemic. A report of the event in *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune* described the scene: "The ancient Jewish 'Song of Life' was played. On the west side of the cemetery at the same time, Jews were chanting the wail of death, as a body was committed to the grave." Following that October 1918 ceremony, the newspaper *The Jewish Exponent* published an editorial criticizing the practice. "The wedding held in a Jewish cemetery last Sunday for the purpose of staying the ravages of the epidemic was a most deplorable exhibition of benighted superstition," it read. "Unfortunately, the publicity given to the occurrence will convey to many people that this is a custom sanctioned and encouraged by the Jewish religion. The people who do such things do not know what Judaism means."

We can feel such compassion for those who lived during the 1918 pandemic. They barely had telephones. No TV, no internet, no Zoom. The lack of reliable information, the ineffectual federal response and leadership, and the lies and half-truths they were fed -

what a terrible way to get through an event this horrifying.

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# Meet Your Board

**Elaine Albin** grew up in the Boston area. She married a naval officer, Warren Kline, and they lived in many cities in the USA before

he retired, and they settled in Corpus Christi. Warren passed away in 1982, and in 1989, Elaine married Phil Albin. She has three children and was an educator in San Antonio and Corpus Christi before her retirement. Elaine and Phil live in Rockport. She is a member of the Awards Committee.



**Willie Braudaway** is a native of Iowa, but has been a Texan since 1990. She is the librarian at Southwest Texas Junior College, 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!

**Gayle Feldman Cannon** is a retired lawyer now living in Austin. She is a transplanted Dallasite and has three children, three step-children, sixteen



grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She is a widow and active

in the Austin Jewish community and is a strong supporter of Congregation Beth Israel in Austin. Her interests include genealogy, reading, traveling and theater. Gayle serves as co-chair of the Speaker's Bureau.

**Lynda F. Furgatch** was raised in Abilene and now lives in Brownsville. She participated in TOFTY (now NFTY-TOR).



She is married to Michael Furgatch, who is also a TJHS

Board Member, and they have two children and three grandchildren. Her many activities include Sisterhood President, member of Hadassah, hospital volunteer, and she helps coordinate Temple social activities. She lived in Puerto Rico for eight months before the hurricane. Lynda has been a T.V. and radio spokesperson and has been in commercials since 1975. She has worked in customer service for Ford for twenty-three years and enjoys cooking, exercising, and reading.

**Dolly Moskowitz Golden** grew up in Baytown, Texas. She married Ed



Golden from Corsicana and they settled in Austin, where she now lives. Ed passed away in 2018. Dolly

is a certified travel counselor, and continues to plan trips. She has visited two-hundred sixteen countries and plans to visit the rest. She has two children and one granddaughter who live in Austin. Dolly is chair of the

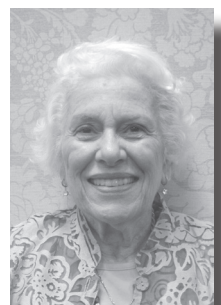
Traveling Exhibit Committee.

**Jan Siegel Hart** grew up in Dublin, Texas and is a grandchild of immigrants from Russia that were part of the Galveston Movement. She attended the University of Texas, Kilgore Junior College, and Lon Morris Junior College. She and



Charles Hart (TJHS Past President) met at Echo Hill Ranch in 1960, and were married in 1961. They have three children and six grandchildren. Jan participated in several productions at Temple Civic Theater and sang with Sweet Adelines, Int. for many years. She is the author of three children's books based on her family histories. For over twenty-five years she has performed a one woman show as "Hanna, the Immigrant" for groups across the nation. Her presentation was selected for Texas Commission on the Arts Touring Program in 2001-2003. Jan has served in many positions of Texas Jewish Historical Society, and currently is co-chair of the Speaker's Bureau.

**Samylu Michelson Rubin** was born and raised in Gonzales. She attended the University of Texas and received a



BS in Education in 1955. She and Norman Rubin married in 1956, and raised their three sons in Hallettsville. Samylu has eleven grandchildren.

In Hallettsville she taught first grade for eight years before opening a private kindergarten. She loves the outdoors and plants and

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has served the Texas Jewish Historical Society as Corresponding Secretary.

**Phyllis Gerson Turkel** is proud to be a “BOI”—born on the island of Galveston, but has lived in Houston for many years. She has been in retail and has even sold mattresses over the internet! She is now a program director at a retirement community, and says this is the best job she has ever had! Phyllis is a walker and has walked half marathons and marathons. She walked Phoenix Rock and Roll with her daughter in January, 2018.

