

# The Texas Jewish Historical Society Magazine



August 2022

## Jewish Section of Willow Wild Cemetery in Bonham Consecrated by TJHS by Sally Drayer

Jews have always taken care of their cemeteries; they are holy ground and to be holy ground the cemetery must be consecrated. This land is set aside and dedicated for this sole purpose.

Bonham's Willow Wild Cemetery has had a Jewish cemetery since the late 1870s. It was deeded to the Willow Wild Cemetery by the only survivor of the original Morris Rosenbaum family, Caroline Rosenbaum, who was President of the Hebrew Benevolent Society in April, 1887. She gave the deed to the old cemetery to the Willow Wild board, thereby placing the cemetery in ownership for its care. Few people knew the cemetery existed until 1967, when Sophia Arr, the daughter of another early Bonham

merchant, David Rhine, bequeathed trust earnings from some of her estate in her father's memory to the Fannin County 4-H. The cemetery contains graves of families named Rhine, Levine, Rosenbaum, Lei James Hoffman Brown and unnamed tombstones. Research shows the land was never actually consecrated by a Rabbi or a "learned man."

The purpose of the Summer Board Meeting of TJHS was to learn about the early Jewish merchants who lived in Bonham and to consecrate the cemetery. I contacted the Ritual and Cemetery Director of Congregation Shearith Israel in Dallas, Avi Mitzner, and he agreed to conduct the

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*Members of TJHS, Willow Wild Cemetery Association and the Bonham Community attending Consecration Service.*

# Content

## Quarterly Magazine

The Texas Jewish Historical Society 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Texas Jewish history, oral histories, and requests for assistance with research are welcome, as are photographs and historical documents. We recommend that you provide photocopies of all documents and photographs. Please provide color photocopies or scans at 300 dpi or greater in gif, tif, or jpg format, and send electronically to editor@txjhs.org or by mail to Texas Jewish Historical Society, P. O. Box 10193, Austin, Texas. 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.

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## Save the Date

**October 16, 2022**

Zoom Board Meeting.  
Link will be provided prior to meeting.

## Save Postage:

Notify TJHS if your address changes or if you will be away from your home when the TJHS Magazine will be delivered.

**The deadline for the November 2022 TJHS Magazine is Friday, October 14.**

# Message from the President

by Sheldon Lippman



Our TJHS 2022 Summer Board Meeting was a mitzvah!

After two years of Zoom-only meetings, TJHS held its first “hybrid” Board meeting in the North Texas city of Bonham, with both in-person and Zoom participants. And the events in Bonham turned out to be an exceptional experience for TJHS.

The City of Bonham and Fannin County Commissioners both issued Proclamations in recognition of TJHS coming to town. Our in-person attendees heard about Jewish merchants and their families who had lived in Bonham in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in a presentation by Malinda Allison of the Fannin County Museum of History. In preparing for our visit, the Museum also produced a

special publication on these early Jewish merchants.

A primary mission for TJHS that weekend, in addition to its Board meeting, was the consecration of Bonham’s only Jewish Cemetery. Most of the attending TJHS members got an advanced look at this plot of land that sits on a gently sloping hillside as part of the sprawling Willow Wild Cemetery with over 10,000 gravesites (including that of former US Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, Bonham’s most famous son).


There was no denying that the Jewish Cemetery section had been neglected for decades. We heard a presentation about the cemetery by Lou Ashmore, of the Willow Wild Cemetery Association, who described their plans for securing the cemetery’s future. At the Sunday morning TJHS Board Meeting, a grant was approved to help preserve this sacred spot.

In preparing for our weekend in Bonham, I had read that there had been no Jews there since 1930. However, at the cemetery consecration we met a married couple from Bonham who had read in the local newspaper about the TJHS meeting and the consecration. This couple was Jewish but had “kept a low profile.” The husband was

originally from New York but has lived in Bonham for 20 years. Now we know, there are at least 2 Jews in Bonham, and they want to be buried in the Jewish Cemetery as well as bury the ashes of the husband’s deceased parents.

TJHS in Bonham sparked a renewed interest in its Jewish heritage. We honored those Jewish citizens who lay in untended plots, and we kickstarted restoration of a burial site that will be forever consecrated as a Jewish Cemetery. This was a meeting that resulted in a good deed. Future TJHS meetings should be as meaningful and purposeful as this one and past TJHS meetings.

Officials in Bonham recognized the opportunity for welcoming TJHS to their city. I ask TJHS members to help identify other Texas cities and towns where holding a meeting there would be of mutual benefit. This is not just the responsibility of the TJHS Meetings Committee; it will handle the logistics once a location is identified. TJHS members must be the catalysts to make such meetings happen.

I invite all TJHS members to submit ideas for future in-person meeting locations to [president@txjhs.org](mailto:president@txjhs.org). 

## We Need Your Stories!

The Texas Jewish Historical Society would like to print your story if you or your family immigrated to the United States from the former Soviet Union, South Africa, India, or other countries. We have received many stories—and still want to include them—from families who immigrated during the earlier part of the twentieth century, but realize that our beautiful Texas history is much more than those stories. Help us tell the rest of the story and contact [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org) if you will include your family’s history in *The TJHS Magazine*.



Row 1 – Sheldon Lippman, John Campbell, Hollace Weiner, Michael Furgatch, Kathy Kravitz  
 Row 2 – Mel Eichelbaum, Louis & Joan Katz, Joyce Davidoff, Helen Wilk, Joan Linares  
 Row 3 – Rusty Milstein, Dolly Golden, Davie Lou Solka, Joyce & Marc Wormser, David Vogel  
 Row 4 – John Campbell, Amy Milstein, Cindy Lindauer, Paula Stein, Michael & Cynthia Wolf  
 Row 5 – Eric Nelson, Susan Novick

## Notes from the Board Meeting, July 17, 2022

- A Grant was awarded to the Willow Wild Cemetery Association for \$5,000 to improve the landscaping, clean ten gravestones, and add metal markers to identify each gravestone in the Jewish section of the Willow Wild Cemetery. (See story and photos on page 1.) The name on the Grant awarded to Gabrielle Dyer at the April Board Meeting should have been Gabrielle Lyle.
- Total membership now stands at 502.
- Articles from immigrants to Texas from South Africa, Russia, and other countries during the 1970s and 1980s are welcomed for publication in *The TJHS Magazine*. Send information to [editor@txjhs.org](mailto:editor@txjhs.org)
- The next Board Meeting will be via Zoom on October 16, 2022, and the Annual Gathering in April, 2023 will be held in Austin.
- The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, located on the UT/Austin campus, is now open to the public, and plans are underway for an intern for the fall semester to work on the TJHS Collection.
- There have been 632 new names added to the Texas Cemetery Database in 267 known Jewish cemeteries.
- Two awards were presented by TJHS at Texas History Day in April in the category of Jewish History. The winners were Shreeya Madhavanur from Greenhill School, Dallas and Srijan Sundar from Plano East Senior High School. (See article on page 18.)
- It was announced that the James and Rosalie Alexander Trust had bequeathed a \$100,000 gift to TJHS. The Executive Committee will consider recommendations on how to use this gift.

# Pictures from the Board Meeting



*Malinda Allison, Fannin County Historical Museum, discussed "Jewish Merchants of Bonham."*



*Emma Trent presented a virtual tour of Sam Rayburn House after A/C issues caused the TJHS tour to be cancelled.*



*Board meeting – Susan Zack Lewis, David Beer, Charles & Jan Hart, Barbara Stone, Jane Manaster.*



*TV in Sam Rayburn House.*



*Some of the group in Fannin County Historical Museum.*



*Hybrid TJHS Board Meeting with Vickie Vogel, computers, iPhones, Tablets.*



*In person TJHS Board Meeting – first time in two years!*

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Pictures from the Board Meeting, continued from page 5



*Fannin County Courthouse.*



*Dining Room in Sam Rayburn House.*



*Barbara Rosenberg, Sally Drayer, and Ben Rosenberg led Havdalah Service.*



*TJHS members in front of Sam Rayburn House.*



*TJHS members in front of Fannin County Courthouse.*



*Historic Markers in front of Sam Rayburn House.*



*TJHS members join Willow Wild Cemetery Association and Bonham community members at Consecration Service.*

service. The community of Bonham was invited to attend.

Eighteen TJHS members and people from Bonham and the Cemetery Association gathered at the Willow Wild Cemetery on Sunday afternoon, July 17, 2022, (and yes it was quite warm!) at the Jewish section, which is a tract of land to the right after you enter the cemetery. The Willow Wild Cemetery Association had markers made for the service, which were concrete blocks with Stars of David on them. Chairs had been placed for us under some trees. The cemetery has little shade and there are ten tombstones, scattered in the area.

Mr. Mitzner, explained to all gathered why a cemetery is consecrated and the procedures. He said that we would walk the area denoted by the markers seven times, and explained how the number seven in Judaism means completion, and in the New Testament seven days for the creation. While walking, he would be reading in Hebrew the first four Psalms aloud. Psalms link the ground to a spiritual purpose and our complete dependence on G-d. He did say that if anyone did not want to walk because of the heat, they could walk

one circuit.

We walked seven times around the area, beginning in the southeast corner then to the northeast. After the third time around, someone did ask him if he was counting and he said he was! In all about seven people from Bonham and eighteen TJHS members walked.

When the consecration part of the service was finished, the group sat/ stood, and the next part of the service was explained. A funeral service was conducted because the cemetery had tombstones in it. Names of the people buried there were read twice, in Hebrew then in English. Mr. Metzner explained the Kaddish, and the meaning of placing a rock on each grave. I brought a bag of rocks and everyone in attendance took a rock, and placed them on the tombstones which ended the service.

Malinda Allison (who lives in Honey Grove but volunteers and does a lot of community work in Bonham) began researching the Jewish merchants after I was there in 2020, and has self-published a book, *The Jewish Merchants of Bonham*. It's full of information/pictures about the settlers and their places of business. She has given a copy to

TJHS for our archives. If anyone is interested in reading the book, please let me know and I'll get you in touch with her.

Mr. Mitzner will have a certificate made for the consecration of a cemetery. It will be presented to the community and we will make sure it's recorded with the County Clerk, so there is documentation that anyone who is Jewish can be buried there.

I asked several people for their comments/feedback regarding the consecration and the service:

Emily Porter is a native of Bonham and her family goes back several generations. She remembers her mother, who was born in 1920, talking about the Jewish merchants. She found the service extremely interesting, and said, "We don't know anything about Jewish traditions. Most of the people in Bonham have no connections to anyone Jewish." She brought several friends with her, and she told me that they found the reason for walking seven times around reminded them of the sev-



*John Campbell & Sheldon Lippman with one of four concrete Star of David corner markers to indicate perimeter of Jewish cemetery.*

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**Bonham, continued from page 7**

en days of creation. What interested them also was the placing of rocks on the tombstones. She appreciated very much how Avi explained everything he was doing. She said she didn't realize how much the city owed to the early Jewish merchants in beginnings of Bonham.

Lou Ashmore serves as the Secretary/Treasurer to both the Willow Wild Foundation and the Willow

Wild Cemetery Association for the Willow Wild Cemetery. She also volunteers as the Interim Services Manager for day-to-day operations of the cemetery. She serves as the liaison for the Cemetery and TJHS. She told me she was "blown away by everything." She continued, saying, "To preserve something eternal is emotional because it's so reverent to traditions of the Jewish people, and it's



*One of seven times group walked perimeter of cemetery with Avi Mitzner*



*Avi Mitzner explaining Jewish rituals.*



*Sally Drayer, Marilyn Lippman, and Sheldon Lippman with tombstone in cemetery.*

a cultural experience I've never had and will probably never experience again." She's in awe that TJHS members came to Bonham. Their belief in the Jewish traditions and customs is profound to her. She also said she appreciated Avi taking the time to explain what was happening. Lou said that hearing the meaning of saying Kaddish made a lasting impression on her.

Sonny Gerber is a long-standing member of TJHS, and serves on the Board. He told me it was an honor and privilege to be a witness to the consecration. He mentioned that he was impressed that members of the community also came to honor the Jewish people buried in Willow Wild; that no one has been to the cemetery to honor them in a long time, and that it was an honor to say Kaddish for them.

Jan and Charles Hart also said they've never been to a cemetery consecration and they were also impressed by Avi's service. It was helpful that Avi explained the what and why of the seven circuits. Charles said it was emotional for him to see

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# Texas Education Connections to the Past

## Schools in Texas Named for Jews

by Jane Manaster

When immigrants feel they have secured a livelihood, however humble, their attention may take a step forward. More than a few of the Jewish immigrants who came to Texas in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century turned to education and the arts to fulfill interests beyond day-to-day necessities. These they pursued as well as keen involvement in the synagogues and temples which multiplied over the years, beyond the three known to worshippers in 1900. The Jewish legacy is perpetuated in both the large cities and the more distant, smaller towns.

In Dallas, eight primary schools and a middle school were named after Jewish men who contributed to the city's advance progress, no doubt with support from their wives, whose role was often unsung. They enjoyed a feeling of affiliation and affection for the city that became their lasting home. At least one Texas school in Houston bears the name of a Jewish


woman who contributed her energies to Texas. Dr. Ray K. Daily Elementary School (known as Daily School) opened in Houston in January, 2006. It was named for the first Jewish woman to graduate from a Texas medical school, and the first woman named president of the medical staff at both Memorial Hospital and Jefferson Davis Hospital. Daily also was elected to a HISD trustee position and served for twenty five years, including being elected as the board's first female president. She opened many doors for women, and many of her innovative programs remain in place today.

Among those schools still thriving in Dallas, are those named for Victor H. Hexter and Arthur Kramer who practiced law together for several years as they advanced into civic service. Victor H. Hexter, whose family continues to be well-known in Dallas, was born in Baltimore in 1864 and was granted a law degree

from the University of Texas. He knew Dallas history like the back of his hand and had a special eye for real estate in the city. He was a man of habit: however busy he was in the morning, he returned home for lunch at noon, visited the library, and managed to read a book a day. In his will, he bequeathed money to the library, an unusual measure at the time. Hexter was twice elected to serve as a city councilman and became a member of the Dallas School board where he served as its President in 1907.


Arthur Kramer, the youngest of seven children, was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1880, and moved to Dallas with his family at the age of nine. He received his law degree in Memphis before partnering in a law practice with Hexter from 1902-1912. He became president of A. Harris & Co. working and promoting the company from 1913 until his death in 1950.

Kramer's love of the arts led him to become president of the Dallas Art Association, the Dallas Symphony Society and Dallas Grand Opera Association. This last venture was a story in itself. Kramer strove in vain for years to bring the Met to Dallas. When eventually they had an engagement in New Orleans, he called the Chamber of Commerce and his friends to raise the \$65,000 the Met demanded as a guarantee for four performances in Dallas. As a result of their successful performances, the Met returned for years, no longer requesting funds.

Schools in Dallas bearing Jewish names are Hexter, Kahn, Kramer, Florence Stone, Reinhardt, Sanger, Silberstein, Titcher, and Weisser. How many members attended or remember schools in Texas named in respect for their Jewish forbears? 