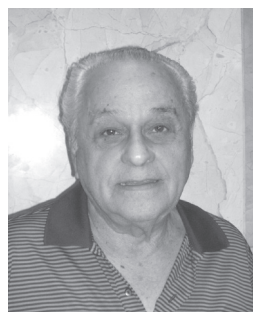


**Cynthia Roosth Wolf** was born in Galveston and grew up in Tyler. She graduated from Newcomb College of Tulane University in 1968 with a B.A. in English. In 2000 she received a Bachelor of Music from Lamar University in Beaumont, where she lives with her husband, Michael, who is also a TJHS Board Member. She taught English and History at Randolph Air Force Base, and English and Spanish at Central High School in Beaumont. She has been active in her community, and served as co-chair of the Soviet Resettlement Project in Beaumont, as well as to President of Sisterhoods in Fort Smith, Arkansas and Beaumont. She has served on the board of Women of Reform Judaism at the district and national level. Currently, Cynthia is a board member of Catholic Charities of



Southeast Texas, Symphony of Southeast Texas, and Temple Emanuel. She serves as Memorial Resolution Chair of Rotary Club of Southeast Texas, and is an interfaith panelist for Lamar University.

**Louis Katz** retired as vice president of Wholesale Plumbing Supply and is now a real estate investor. Louis is past president of Wholesale Distributors; member of the Texas Association of Fairs; Fort Bend County Fair and Rodeo, Stafford; Missouri City Lions Club; life member of Hadassah; advisor to Loeb AZA; life member of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; Treasurer of the Stafford Historical Society; and member of Congregation Beth Yeshurun. He is married to Joan, also a TJHS Board Member.



**Howard “Rusty” Milstein** was born in Longview and still lives there. He is retired from Industrial Steel Warehouse and is married to Mitzi Milstein, 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.

**Sharon Gerber** is from Houston and married to TJHS 1st Vice-President, Sonny Gerber. They have six children, each of whom are married, and eight grandchildren—seven of them girls! She works as a psychoanalyst in private practice, and likes to read, crochet, and exercise.



**Barbara Rosenberg**, TJHS Past President, lives in Sugar Land, Texas, with her husband, Ben, TJHS Treasurer. She is a native-born Texan who 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 Master’s degree in Speech Pathology. She has worked in schools, hospitals, and has had a private practice. Barbara visits Jewish hospital patients as a volunteer of Houston’s Jewish Chaplaincy; is a docent for the Fort Bend Museums; is a member of a citizen’s advisory committee (CAP) for a chemical company; and is a former member of the Ft. Bend County Historical commission. Barbara enjoys flower arranging and gardening and is Treasurer of the Sugar Land Garden Club. 



# 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](mailto:editor@txjhs.org). We want our archives to be as complete as possible.*

## The Laurens Duel

by Vickie Vogel

Since the Briscoe Center for American History is closed due to the pandemic, I can't access the TJHS archives. I scrounged through my old notes to see what I could find, and I ran across an article on Levy L. Laurens. It's been in my computer since 2014, but I couldn't remember it at all or how it got there. Eventually, I realized it's something former TJHS board member Kay Goldman sent me, and I didn't use it because it isn't in our archives. Under these circumstances, I'm using it, and then it WILL be in our archives.<sup>1</sup>

Laurens was a journalist in the early nineteenth century, and made his way to Texas to cover the events of Texas' struggle for independence from Mexico. He was in his early twenties and was looking for adventure.

Born in Charleston, South Carolina around 1815 to a Jewish family, he went to live with his Uncle Mordecai Manuel Noah at an early age. Noah has been called the most influential Jew in the United States in the early 19th century. His multi-faceted career included stints as a journalist, playwright, politician, lawyer, judge, military officer, and utopian Zionist. He studied law in Charleston, but I couldn't find his exact connection to Laurens. Other

researchers have also been unable to trace his lineage.<sup>2</sup> One theory is that Manuel Noah, Mordecai's father who disappeared for at least twenty years after the death of his wife Zipporah at Charleston, must have remarried and fathered a daughter who became Levy Laurens' mother.<sup>3</sup>



*Mordecai Manuel Noah*

Noah was a complex man, a proponent of slavery and involved in the Tammany Hall political machine, but his most ambitious undertaking was to purchase land near Buffalo, New York to establish a Jewish colony for immigrants. The project had little support and failed.<sup>4</sup>

Noah taught Laurens the newspaper business, and he became a columnist at the *New York Evening Star* which was owned by Noah.

In 1837, Laurens moved to Houston, population around 2,000, to start a newspaper in the newly independent Texas. Before this could be done, he was hired by the Texas legislature to serve as secretary or reporter for the Texas Congress of 1837 and establish a government press at a salary of \$8.00 per day. Laurens' entree into Texas was paved by his famous uncle.

Houston was small, but growing rapidly, and there were not enough boarding houses to accommodate everyone. Laurens and three others shared

a room with Dr. Chauncy Goodrich, an assistant surgeon in the Army of Texas.<sup>5</sup> Goodrich had his pocket robbed and accused Laurens, who was so outraged he challenged Goodrich to a duel to defend his honor. Dueling rules allowed Goodrich to choose the weapon. He picked rifles at 65 yards. Meeting on a field outside town in the early morning hours of June 25, 1837,<sup>6</sup> Goodrich fired first and hit Laurens through both legs, the bullet entering his right thigh and passing through his left.<sup>7</sup> His wounds were tended to, but two days later he died.

His obituary read, "Never, we believe, have our columns contained a more shocking obituary than the present; never we hope, will a similar one be furnished. DIED In this city on Tuesday last, Levy L. Laurens, aged about 21 late reporter of the house of representatives, and recently from New York City, of a wound received in a duel, at the hand of Dr. Chauncy Goodrich, recently from Vicksburg, Mississippi."

The city was shocked and many mourned the loss of this young man with a promising future. The only Houston newspaper, fringed in black (a tribute usually reserved for presidents and the like) wrote, "When the capital is in mourning, it is meet that the *Telegraph* should display the emblems of wo[e]. The decease of the unfortunate Laurens, which has called forth this demonstration of sorrow, has thrown a pervading gloom over our

*continued on page 17*



city, and caused a more general manifestation of sincere grief, than we have ever before witnessed. This singularly interesting young man had resided in this place but a few weeks; a portion of which time, he was engaged in discharging the duties of reporter of the house of representatives: yet within this short period, his gentlemanly deportment and fascinating manners attracted to him a large circle of affectionate acquaintances, who viewed in him one of the noblest ornaments of society: a friend, whose generous bosom was inspired by every virtue which can elevate the human character, and ameliorate the condition of mankind. Frank, sincere, affectionate and generously confiding, he seemed incapable of suspecting crime in others. . .”<sup>8</sup>

Francis Moore, Jr. (1808-1864) was the editor of the *Telegraph* and a friend of Laurens. In his grief he wrote, “could we have been apprised of the transaction in season, would we have thrown our own bosom before the accursed rifle uplifted for his destruction, and prevented the foul deed, or perished in the attempt.”<sup>9</sup>

A meeting was held and a resolution passed expressing remorse and regret and a determination to erect a monument in Laurens’ memory. Copies of the resolution appeared in the *Charleston Mercury* and the *New York Evening Star*. Friends in New Orleans passed an additional resolution, calling Laurens brilliant and talented.

As other newspapers picked up the story, there was a call to end dueling. Houstonians were so angry, Goodrich was forced to leave the city. He relocated to San Antonio, tried to kill a man, and was shot to death. The *Times-Picayune* opined “who shedders [sic] man’s blood; by man should his blood be shed.”

Two years later, the paper ran another story on Laurens, which indicates he had been well known there. It was

reported that the sum missing from Goodrich’s clothing was a single \$1,000 bill. Of the four other men sharing the room, one of them was a man surnamed Stanley, the son of the ex-governor of Carolina who served as Laurens’ second. Goodrich, who later recanted his accusation,<sup>10</sup> had nightmares about the event and had become an alcoholic, before quarreling with a gambler in San Antonio who shot and then stabbed him.

Stanley had remained in Houston and later paid a \$1,000 bill to a man to bring goods so Stanley could start a mercantile business. Suspicious, the man told a friend and they believed this was Goodrich’s money. The statute of limitations for theft had passed, but Stanley was being held for stealing \$500 from another man in Houston.

In 1840, Texas passed a law against dueling. Eight years after Laurens’ death, the new Constitution of Texas

outlawed dueling. The practice did not end, but it gradually fell into disuse. The tragedy of Levy Laurens no doubt provided impetus for the law.

Goldman muses that Laurens may possibly be the first Jew to die in Houston and was probably buried in the City Cemetery or Founders Cemetery, platted in 1836. The cemetery filled up, was no longer used, and became overgrown and neglected. Many markers disappeared and graves could not be located. At any rate, Laurens’ gravesite is unknown.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Kay Goldman, “Adventure, Honor and Death in 1837 Houston: Levi L. Laurens, Jewish Newspaperman,” unpublished
- <sup>2</sup> Goldman states Ira Rosenswaiké discovered Laurens was a nephew of Noah, but could not determine how he was related.