### Bonham, continued from page 8

members of the community fully participating, both walking and placing rocks on the tombstones.

As for me, the first time I saw the cemetery in 2020, I thought to myself that TJHS needed to help the community with it in some way. I also feel humbled that we were able to consecrate the cemetery, have a service and say Kaddish, which hasn't been done since the 1930s. I want to again thank the Bonham community and TJHS members that came in the hot weather. We all participated in a mitzvah and in a historic event and I know TJHS is appreciated by the community. 

### Grant Awarded to Willow Wild Cemetery Association, Bonham

At the Board Meeting on July 17, 2022, the Texas Jewish Historical Society approved a grant of \$5,000 for the Willow Wild Cemetery Association in Bonham to help with expenses cleaning up the Jewish Section of the cemetery.

It was also announced that the name on the grant awarded in April to Gabrielle Dryer for travel expenses should have been Gabrielle Lyle. We apologize to Ms. Lyle. 

## FROM OUR ARCHIVES

# Texarkana's Own Prodigy

by Vickie Vogel

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**This column is based on information available in our archives, supplemented by some online research. If you have corrections or additions to this information, 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 and accurate as possible.**

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Yetta Wexler was born in Texarkana, Texas in 1912, the sixth child of Solomon and Naomi Kardamon Wexler and the only one born in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Their son, Max, was born in 1897 and was followed by four daughters: Lena, Fannie, Bessie, and Miriam. The Wexlers fled Czarist Russia in the early 1900s so that Solomon could avoid conscription into the Russian army. Solomon arrived in Texarkana in 1904 and opened a dry goods store. The family joined him there in 1909, as part of the Galveston Movement. After settling in Texarkana, the fifth daughter, Yetta, was born.

Max enrolled in first grade at the age of twelve, so the children teased him. With three years of schooling and seven months of business school, he went out on his own. After working various jobs, he was hired by Four State Grocery Company in Texarkana and stayed with them for some thirty years. In 1944, he opened his own



*Yetta Wexler Schmidt. Image provided by Texarkana Museums System Wilbur Smith Research Archive, courtesy Jamie A. Simmons, TMS Curator*

dry goods store with a partner, Vasco McCoy.<sup>2</sup>

The daughters followed their own tracks. Yetta showed an early talent for piano, demonstrating “absolute pitch,” i.e. the ability to name the exact pitch of any musical tone, at the age of three or four. Her mother told

the sisters’ piano teacher, Bessie Davis Taylor, that Yetta could play everything the others could, and better. The doubtful teacher agreed to hear her play, confirmed her talent, and began her formal training.

At around five years old, the Knabe piano company gave Yetta a

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### Her Picture In Chicago Newspapers



YETTA WEXLER

Yetta Wexler, 12-year-old Austin girl, now playing in the Chicago Symphony orchestra concert, whose pictures appeared in Chicago newspapers following her appearances. Miss Lucile Morley, music editor of the Sunday American-Statesman, in the article below, tells the interesting story of Yetta.

[Her picture in Chicago newspapers. \(1925, Apr 26\). The Austin American \(1914-1973\) Retrieved from https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/her-picture-chicago-newspapers/docview/1620914845/se-2?accountid=7451](https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/her-picture-chicago-newspapers/docview/1620914845/se-2?accountid=7451)

grand piano. She played a Red Cross fund-raising event during World War I and was acclaimed a prodigy. Her teacher took her to concerts to hear great pianists, including the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra which played in the area in 1918. Yetta played for them in the afternoon.<sup>3</sup> By the age of six, Yetta was giving recitals,<sup>4</sup> such as at the University of Texas School of Music where everyone marveled over her genius, calling her “bright intellectually” with “proof of striking brilliancy of mind.” Other

*Piano Recital*

# Yetta Wexler

THE WONDER CHILD

Presented by  
MRS. BESSIE DAVIS TAYLOR and MISS SARAH R. DAY

JUNIOR HIGH AUDITORIUM

Monday Evening, April 12th, 8.30

ADMISSION 50 CENTS

[Display ad 18 -- no title. \(1920, Apr 10\). The Statesman \(1916-1921\) Retrieved from https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-18-no-title/docview/1616995334/se-2?accountid=7451](https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-18-no-title/docview/1616995334/se-2?accountid=7451)

recitals sometimes included a charge up to 50 cents for Yetta’s education fund.<sup>5</sup>

When her piano teacher, Taylor, moved to Austin, she convinced Naomi to let her bring Yetta with her. When Taylor later became ill, Sallie Day and a Miss Whitis became her teachers. They promoted Yetta, and served as teachers, counselors and guardian angels.<sup>6</sup>

Yetta lived for about a year in Austin, where she caught the attention of many professional musicians and teachers. She gave concerts for children, and played for the Lions Club in 1919. They were amazed at her skill, comparing her to Mozart who was also a child prodigy. Yetta stood with her back to the piano while her teacher played chords, which Yetta unerringly identified.<sup>7</sup> In 1920, she played a public recital of Beethoven, Debussy *et al* for hundreds who

marveled at how at ease she was and how self-possessed. The audience showered her with flowers.<sup>8</sup> She also played for the Austin School for the Blind.<sup>9</sup> Bessie Davis Taylor and several other Austin women took the little prodigy to San Antonio to attend a recital by Percy Grainger, the distinguished pianist from Chicago. She played for him at the big luncheon given for him. Grainger called her “unusually gifted” and seated her at his right hand.<sup>10</sup>

Newspaper articles described Yetta as an “eerie” or “unusual” looking child, with straight black hair and, questioning, fathomless eyes, and preternatural solemnity. She seemed to them “set apart.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1925, a newspaper article wrote admiringly of her talent, lamenting that she was moving away to continue her music studies. Famed pianist Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler on

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Austin's Little Musical Genius



YETTA WEXLER,  
The Little Texas Girl Whose Genius on the Piano Makes Musicians Wonder.

Little Miss Yetta Wexler delighted the children of the Texas school for the blind with a piano recital, Tuesday morning, February 17. The marvelous playing of the gifted little girl took the breath of her audience. Her interest in the pipe organ, her announcement to the children that she could read "Texas" when she was shown the map; her telling a child in the low first grade, who was rather timid about reading before precocious Miss Yetta, "Never mind, honey, I'll help you if you do not know the words; break down all barriers that might have been between her and the other children. They loved her from the start.

In the rendition of the following program Yetta showed an interpretative skill that borders on the sublime, when given to one so young in years: Beethoven "Sonata" (first and second movements); "Little Shepherd" (The Busby); "Toy Soldier" (Warner); "Spin ning Song" (Huguenot); "Pierette" (Chaminade); "Robin Redbreast" (Ginco).

The little girl is leaving soon to take up her study of music in New York. It is the wish of all those that have come in touch with her charming little personality and her marvelous playing that the realization of her destiny as a wonderful pianist will be as bright as the beginning portends.

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*Austin's little musical genius.* (1920, Feb 22). *The Statesman* (1916-1921) Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/austins-little-musical-genius/docview/1643630320/se-2?accountid=7451>

a concert tour heard Yetta at the request of her music teacher. Zeisler was not interested in hearing a child play, and was on a tight schedule, but she agreed to hear her at the reception in her honor. As the reception bustled on, the teacher realized Yetta's chance was slipping away. She told Yetta to just go to the piano and start playing. Conversations stopped. Zeisler in-

terrupted her while she was playing the Beethoven sonata in F minor and asked what else she could play. "I can play the second movement of this sonata." "Do you play anything else?" "Dolls," the amused child replied.<sup>12</sup>

Zeisler, who called Yetta "a perfect wonder,"<sup>13</sup> offered to teach her for free if she would move to Chicago where Zeisler lived, and accept a ten-year contract. She pledged to protect Yetta from premature publicity which could be damaging to a young child. Chicago philanthropist A. D. Lasker, formerly of Galveston, and a group of friends guaranteed \$25,000 for her and Naomi's living expenses for those ten years. Naomi, Yetta and one sister moved right away to a small but comfortable apartment, and the rest of the family followed, except for her brother, Max,<sup>14</sup> who also contributed to Yetta's general fund but remained in Texarkana. Wealthy Jews of Chicago added to her education fund, and she was placed in a private school for her general education. Although Yetta could easily play complex classical music, she found other school work somewhat challenging, such as memorizing poetry.<sup>15</sup>

Zeisler arranged for private schooling, medical care, concert tickets, and taught Yetta herself. Under Zeisler's patronage, Yetta appeared with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra when she was twelve years old. A music critic wrote, "Yetta Wexler, a youthful pianist was soloist at the children's concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the afternoon, playing Mendelssohn's 'Capriccio Brillante' with a swiftness and certainty that would have been commendable in a mature artist and [was] bewildering in one of her years. Much applause and an encore fol-

lowed."<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, Zeisler died when Yetta was 15, but her husband, Sigmund, (a retired judge) continued his wife's interest in Yetta's career. She was admitted to Juilliard Graduate School of Music in New York City, and was on scholarship for six years before returning to her parents in Chicago. Meanwhile, her sisters graduated with honors from the University of Chicago and married.<sup>17</sup>

After graduation, Yetta enjoyed a career playing, composing, teaching theory and harmony, and lecturing. In the 1934 season, she was a featured soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 1935, she performed at the Texarkana Municipal Auditorium for the Mount Sinai Congregation Jubilee (1885-1935). The program named her "Texarkana's Own Prodigy." Returning to Austin after years away, she gave a concert at Hogg Memorial Auditorium sponsored by Hillel foundation of UT, her first program in the capital since she was hailed as a child prodigy. Her hands were still small, which hampered her only slightly. After the Austin concert, she traveled to Texarkana to visit her brother, Max, before going back to Chicago where she was on the teaching staff of Layman Music Choruses, a project of the Juilliard Foundation.<sup>18</sup>

Yetta joined the Women's Army Corp (WAC) and served in the European theater of World War II for almost three years. She married David Schmidt from New York.<sup>19</sup>

Later in life, Yetta had interests other than music, including politics and Jewish issues. She is considered one of the greatest classical musicians from Texas. Yetta died in 2001 and was buried in Memorial Park Cemetery in Skokie, Illinois.<sup>20</sup>

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**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all information is from an autobiographical sketch of Yetta Wexler Schmidt sent to historian Ruthe Winegarten dated May 8, 1989, found in Box 3A168, Folder: Musicians, Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- <sup>2</sup> Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas 1820s-1990s*, p. 290, University of Arkansas Press, 1994. Accessed here: [https://books.google.com/books?id=c\\_xNrV-BHxIC&pg=PA290&lp-g=PA290&dq=yetta+wexler+schmidt&source=bl&ots=WI-H5P8OzvD&sig=ACfU3U0\\_U7VZQG4r74U2YZjpcad-ZUGRafQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjwhZOUlvv2AhUNkWoFHRxDDGoQ6AF6BAglEAM#v=onepage&q=yetta%20wexler%20schmidt&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=c_xNrV-BHxIC&pg=PA290&lp-g=PA290&dq=yetta+wexler+schmidt&source=bl&ots=WI-H5P8OzvD&sig=ACfU3U0_U7VZQG4r74U2YZjpcad-ZUGRafQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjwhZOUlvv2AhUNkWoFHRxDDGoQ6AF6BAglEAM#v=onepage&q=yetta%20wexler%20schmidt&f=false).
- <sup>3</sup> *Arkansas Democrat*, May 10, 1918, p. 7. Accessed at <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/34877024/5-year-old-yetta-wexler-piano-prodigy/>.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://newspaperarchive.com/tags/?psi=94&pci=7&ndt=b-d&pd=1&pm=1&py=1915&pe=31&pem=12&pey=1925&pf=yetta&pl=wexler/>.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, May 2, 1919. <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1617063157/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/16?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>6</sup> “Child Prodigy of 15 Years Ago Back in Austin for Concert,” *The Austin Statesman*, April 24, 1935. Accessed: <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1563317872/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/5?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>7</sup> The Lions knew how to have a good time. At the end of the meeting, a woman whistled the Star-Spangled Banner without taking a breath. *The Austin Statesman*, November 6, 1919, “Little Girl Piano Artist Astonishes Lions with Skill” accessed: <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1617254048/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/3?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>8</sup> “Yetta Wexler Concert Is Great Success on Monday Night,” April 13, 1920, *The Austin Statesman*, *ibid*.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, “Austin’s Little Musical Genius,” February 22, 1920, accessed <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1643630320/94D16136329E49E6PQ/1?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Austin Statesman* March 14, 1920 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1643629551/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/9?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, April 14, 1935 “Child Prodigy of 16 Years Ago Will Play in Home Town” by Molly Connor Cook, accessed <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1611738702/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/7?accountid=7451> and “Chords and Discords by the Kitten on the Keys,” April 4, 1926, accessed <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1634194187/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/10?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>12</sup> Lucile Morley “Music and Musicians,” *The Austin Statesman*, April 26, 1925, accessed at <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1620914845/fulltextPDF/A4EC83F67C784600PQ/1?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>13</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, November 24, 1919: 5 “Madam Zeisler Hears Little Yetta Wexler Play” from Mrs. Fred Scott Society column. Accessed: <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1617324962/fulltextPDF/5EC5C45133EA4488PQ/1?accountid=7451>.
- <sup>14</sup> Max remained in Texarkana for most of his life, achieving business and civic prominence, and was a leader of the Jewish community. <http://www.rpd611.com/vrTXSYN/TEXARKANA/Texark.html>. Max (1897-1992) in later life moved to Denver, CO and died there. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72328577/max-h-wexler>.
- <sup>15</sup> Morley, *op cit*. See also *The Austin Statesman*, July 25, 1920, society column edited by Mrs. Fred Scott, accessed at <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1457008/hits/?q=Yetta%20Wexler>.
- <sup>16</sup> Morley, *op cit*.
- <sup>17</sup> Cook, *op cit*.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, April 24, 1935 “Child Prodigy of 15

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## Does TJHS Have Your Current Email Address?

Is your email address current? Has it changed since the 2021-2022 directory was printed? Have you changed email providers? If so, please send an email to [membership@txjhs.org](mailto:membership@txjhs.org) so your information can be updated. To reduce postage cost and printing delays, we are going to



be electronically sending as much mail as possible, so don't be left out or behind—send your current information today!

Please put “email change” in the subject line and with your name in the text of your message, send it today!

Thank you. 

# Martin Rosenfield

## Bringing the Auto Parts Industry to Texas

by Evan Rosenfield

National automotive aftermarket service chain Pep Boys was founded in 1921 by four friends from the Navy—Emmanuel “Manny” Rosenfeld, Maurice “Moe” Strauss, Graham “Jack” Jackson, and Moe Radavitz. These sons of Jewish immigrants pooled \$800 to open the first store in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. By 1928, Pep Boys had a dozen locations in the Philadelphia area.