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## Contributions

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

### In Honor of

the 112th birthday anniversary of  
Frances Rosenthal Kallison

### From

Bobbi Kallison Ravicz

### In Memory of

Abbi Michelson

### From

Jan and Charles Hart, Paula & Amy Lovoi,  
Becca & Thomas Brocato, Sally Drayer,  
Sandy and Carol Dochen, Leslie and Anita Feigenbaum,  
Brad and Jennifer Greenblum, Neil and Betty Gurwitz,  
Louis and Joan Katz, Harold and Jean Karren  
John Campbell and Sheldon Lippman, Alan Laves,  
Pacey and Myra Laves, Susan and Bob Lewis,  
Stephen and Joanne Peck, Robyn and Austin Pecora,  
Gregg and Michelle Philipson, Vance Rodgers  
Barbara and Ben Rosenberg, Sherwin Rubin,  
John and Mary Saunders, Davie Lou and Jack Solka,  
Shapiro Family Philanthropic Fund of Dallas,  
Tracy and Rob Solomon, Diane Swan, Phyllis Turkel,  
Mrs. Hugh Wolf, Ethel Zale, Barbara Spiegel,  
Jill, Barbara, and Harvey Goldstein, Paula and Rick Stein,  
Barbara and Larry Babow, Ronnie Stein and Family

email for him and wrote asking for memories of living in the house. He replied with several wonderful stories about their seven years there.

"One day the doorbell rang, and a couple of young men who were Mormon missionaries were reading the plaque. When Lynn (in her shorts and T-shirt) answered the door, the boys asked, 'Is your Mother at home?' Lynn was so flattered she asked them to come in. They enjoyed such an interesting religious conversation that Lynn invited them to Shavuot-Confirmation services at Temple that night. They had never been in a Temple, so their attendance was quite a novel experience for them.

"Another time, the exterior of our freestanding garage needed painting. The painter who was awarded the contract rode his bicycle to our home, with a can of paint suspended from each handle bar. In applying paint to the garage, he started at the bottom and worked up to the top but failed to use drop cloths. For a few weeks thereafter, part of our lawn was blanketed with white paint and the bottom part of the garage had somewhat of a 'Jackson Pollock' look.

"For daughter Heather's third birthday party right near Halloween, the weather was terrible, so the 'trick-or-treat' party moved to the upstairs of

the house. Each child would knock on a door of the bedrooms, bathrooms, and closet, to claim their goodies from one of the mommies."


Rabbi Jimmy kindly sent memories and although several of them appeared in his new book, *Ramblings of a Texas Rabbi*. I'm including them for historic relevance.

"I moved into 4602 Woodrow the summer of 1976. Shelley moved in August 1977, when we were married. In the summer of 1978, the Congregation sold the house and we moved into our own home on Chantilly. "When I interviewed for the job as Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, I was asked about my use of the home owned by the Temple (called the "Rabbinage"). The concern of the Chair of the board, a past president, was 'how can you manage to live in the house since you are single?' I smiled and said that I was not a confirmed bachelor but if I were hired, my mother would be ecstatic. The Chairman said that every single rabbi who had come to B'nai Israel had married while here.

"Rabbi Silverman married a Galveston girl, and went on to become the Rabbi of Temple Emanu El in New York. Rabbi Cohen married a Galveston girl and served sixty-four years. PS: I did marry Shelley Nussenblatt,

a BOI (born on the Island) a year later. I told the president that the master bedroom, which was the top half of the second floor of the "Rabbinage" was larger than my apartment in Austin where I was the Hillel Director.

"After moving to Galveston and into the house, I realized that there was a lawn to be mowed. I didn't ask anyone, and went out and bought a lawn mower. It seemed to me a great way to exercise and lose weight. The day after I mowed the front yard, the president of the Congregation called to ask if that was me doing the yard. When I told him it was, he explained that they did not pay me to do the yard and it was not acceptable. It was reported that some town folk saw me doing the yard and wondered if that was appropriate. From then on a yard person came to the Rabbinage regularly to keep up the yard and plant beds."

What a pleasure it has been to share history with my friend and to preserve stories of lives lived in a cherished family home. This journey has kept a friendship fresh and interesting and helped fill in some of the gaps of knowledge about what happened in the "Big House" in Galveston. Without my Texas Jewish Historical Society connections this information would have been lost to my friends and the Society. 

## 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 Davie Lou Solka at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) or 512-527-3799.

**If you need TJHS membership applications for an event, program, personal use, etc., please contact Rusty Milstein at [hrmilstein@prodigy.net](mailto:hrmilstein@prodigy.net).**



# The TJHS is Accepting Nominations for Two Outstanding Recognition Awards for the Preservation of Texas Jewish History

Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS), founded in 1980, is seeking nominations for Outstanding Recognition Awards in two areas: (1) Significant Historic Site Preservation (awarded first to Leon and Mimi Toubin for the restoration of the Orthodox Synagogue originally in Brenham and moved to Austin, in order to continue as a sacred place for Jewish worship services) and (2) Extraordinary Historic Project (awarded first to Rabbi Jimmy Kessler for the 1980 founding of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, which continues to educate, to preserve stories, and to archive Texas Jewish History).