On September 19 of that year, my grandfather, Martin Rosenfield, was born in Philadelphia. His father, Jacob, a Jewish immigrant from Zhytomyr in the Russian Empire (in present-day western Ukraine), was a tailor. Jacob later became a different kind of cutter. Starting with circumcisions as a mohel, he moved up the ladder to chicken slaughter, and then to cattle slaughterer as a shochet, the top of the profession. The family was poor, but Jacob’s wife, Sarah, created a warm, caring, religious home. She worked alongside her husband, she “flicking” the chickens’ feathers, and he slaughtering them.

Martin attended Central High School, the city’s premier boys’ high school. As a high schooler, Martin began working at Pep Boys on 48th Street after school from 4:00-6:00 pm and all day on Saturdays until 9:00 pm. He made \$1 an hour, with which he could eat his first-ever restaurant meal: clam chowder with clams and breaded veal cutlet.

Pep Boys went public in 1945, with Manny Rosenfeld named president, and Moe Strauss elected Chairman of the Board. When Martin graduated high school later in the year, his father wanted him to attend rabbinical school, but Martin declined, and



*Martin and Estelle Rosenfield on their wedding day in 1952.*

his father withdrew financial support. Martin promptly went to Pep Boys corporate headquarters without an introduction and asked for an opportunity to grow with the company. He was hired on the spot as an Assistant Buyer for \$50 per week.

Pep Boys management equated age with ability, and Martin advanced in small increments, eventually be-

coming Special Order Manager, or Customer Service today. With the position, Martin finally had his own office and needed a secretary.

The Pep Boys building had five stories, with the company occupying all but the third and fourth floors. Martin’s division took up the 5th floor. By happenstance, Estelle Weisman – Martin’s future wife – was looking

[continued on page 15](#)

for a job and was supposed to get off the elevator on another floor. By mistake, she got off on the fifth floor. So long as she was there, she decided to apply for a job. She was hired, and Martin had his secretary, and the start of a lifelong romance. Martin and Estelle were married in October, 1952.

At the onset of the Korean War in 1950, Martin joined the National Guard. He attended basic training at Camp Stewart outside of Atlanta, artillery training in Fort Gordon, Georgia, and finally radar repair school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. By the time he received orders to deploy to Korea, the war was about to end. Martin was discharged in 1953 and returned to Philadelphia and Pep Boys.

With added experience, Martin decided to change his persona and become more aggressive. The new Martin could tell jokes, keep a conversation going, and start a new one. He spoke with presidents of large corporations and owners of small companies without any fear of appearing unprepared due to his age. He began to observe management closely and picked up traits he thought would be helpful. For example, when he finished ordering for the day, he would make time to circulate around the office, stopping at different departments to make small talk.

This was Martin's college. His plan was simple: first, learn as much as he could about how to make things happen; then, change his demeanor. Although he was shy, he began to make new friends. He learned how to make the product layouts and put them together to make an advertisement. At different times, he was an assistant to all three of Pep Boys' buyers and could step in where they needed him.

Martin and Estelle had their first



*Martin Rosenfield during the Korean War, 1950.*

daughter, Sherri, in 1955. As a married man with a daughter, he finally reached the “proper maturity” to move up to Buyer. His pay was increased to \$100 per week, still paltry for the growing family. Friday nights, the family would go to their bedroom and feast on chopped liver from the deli or sautéed mushrooms on toast and a liter of Miller High Life. They bought a window unit for the bed-

room and placed a television there. A second son, Stuart, was born in 1960.

By the early 1960s, Pep Boys was considered the world's largest auto parts and supplies company.<sup>1</sup> It operated more than 120 retail stores in California and on the East Coast and had sales of around \$25 million.<sup>2</sup> Moe did not want to expand beyond these markets, but his son Robert, who led the company's operations in Califor-

[continued on page 16](#)

Martin Rosenfield, continued from page 15

nia, convinced his father to open in Texas. Robert wanted to demonstrate his managerial abilities and his readiness to succeed his father atop the company. Robert was named Pep Boys Executive Vice President in charge of the Texas Division.

At Pep Boys headquarters in Philadelphia one Saturday after lunch, the subject got around to who would do the buying for the new Texas division. The original candidate from California was not outstanding, and Martin appeared as the better choice during the jawboning, much to his later regret.

More than forty years after his family had arrived in Philadelphia, Martin, his wife and two young children, including my father, were bound for Dallas, Texas. The lesson Martin would learn was, "Don't talk too much and keep your answers short."

Pep Boys announced its entry into the Dallas market on February 2, 1962, acquiring four locations on Commerce,



*From left: Robert Strauss, Martin Rosenfield, Strauss's wife, unknown individual, Dallas Mayor Cabell at the opening of Pep Boys' fourth store in Dallas (June 1962).*



*Republic Auto Supply in 1964.*

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Jefferson, Garland, and S. Buckner Streets,<sup>3</sup> and setting up headquarters and a warehouse on Westmoreland.<sup>4</sup>

The Rosenfield family arrived in Dallas on February 8, 1962. As Martin recalled decades later, he was “wearing a black cashmere overcoat and black hat, looking more like a rabbi or undertaker than an auto parts buyer.” Start-up was easy, and Texas drew on experienced people from both coasts. The Texas office quickly put together a twenty-five-year road map, had seemingly unlimited capital, and could count on advice from both coasts. Dallas Mayor Earle Cabell attended the first store’s opening at 2207-09 Commerce Street on March 28, 1962.<sup>5</sup>

The family became active members in Dallas’s growing Jewish community. They joined the Conservative synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel. Estelle was a long-time board member of the Jewish Community Center’s Women’s Service Organization.

Within weeks, Martin knew he had made a mistake in moving to Texas. In Martin’s eyes, Robert’s insistence on putting his stamp on everything disregarded time-proven policies. For example, each week the buyers were sent a camera-ready ad. Robert would often find problems with the ad and instruct Martin to redo the ad using past ads. It was difficult to make the changes he wanted using leftover pieces of previous ads. When the redos were completed, Robert often didn’t like what he saw, and the team had to go around again until he was satisfied. Additionally, Martin had to have the layout board early enough for the engraver to make a plate for the printing press. If you were late, the ad was printed without you. Martin grew increasingly frustrated with the process.

On the day of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963, Martin was with Pep Boys Executive Vice President, Charles Unger, at the Pep Boys store on Commerce Street, about a mile from Dealey Plaza. Unger admitted that company leadership knew the Texas Division was having problems, but no one wanted to build animosity with Robert due to his inevitable return to Philadelphia. Unger reportedly told Martin, “What cannot be cured must be endured.”

By early 1964, most of the original employees in Texas pulled from both coasts were gone. Robert returned to Philadelphia in 1970, and Pep Boys disbanded its Texas operation in 1971.<sup>6</sup>

After more than 20 years at the Pep Boys, Martin left the company in June, 1967. He crossed the street and joined wholesale auto parts supplier Republic Auto Supply

at 2210 Commerce. As Martin remembered, Republic was a seat-of-the-pants operation. Its thirty-two-page catalog had no continuity, with the same products spread throughout the book in no particular order. Growth was slow, but with low salaries and no real overhead, so it was pretty easy to make a profit each year. Over time, Martin’s “Philadelphia education” helped him do things differently. He built up the catalog to ninety-six pages, reorganized the book into product categories, and added an index.

Republic’s previous owner told new owner, Jack Cleveland, that in six months, he would know everything and could let Martin go. But the company grew so rapidly, and Martin had to be retained, with Republic even taking out a “Key Man” insurance policy on him. In five years from October, 1970, Republic increased annual sales from \$600,000 to over eight million, and became a player in Dallas. Jack focused on the company’s finances, and Martin took over advertising and merchandising. Republic built another warehouse at 1648 Prudential in the early 1970s, where Martin’s son, Stuart, would work in high school with Jack’s son, Mark.

Martin retired from Republic, which changed to Rasco Wholesale Distributors,<sup>7</sup> in the mid-1990s amidst tremendous industry change. By then, Pep Boys had returned to the Texas market. Major retailers such as Walmart, O’Reilly, and AutoZone now crowded the auto parts market, putting pressure on margins and pushing aftermarket suppliers like Pep Boys into automobile service and maintenance.

Martin instilled a strong sense of Jewish identity in his three children and five grandchildren. His son, Stuart, would later be a long-time President of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “Texas Division of Pep Boys Begins Warehouse Stocking.” *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), March 11, 1962: 6. *NewsBank: America’s News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DD B671832188%40EANX-0FFE6508D2F5BCB2%4024377 35-0FFE650A5C2A96D6%4061-0FFE65100E93306F%-40Texas%2BDivision%2Bof%2BPep%2BBoys%2BBegins%2BWarehouse%2BStocking>.
- <sup>2</sup> “Auto Parts Firm Locates in Dallas.” *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), December 29, 1961: 2. *NewsBank: America’s News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DD B671832188%40EANX-1001185083->

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# TJHS Presents Awards at Texas History Day, 2022

by Willie Braudaway

Two high school students, Shreeya Madhavanur of Greenhill School in Dallas and Srijan Sundar of Plano East Senior High School, earned a Jewish History Award, sponsored by the Texas Jewish Historical Society, at the 40th Annual Texas History Day competition April 23, 2022. Both winning papers will be posted on the Texas Jewish Historical Society website at txjhs.org.

The 2022 Texas History Day is sponsored by the Texas State Historical Association. This year's theme was "Debate & Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences."

Shreeya Madhavanur's Senior Division paper, "The Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty of 1994: A 'Water-shed' Diplomacy," earned the \$100 First Place Jewish History Award. Madhavanur is a Greenhill School in Dallas student of Scott Cotton. TJHS judges' comments included an appre-


ciation for "a clear understanding of the failures that led up to the Peace Treaty...and how the United States participated in bringing it about" as well as the "way this student incorporated [water] metaphors into the writing...It's a good read."

Srijan Sundar's Senior Division paper, "English Diplomacy via German Relativity: The 1919 Eclipse Expedition to Show 'Light-Rays, When Near the Sun, DO NOT GO STRAIGHT,'" was awarded the \$50 Second Place Jewish History Award. Sundar is a student of Rhett Carter at Plano East Senior High School. TJHS judges noted the "detailed research and the response to Einstein's Jewishness" as well as the "pun in the essay's conclusion: 'The significance of the expedition...is a matter of relativity.'"

Both of the Jewish History Award winners took top honors at the state level. Sundar's paper won First Place

among all the Senior Division Papers presented at Texas History Day. However, Madhavanur's Second Place paper ultimately advanced to be judged in the National History Day competition where it became one of the ten finalists.

This year these were the only papers submitted for review to the TJHS judges: Hollace Weiner, Jan Hart, Jane Manaster, and Willie Braudaway. "We enjoy reading the papers each year and look forward to rewarding these students' hard work. We would love to see more middle and high school students choosing to make any aspect of Jewish history the focus for their papers for Texas History Day 2023," says Braudaway.

The 2023 History Day theme is "Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas." For more information, go to the National History Day website at <https://www.nhd.org/frontiers-history>. 

## Martin Rosenfield, continued from page 17

364F9C%402437663-10011850D73B6A1D%4025-100118529F4614FB%40Auto%2BParts%2BFirm%2BLocates%2Bin%2BDallas.

<sup>3</sup> "Fourth Store Here Planned by Pep Boys." *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), May 31, 1962: 4. *NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DDB671832188%40EANX-0FFE6691D0253E55%402437816-0FFE669250E3C535%4039-0FFE6695048A2E64%40Fourth%2BStore%2BHere%2BPlanned%2Bby%2BPep%2BBoys>.

<sup>4</sup> "Pep Boys Acquire 2 Locations." *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), February 2, 1962: 6. *NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current*. [https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DDB671832188%40EANX-0FFE63FF7F1768D%402437698-0FFE64001538914D%405-0FFE6401483F5EF5%40Pep%2BBoys%2Bacquire%2B2%-](https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DDB671832188%40EANX-0FFE63FF7F1768D%402437698-0FFE64001538914D%405-0FFE6401483F5EF5%40Pep%2BBoys%2Bacquire%2B2%-2BLocations)

2BLocations.

<sup>5</sup> "Snipes to Lakewood." *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), March 28, 1962: 4. *NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A0F99DDB671832188%40EANX-0FFE64AA74E93B6D%402437752-0FFE64AAB095312B-0FFE64AC703716F2>.

<sup>6</sup> Braswell, E.J. 2005. *The Pep Boys Auto Guide To Car Care And Maintenance*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. <https://books.google.com/books?id=CcpvDwAAQBA-J&pg=PA109&lpg=PA109&dq=%22pep+boys%22+exit+texas+1970s&source=bl&ots=yKrha5FxfhJ&sig=AC-fU3U3TioETaIoi0BXRv1c8sFL9KS6vGg&hl=en&sa=X-&ved=2ahUKEwjYsun5opr4AhVqomoFHXL-CQs4HhDo-AXoECBcQA#wv=onepage&q=%22pep%20boys%2>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://opencorporates.com/companies/us\\_tx/0028066200](https://opencorporates.com/companies/us_tx/0028066200).

# Letters to the Editor

## Texas History Day

Dear Willie Braudaway and the Texas Jewish Historical Society,

I would like to convey my sincerest thanks for sponsoring the Jewish History Award this year at the Texas History Day. I am honored to receive this award and it is definitely a source of personal encouragement.

Once again, thank you for supporting Texas History Day and for contributing to this memorable experience for all competitors. I am sure that this award will continue to inspire many more competitors in the coming years.

Very Sincerely,

Srijan Sundar, July 4, 2022

## Re: Archive Article on Rita Barr in May, 2022 issue.

Mystery solved! Sara Borschow was the daughter of Emanuel and Rebecca Lazerowitz Borschow. Emanuel Borschow was a brother of Max Borschow 1870-1937. He and his wife, Sara, are buried in El Paso. They were the parents of the El Paso Borschows. The article mentions Dorothy Borschow, who was the widow of Paul Borschow. Paul, Max's grandson (Sam's son) was the founder of the Lauterbach and Borschow firm. (My husband's nephew, Scott Kobren, is a partner in that firm.)

In Max's obituary in 1937, it mentions that he is survived by a sister, Mrs. A. S. Weiner, a brother, Emanuel Borschow, and his mother, Mrs. Jacob Borschow, who was a widow at the time. Dora Donchin Borschow passed away a year later. Her husband, Jacob,

died in 1919. Both are buried in San Antonio.

Both Borshow families have a son named Sidney. Sidney Samuel Borschow (Sara's brother) was born in 1916, and died in 2006. He is listed on the 1920 census (Ferris, Ellis Co., TX) with his nine-year old sister, Sara, and the other children of Emanuel and Rebecca.

The "El Paso" Sidney Borschow (1907-1995) was born in Fort Worth,

and is buried in El Paso. I went to high school with his son, Robert. The 1920 census indicates that Sara was born in 1911. According to the 1930 census San Antonio) she is eighteen. Her Social Security death records lists her birth dates as 3 Aug 1910. Take your pick!

With best wishes from La Frontera Mexicana!