TJHS now seeks your help to identify and honor those individuals who have made a significant and lasting impact on the preservation of Texas Jewish History. Only one award per year can be given in each category; but it is not mandated to be given yearly, only when an outstanding accomplishment merits the award. Recognitions as determined by TJHS Award Committee will be presented at TJHS Spring Annual Gathering. Applications must be received by July 15, 2021 and mailed to Award Chair, Texas Jewish Historical Society, P. O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193 or [awardchair@txjhs.org](mailto:awardchair@txjhs.org).

## Application Form

Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Contact Information of Nominee(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name and Contact Information of Person(s) Recommending Nominee(s) for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Category of nomination:

☐ Significant Historic Preservation

☐ Major Historic Project

In the packet that you will return with this sheet as your cover page, please include the following:

- Complete description of the accomplishment
- Reasons that you are submitting this nomination and how you became aware of this accomplishment
- Pictures and other documentation
- Impact of this accomplishment and how it has and will continue to make a difference now and in the future on the ongoing story of the Jews of Texas
- Short bio of nominee(s)

Thank you for helping us recognize deserving individuals!

*Send applications to: Award Chair, Texas Jewish Historical Society,  
P. O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193 or [awardchair@txjhs.org](mailto:awardchair@txjhs.org)*



# The Galveston Movement

*In 1907, European Jews began coming to the United States via Galveston, Texas. They were routed from locations along the East Coast to relieve crowding in overpopulated cities and prevent a public wave of anti-Semitism, which could lead to immigration restrictions. This immigration continued until 1914 and became known as the Galveston Movement.*

## Joe & Lena Lewis

by Sheldon Ike Lippman

By 1913, both Joe and Lena Lewis had immigrated from Salat, Lithuania to Houston, Texas. The following excerpt about their arrival in Galveston was taken from an article published in the TJHS News Magazine in February 2019.

Leah Melamed and Hirsch Jassel Luria were married in January 1908, in the *shtetl* Salat, Lithuania. Leah was born in Salat on December 24, 1887. Her parents, Isaac and Fruma Mira Melamed, had seventeen children (twelve survived to adulthood) of which Leah was the eldest. Hirsch was born in Pumpane, Lithuania, on August 16, 1886. His parents, Meyer and Liba Luria, had eight children.

Hirsch lived in Salat with Leah after their wedding and most likely



*Joe & Lena Lewis in front of their kosher meat market at 1914 Hamilton Street.*

worked on the dairy farm with Leah's father, Isaac. These times were difficult; the economy of Salat did not make it easy to make a living.

The history of Jewish people in

this part of the world is filled with thousands of stories of harassment, threats, and worse. Jewish families were being torn from their homes. By 1912, a young Hirsch and Leah and all the Melamed family, having been forced to leave their dairy farm, made a decision to go to America. Lithuania was no longer welcoming or safe.

Hirsch, Leah, and the Melamed family moved to Riga to await their time for passage to America. Leah and her sisters worked as wig makers for Hassidic women until the time came for them to depart.

On his own at age twenty-six, Hirsch boarded the ship, *Breslau*, in Bremen, Germany, on May 2, 1912. The *Breslau* was headed to Galveston, Texas.

Hirsch had a cousin, Aaron Luria, who immigrated to America through New York in 1906. By 1908, Aaron, who had changed his last name to Lewis, was settled in Houston, Texas, with his wife Rosa (Stein). Both Aaron and Rosa had immigrated from Kavensko, Russia.

Hirsch Jassel Luria disembarked in Galveston on May 24, 1912. The ship's manifest identified his profession as "butcher." Joe was headed to Houston where his cousin Aaron and family lived. Joe adopted his cousin's



*Melameds/Heyman Family. Back : Ben, Joe, Edith, Sam, Frieda, Robert, Simon. Front: Helen, Lena, Isaac (father), Morris, Fruma Mira Luria (mother), Ethel, Albert.*

*continued on page 25*



# The 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.

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

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

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Please detail the timeline of your project.

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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](mailto:grantchair@txjhs.org).*



# Gerber Family History

by David Gerber

This is a history as I know it of my father's and mother's sides of the family as told by David Gerber.

## First, my father's side

My paternal grandfather was Morris J. (MJ) Gerber. This is what I know, as told to me by my dad, Saul Gerber and his sister, Ida Schmidt (my Aunt Ida) and Mimi Cohen (Aunt Mimi) over the years.

MJ was born in a small town near Odessa, Russia. He said goodbye to his parents, never to see them again.

He arrived in New York in 1906. He started a business of blocking hats for men. He was successful and the union tried to organize his shop. MJ fought it and he had an unexplained fire which destroyed the shop.

He rebuilt it, and a year later, after ongoing conflict with the union, the shop had a second fire which destroyed it again.