Mary Ann Plaut, Librarian, Temple Mt. Sinai, El Paso, Texas 🇺🇸

### TJHS Trip to Poland and The Baltics

**MAY 27, 2023**

**14-Day trip**

**Optional 5-Day Extension to St. Petersburg and Moscow**

From \$3,834 + airfare from your departure city (14-20 people—price depends on number of registrants.)

*Includes breakfast daily and six dinners, guide, 10 tours, and deluxe coach.*

New travelers who reserve their spot have their mind and receive a full refund.

**For full itinerary &**

**<https://www.groupvickie.com>**

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*There may be a DISCOUNT depending on group size.*

*For details contact Vickie*

*vogel@yahoo.com.*

- Warsaw Rising Museum
- Wolf's Lair - Vilnius, Lithuania
- Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights
- Palaces, castles, gardens
- Auschwitz/Birkenau
- Oskar Schindler Factory
- Synagogues
- Warsaw Ghetto
- River Boat Ride
- Riga, Latvia
- Tallinn, Estonia
- Food, beer, cider tasting
- National park scenic walk

**CANCELED**





# 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 Awards Committee will be presented at TJHS Spring Annual Gathering. Applications must be received by July 15, 2023 and mailed to Awards 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: Awards Chair, Texas Jewish Historical Society,  
P. O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193 or [awardchair@txjhs.org](mailto:awardchair@txjhs.org).*

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



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

# Meet Your Board

**Paula Stein** was born and raised in Schulenburg, Texas.



Since she and Sheldon Lippman, TJHS President, were the only Jewish kids in town, they became good friends. She and Rick Stein have been married for forty-seven years, and they have three children and five grandchildren. Paula's interests include travelling and her family's genealogy. She has traced her father's family's

arrival to Texas around 1860, and her mother's side to New York City and Philadelphia in 1770.

**Gayle Feldman Cannon** is a retired lawyer now living in Austin. She is a transplanted Dallasite and has three children, two stepchildren, sixteen grandchildren and four 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, President of Valley Baptist Auxiliary volunteers, and helps coordinate Temple Social activities. She lived in Puerto Rico for eight months before the hurricane. Lynda has been a TV & 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. Currently she helps produce and direct corporate videos and is semi-retired. Lynda is a member of the Meetings Committee.

**Susan Septimus** was born in Houston, and graduated from Bellaire High School, the University of Houston, and South Texas College of Law. She and her husband, Dr. Ed Septimus have two sons, Dr. Joshua (Ali) Septimus and Rabbi Daniel (Amanda) Septimus. Susan enjoys any and all kinds of dance—much to the embarrassment of her five grandchildren, along with bird-watching. She cultivates Monarch butterflies from caterpillars to release-ready butterflies in her home. Susan does “Jewish Genealogy on a professional and personal basis, and has compiled personal histories for more than sixty Jewish families in Texas.”



**Hy Penn** is a native Houstonian and the oldest child of Holocaust survivors, Linda and Morris I. Penn. He graduated from the University of Texas/Austin and the University of Texas Medical School/San Antonio, with a residency at the University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston. He recently retired after thirty-five years as a pediatrician in the Kingwood-Humble area. He currently serves as a Docent at the Holocaust Museum of Houston, and serves on the Board. He is also a Board Member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. Hy is married to Lynn Gordon Penn for thirty-four years, and performs as the Magician, “The Great Hydini.”



**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.



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## Board, continued from page 22

Elaine and Phil live in Rockport. She is a member of the Award Committee.

**Marilyn Lippman** now lives in Dallas, but has connections to Fayette County. She is the Treasurer of Temple Israel in Schulenberg and a Board Member of the Jewish Cemetery in Hallettsville. Marilyn is employed with Ericsson, Inc. in Plano, as a Business Operations Manager. In her spare time, she enjoys hot yoga, hiking, and gardening – especially mowing lawns!



**David Vogel** graduated from University of Texas/Austin with a BBA in Marketing in 1971. He served as President of Temple Israel of Schulenberg for sixteen years. David is known as Bat Man in some circles because he volunteers at the largest bat cave in Colorado, where he shows and educates people about bats. He enjoys live, original music and supports independent musicians, songwriters and independent music venues. He is a UT basketball and baseball fan, and attends many games. He is married to TJHS Past President, Vickie Vogel for “at least forty-four years (that number keeps changing.)”



**Jane Manaster** lives in Dallas and was raised in England. She moved to Texas with her American husband, Guy. Jane has three children and six grandchildren. She has degrees in Psychology and Geography, and is the author of three natural history books. She is a former newspaper columnist and has written articles on travel and Texas history. Jane is a charter member of TJHS, and is Chair of the Grants Committee.



**Michael Thomas Wolf** was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, but moved to Brownsville, Texas, with his parents, Raymond and Madeleine Wolf. Michael grew up in



Brownsville, where he became an Eagle Scout and was involved in BBYO. He attended Texas A&M University, graduating with a degree in Finance. While at A&M, he was involved in Hillel and the Corps of Cadets and was commissioned as an Army Officer. He attended Texas Tech, earning his MBA. He moved to Beaumont where he served many years as Treasurer of Temple Emanuel until he became President of the congregation. He currently serves on the Temple Board and is Chair of the Endowment Committee. Michael is Past Chair of the Greene Family Camp Committee, and has served as president of many community organizations. He has thirty-six years of perfect attendance in the Rotary Club of Beaumont and serves as Chair of the Rotary Foundation Board. He is a Life Underwriters Training Council Fellow and has earned numerous company and industry awards. Michael is Past President of the Hillel Corporate Board at Texas A&M University and served over thirty years as Treasurer. He is a partner in Wolf Bunt and Associates, a financial services company. Michael and his wife, Cynthia (TJHS Board Member), have three children and four grandchildren. He is a member of the TJHS Grants Committee.



**Sharon Gerber** is from Houston and married to TJHS Board Member, Sonny Gerber. They have six children, each with a spouse and nine grandchildren – seven of them girls! She works as a psychoanalyst in private practice, and likes to read, crochet, and exercise.

**Charles B. Hart**, TJHS Past President, is from Temple, but was born and raised in Houston. Charles graduated from the University of Houston with a BS degree and American University with a MS degree. He served in the U.S. Army from 1958-1960 and 1961-1962. He retired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture after thirty-four years of civil

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over thirty years.

**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.



**Joyce Davidoff** was born in Houston and she lived there until she was eight years old. Due to health reason, the family moved to southern Arizona, and she grew up in a copper mining town near Tucson. The family returned to Texas in the 1960s, where she graduated from El Paso High School. Joyce graduated from the University of Texas/Austin with a bachelor's degree in sociology/social work, and has worked in not-for-profit agencies in Austin, Dallas, New York, and

service, and taught horseback riding at Jewish summer camps for over twenty-five years. He is an Eagle Scout and a long-time member of the Hillel Board at Texas A&M University. He is married to TJHS member, Jan Siegel Hart, and they have three children and six grandchildren. He and Jan have been TJHS members for

since 1980, El Paso. In 1984, she earned a Master of Public Administration from UTEP, and recently worked as Grants and External Affairs Coordinator for a large social impact agency serving El Paso and far West Texas until her retirement on June 1, 2022. Joyce has three sons, and with her husband of two-and-one-half years, has sixteen grandchildren.

**Marc Wormser**, TJHS Past President, lives in Pearland and is an "Aggie at heart." He has been a traveling sales rep for Levis, C.R. Gibson, gifts, and medical sales. He owned a recruiting firm and was active in scouting and Optimist Club. He and his wife, Joyce, travel whenever they can. He maintains the database for membership and dues. 🇺🇸

**Marc Wormser**, TJHS Past President, lives in Pearland and is an "Aggie at heart." He has been a traveling sales rep for Levis, C.R. Gibson, gifts, and medical sales. He owned a recruiting firm and was active in scouting and Optimist Club. He and his wife, Joyce, travel whenever they can. He maintains the database for membership and dues. 🇺🇸



**ELAINE GALE**, TJHS member, San Antonio, died July 20, 2021. She is survived by her son, Scott Gale, two grandchildren and spouses, and four great-grandchildren.