With that, he moved the family



*Saul and MJ Gerber at Gerber's Restaurant Supply Co.*

*SAUL GERBER* ↗



Thanks to Sam Zeisman for providing this 1938 photo of the M.M. Society baseball team. This team won two Texas State Jewish Tournaments and a league championship in the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. (Front row) Bob Krakower, Jake Wagner, Maurice Dushkin, Harold Gerson, Fritz Friedman, Willie Levine and Puch Gerson (back row) Saul Gerber, Steve Chasnow, Meyer Kuper, Sid Solomon, Dar Scher, Chill Schwartz and Sam Zeisman, manager; (seated) Newt Schwartz, bat boy.

1932-1933.

to Miami, Florida in the mid-1920s where he went into the real estate business.

In those days Florida was booming; real estate brokerage was totally unregulated and people were buying and selling swampland on street corners.

MJ did very well and was able to provide for a nice house for his family, which I saw years later (in the 1950s) with my Dad.

My Dad recalled one of many hurricanes which blew the roof totally off the house and scared them to death, but thankfully no one was injured.

Then in 1929 the bottom fell out of the real estate boom in Florida, right before the stock market crash on Wall Street in New York. Grandpa MJ Gerber lost everything and was quite destitute.

Somehow he knew the Farb family in Galveston, Texas and Mr. A.C. Farb came to Miami, and helped the family load up their possessions to make the long road trip to Texas. You can imagine what poor condition the roads were in those days. Mr. Farb remained a close friend of MJ and they invested together in several real estate develop-

ments in Houston over the years.

They arrived in Galveston in 1929. Galveston was still recovering from her own hurricane in 1900 which killed over 10,000 people (still the largest natural disaster in United States history to this day). Only one year later MJ moved to Houston.

My dad Saul enrolled in San Jacinto High School in Houston and graduated in 1933. His classmates were Walter Cronkite and Congressman Bob Casey. That same year, MJ purchased a small company which sold used commercial refrigerators to the restaurants in town. The company had closed, and MJ borrowed the money from a local Jewish banker, Irving Shlenker, and renamed the business Gerber's Restaurant Supply Company.

MJ's brother IJ Gerber (Sonny's Dad) had immigrated to Houston by that time as well.

Over the years the restaurant supply customers requested additional inventory, so MJ started selling ranges, ovens, fryers, and also the tables and chairs for the dining room and the utensils, such as chinaware, flatware, cutlery, etc.

*continued on page 23*



## In Memoriam

**Elinor Rose Alpert**, TJHS member, Brownsville, died on September 6, 2020. She is survived by Calvin Davidson, Emily Alpert and Bertha Janis, Evelyn Albert and Leon Pesin, Ted and Keren Alpert, and James Alpert; twelve grandchildren; her brother, Gordon Witz; and numerous nieces and nephews.



**Abigail (Abbi) Michelson**, TJHS Board Member, Lockhart, died on September 18, 2020. She is survived by her sons, Jeffery (Shelley) and Jon; sister-in-law, Samylu Rubin (TJHS Board Member), four siblings, numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.



**Norma Rabinovich**, TJHS member, McAllen, died August 11, 2020. She is survived by her children, Diana Berger, Michael (Mickie) Rabinovich, Lisa (Jeff) Humphrey, son-in-law, Bob Berger, sister-in-law, Cecilia Shapiro (TJHS member), four grandchildren and spouses; numerous nieces and nephews.




**Sharla Ruth Aaron Wertheimer**, Houston, TJHS member, died September, 2020. She is survived by her children, Kim Wertheimer, Jane Solimani, Stephen (Gabrielle) Wertheimer, Miles (Mindy) Wertheimer; ten grandchildren; one great-granddaughter; brother, Stuart (Barbara) Aaron; brother-in-law, Harold Kleinman, numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins.



**May their memories  
be a blessing.**

## Guess This Member

Well, no guesses this time—take a good look—you do know this pretty girl and now she is a pretty woman. This little one has been a faithful TJHS Board Member for many years.

Email your guess to Davie Lou Solka at [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) any time beginning Monday, November 23. Entries received before that date will not be considered. Family members and previous winners and their families are not eligible to participate. Good luck! If you'd like to try and stump the TJHS membership, please send your photo to [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org). 



## Mazel Tov

**to the following TJHS Members**

**Dolly Golden**, for receiving the “Love of a Lifetime” Award from the Austin Chapter of Hadassah for her years of commitment to Hadassah. The honor was presented at the chapter’s annual luncheon held virtually November 4, 2020.

**Betty and Dr. Neil Gurwitz**, who celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in October. The Gurwitzs live in Bastrop and are past TJHS Board Members.

*Gerber Family History, continued from page 22*

My dad, Saul, was a talented athlete. He played basketball in high school and was a baseball player, who played Minor League professional baseball in Louisiana for two years during the Great Depression.

In 2006 he was inducted into the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in Houston. However, in 1935 or 1936 MJ told Saul to forget baseball and come into the growing restaurant supply business with him, which he did. They later opened a retail china shop in downtown Houston which also did very well.

My dad played poker every Monday night for over 50 years with the same group. They rotated houses every week. I remember as a youngster, I was told to leave the room when their jokes were “off color.”

I have very fond memories of MJ, my “Grandpa Gerber.” He was a gentleman, very dapper and well-dressed and although of very serious demeanor, had a great sense of humor and a twinkle in his eye.

*continued on page 24*



I think he passed on the sense of humor to my dad Saul, who was a renowned joke teller.

MJ was very charitable. I remember many orthodox Jewish "collectors" coming to the store for donations and he never turned anyone down. He also bought Israel Bonds and was honored by the Zionist Organization of America.

He was one of the founding members of Congregation Beth Yeshurun which was a merger of an orthodox and a conservative synagogue in the 1940s, Adath Yeshurun and Beth El. Today Beth Yeshurun

is the largest conservative synagogue in North America with over 2,000 families. The original charter called for a conservative service and a more traditional orthodox service which is maintained today.

He was also instrumental in sending arms to Israel shortly after the founding of the Jewish State. I was told these were Czech arms sent to South America, then rerouted to Houston.

MJ's first wife, my grandmother, Sonia Gerber I remember only vaguely since she died in 1950 when I was only eight years old. She immigrated

from the same town in Russia as MJ.

I do remember going to her house and smelling the soup. You could smell her soup when we drove up to her house. She always had a pot of soup on the stove, 24/7. I could not come into the house unless she sat me down at the table to have a bowl of soup.

She was a very warm person, and I remember crying in bed after she died in 1950, since I was not allowed to attend the funeral.

Today, the entire family is buried at the Post Oak Beth Yeshurun cemetery in Houston. MJ bought a large cemetery plot to hold his grave,

Houston Zionist District Yearbook 1977

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*continued on page 25*

### In Memoriam



**MORRIS and SONIA GERBER**

They went through life with an unshakable faith in God and their fellow-men. Modest, quiet and reserved they gave most generously of themselves and their possessions to bring happiness to the lives of those in need. Their saintly touch brought sunshine to those in despair.

Ardent Zionists, they dedicated their lives to the creation of the State of Israel and had the Zehus to witness the creation of the Jewish State.

Many honors were bestowed upon M. J. Gerber, but his greatest happiness was in helping the upbuilding of the State of Israel and the continuation of the Zionist ideal: UNITED JEWISH APPEAL, Bonds of Israel, Jewish National Fund, Histadruth, Hadassah, ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA, in all of these, he built for himself a niche that will forever remain an example to others.

★

*They are gone but their memory will remain in the hearts of  
all who knew them—  
and knowing them, loved them.*



*Sarah and Abe Cohen, Florence Gerber's parents.*



*Gerber Family. Back: Marilyn, Florence,  
and David. Front: Bernard, Sidney.*



Sonia's grave and those of his children, Ida, Saul, Mimi and their spouses.

In 1954, MJ remarried a widow, Minnie Dinerstein. MJ died in 1960 when I was a senior in high school.

***Now for my mother Florence's side of the family:***

My maternal grandparents were Abe & Sarah Cohen. Abe was born in Poland and immigrated to Houston in the early 1900s.

He lived on Henderson Street near Washington Avenue, very close to downtown. Right next to his house was a small grocery store he owned.

It had sawdust on the floors and he slaughtered his own chickens in the land behind the store. He would always give us free candy! The house and store still stand today.

His wife Sarah was born in Safed, (Palestine at that time) and as a very young child immigrated with her brother to Buenos Aires, Argentina in the early 1900s, as they could not obtain visas for the U.S. In 1908 (I believe) her brother came to Houston and she followed shortly thereafter.

When she arrived in Houston she found a childhood friend from Safed, Mr. Alter Greenfield, for whom the



*Saul and Florence Gerber.*

Greenfield Chapel at Congregation Beth Yeshurun is named. Mr. Greenfield tutored the bar mitzvah boys for many years.


She met Abe Cohen and they were soon married. Her child (my Mom Florence) was the oldest of four sisters and one brother. (My mom's photo is attached).

Florence walked two miles to Sam Houston High School, which later became the main post office downtown. The building was since torn down and an office building erected in its place.

My Mom & Dad married in 1940 and had four children of which I am the oldest. I married Janice Zions in 1963 and we have three children and 10 grandchildren in Seattle, Mountain View, California and here in Bellaire.

My mom was a beautiful woman

and very outgoing. She had many friends of all ages. In her later years she made unique jewelry at her home workshop, which she sold through Neiman Marcus.

She and Saul loved to travel, often leaving us young kids at home for six weeks at a time. They joked that they had been around the world and had nowhere else to go! I had a happy childhood with loving parents and grandparents, and miss them to this day. 

***Laurens Duel, continued from page 17***

<sup>3</sup> Ira Rosenswaike, Levy L. Laurens: An Early Texas Journalist, American Jewish Archive, April 1975 [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1975\\_27\\_01\\_00\\_rosenswaike.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1975_27_01_00_rosenswaike.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/mordecai-manuel-noah>

<sup>5</sup> *New Orleans Picayune*, July 18, 1837

<sup>6</sup> Ira Rosenswaike, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> *Picayune*, *op cit*.

<sup>8</sup> *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), July 1, 1837

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> *Evening Star*, July 26, 183

***Galveston Movement, continued from page 20***

name, Lewis; his American name became Joe Harry Lewis.

About one year after Joe's arrival in Houston, Leah Melamed Luria at age twenty-seven boarded the ship, *Cassel*, in Bremen on June 17, 1913. The ship's manifest identified Leah as "housewife." Leah was reunited with her husband when the *Cassel* docked in Galveston on July 7, 1913. Her American name became Lena Heyman Lewis.


The oldest of the Melamed children, Lena had been the last of her ten

siblings to leave Europe and immigrate to America. However, Lena's siblings all went through Ellis Island and ultimately settled in the Elmira and Syracuse, New York area, all with the last name changed from Melamed to Heyman.

Joe's sister Helena Luria, with her husband, Philip Morris, emigrated in 1913 from Lithuania through Galveston and also settled in Houston. Helena was Joe's only sibling to immigrate to America. Five other siblings and their families perished in the Holo-

caust. One sister survived and lived in Barnaul, Siberia.

Joe Harry and Lena operated one of only two kosher meat markets in Houston.

In January 1928, sixteen years after his arrival in the country, Joe petitioned to and became a citizen of the United States of America. Joe died September 1, 1963. Lena died on January 14, 1970. Both are buried side by side at Beth Yeshurun Cemetery (Allen Parkway, Houston). 



## Save the Date

January 29-31,  
2021

Zoom Board Meeting

### *Jewish Girl, continued from page 8*

Their weddings were simple affairs, not quite what I had come to expect of big city weddings. Theirs mostly consisted of finger sandwiches and champagne. Finger sandwiches, I was to learn, were two layers of bread stuffed with tuna or chicken salad. Then they were cut on the diagonal and placed in neat patterns on plates. The most interesting thing about them I still remember is that the bread was colored blue and green, reminding me of how some Easter eggs are colored. I still don't know why they did that to this day! But catering those weddings kept the doors of the synagogue open and that was the important thing.

What those four years in the upper panhandle of Texas taught me is that Jews are the same all over, no matter what size town they are in. The traditions are the same all over in each city big or small. The Jewish community of Wichita Falls was warm and welcoming to the strangers who happened to be there from other parts of the country. They welcomed us as if we were their own children and grandchildren. They became part of our family and we theirs for those four years and I will always be eternally grateful. As we were leaving, and our Air Force days came to an end, the community said, "Y'all come back!" And I knew they meant it, with all their big, sweet Texas hearts.

(Bonnie Flamer lives in Los Angeles, California, and can be reached at [bflamer777@gmail.com](mailto:bflamer777@gmail.com) for comments or information).



## Welcome New Members!

**Joyce Davidoff**  
718 Espoda Drive #B  
El Paso, TX 79912  
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## Directory Changes

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If you have any changes in your information, please send them to [membership@txjhs.org](mailto:membership@txjhs.org)

### *Jewish Athletes, continued from page 6*

1942. Dallas was the last stop in his storied minor league career. He earned the storied nickname "Porky" for passing up on a portion of pork roast at a team function. He was a spare goaltender for both the NHL Detroit Cougars and the Detroit Olympics in the Canadian Pro-League. He moved to the rival American Hockey Association in 1929 where he played most of his impressive pro career. In 1931-32 he was the AHA's top goaltender and was selected to the All-Star team. In 1934 he reprised as an All Star and recorded a 2.02 GAA.

In 1941-42 the veteran tended goal for the expansion Dallas Texans. He was part of a well-publicized stunt which saw a fairly hefty "Porky" Levine race a younger slimmer Fort Worth goaltender during the intermission between the first and second period of a league game. It was quite a spectacle and was reported in all the Texas newspapers! He retired in 1942, and was the AHA leader in games played, games won, games lost, and shutouts. He went to Vancouver to manage the St. Regis Hotel and their hockey team. He was instrumental in paving the way for a young Larry Kwong, the first Asian player to play in the NHL. 



Sam "Porky" Levine



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The Texas Jewish Historical Society has three museum quality photo exhibits, with explanations depicting early Jewish life and contributions. The 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 Dolly Golden at [txjhs\\_exhibits@txjhs.org](mailto:txjhs_exhibits@txjhs.org) or 512-453-8561.

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