## In Memoriam

**ROBERT ADLER**, TJHS member, Corpus Christi, died July 4, 2022. He is survived by his wife, Chris; children, Troy (Bobbie), Matt (Marjorie, Michael (Lynn); three grandchildren; and his sister, Annette Corman, also a TJHS member.

**HAROLD M. EISEN**, TJHS member, Beaumont/Houston, died July 9, 2022. He is survived by his children, Jay (Mindy), Eydie (Ed) Dresser, Stephen A. (Life partner, Brenda Adkinson), five grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

**MARILYN SAIKEN STAHL**, TJHS member, Austin, died July 28, 2022. She is survived by her children, Stuart (Ronda) Stahl, Brent (Susan) Stahl, Nancy Stahl Shuman (Lee Dickerson), seven grandchildren and spouse, and one great-grandchild.



**ELAINE GALE**, TJHS member, San Antonio, died July 20, 2021. She is survived by her son, Scott Gale, two grandchildren and spouses, and four great-grandchildren.

**May their memories be a blessing.**



# European Jews Come to Texas via Mexico

## The Influence of Roberto Haberman

by Larry Holtzman

In 1924, Plutarco Elias Calles, formerly the Secretary of the Interior, became president of Mexico. He was picked by former president, Alvaro Obregon, to be his successor. One of President Calles' first acts was to issue an invitation to Jews from Europe to come to Mexico. The timing was fortuitous because the United States had imposed strict quotas on immigration in 1921 in response to the large influx of Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and teeming into New York City.

Consequently, Mexico received a rush of immigration of Jews from Russia, Lithuania, Romania, and other Eastern European countries which established today's Jewish community in Mexico. Many of the immigrants found their way to the United States; some through the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Why would Calles issue this invitation? Little has been written about this invitation to the Jews by President Calles. My research uncovered an article in a publication by *The American Jewish Archives*, Spring/Summer, 1991, published on the Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College. The article is titled, "Roberto Haberman and the Origins of Modern Mexico's Jewish Community," by Dan La Botz.

Dan La Botz writes, "Roberto Haberman had a remarkable career. A Jewish immigrant from Romania, a U.S. citizen, and a Mexican politician, he was a pharmacist, attorney, and advertising man..." He became "an intimate of Plutarco Elias Calles, the president of Mexico, and was also one of the most important and

influential Jews in Modern Mexico." Haberman had come to Mexico to help establish labor unions. His activism propelled him into contact with Mexican politicians on their way up, such as then Secretary of the Interior, Plutarco Elias Calles.

It was Roberto Haberman, as advisor to President Calles, who put forth the scheme that led to the invitation for Jewish immigration to Mexico. Dan La Botz writes, "Surprisingly, no historian, as far as I am aware, has ever before drawn attention to Haberman's crucial role in these developments."

Haberman convinced President Calles not to charge the \$10 head tax to Jewish immigrants which was part of the encouragement for Jewish settlement in Mexico. Haberman assured Calles that Jewish organizations would help the Jews get started so they would not be a burden on the Mexican government. The hope was the Jews would establish factories producing consumer goods, such as clothing, shoes, and furniture.

Dan La Botz writes, "No doubt, Haberman expected that an invitation to the persecuted Jews of Europe would enhance Mexico's reputation abroad and help improve its position vis-à-vis the United States." Mexico's global reputation suffered during World War I. Germany's offer to help Mexico attack the United States through Texas to regain lost territory. The discovery of the famous Zimmermann Telegram revealing Germany's offer of an alliance with Mexico was the cause of the United States to enter World War I.

Calles issued a public statement

of invitation to the Jews saying, "I am very interested in the situation of thousands of Jewish immigrants stranded in Europe and I have already been in conference with several American Jewish organizations who seek to solve the problem of the refugees."

The Jewish *Comite de Damas* of Mexico City assisted immigrants by providing jobs, medical care, loans, housing, and educational assistance. The North American B'nai B'rith had a representative at the port of Veracruz who helped with housing and food. Women played a central role in these activities, which included running a hospital, a hostel, and a soup kitchen.

In the early 1930s, Roberto Haberman returned to New York and established himself as an attorney specializing in Mexican divorces. During that time, he wrote a book on the divorce laws of Mexico.

In 1948 he was invited back to Mexico by President Miguel Aleman Valdez to help organize the social security program. He worked on this project until his retirement when he moved back to the United States.

Roberto Haberman was born in Jassy, Romania, in 1882. He immigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of nineteen and enlisted in the U. S Army Hospital Corp. He served as a pharmacist mate and was discharged in 1904. His service in the United States Army entitled him to citizenship. He passed the pharmacy exam of the California State Board of Pharmacy and enrolled in law school. He received his law degree in

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# Welcome New Members!

Scott Gale  
[REDACTED]

Daniel & Annette Gordon  
[REDACTED]

Alan & Debbie Postal  
[REDACTED]

Barbara Rosenthal  
[REDACTED]

Solomon & Elaine Schein  
[REDACTED]


Richard & Sue (Rosenbloom) Vane  
[REDACTED]

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

## Texarkana Prodigy, continued from page 13

Years Ago Back in Austin for Concert.” <https://www.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/docview/1563317872/5EC-5C45133EA4488PQ/5?accountid=7451>.

<sup>19</sup> LeMaster, op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ericbrahinsky.com/txclassical.html>; <https://billion-graves.com/grave/Yetta-Wexler-Schmidt/459609>. 

## Please Note:

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


## Roberto Haberman, continued from page 25

1912 from New York University. He worked as a pharmacist and attorney at various times. He was very interested in socialist causes both in the United States and Mexico. Haberman spoke Rumanian, English, Spanish, and some French and German. He died in a VA Hospital in 1962 at the age of seventy-nine.

In addition to Roberto Haberman’s critical role in Jewish immigration to Mexico, Dan La Botz talks about Haberman’s run-in with the FBI, his activities in the Yucatan during the Mexican Revolution, the fact that he was married three times and about Haberman’s work as a Socialist labor agitator in Mexico. Roberto Haberman was a very interesting character.

Many Jewish Immigrants to Mexico eventually came to Texas and the United States. Many settled in the border cities of Texas because they now spoke Spanish, the business language of the Texas-Mexico border.

Much has been written about the Eastern European immigrants’ story to Texas, but very little about those who came via Mexico with Roberto Haberman’s help.

Source: “Roberto Haberman and the Origins of Modern Mexico’s Jewish Community” by Dan La Botz, published by American Jewish Archives, Volume XLIII, Spring/Summer, 1991, Number 1, on the Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, President. 

## Committee Chairs and Project Managers 2022-2023

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*Awards*

*Cemetery*

*Cemetery Research\**

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*Finance/Treasurer (Elected)*

*Grants*

*Historical Texas Cemetery Designation*

*Legal\**

*Meetings*

*Membership*

*Publicity/The TJHS Magazine*

*Publicity\**

*Speaker’s Bureau*

*Texas History Day\**

*Travel*

*Photo Exhibit*

*Website/Technology\**

\*Project Managers

Sally Drayer

Cynthia Wolf

Rusty Milstein

Kathy Kravitz

Davie Lou Solka

Ben Rosenberg

Jane Manaster

Doug Braudaway

Lonnie Schooler

Sally Drayer

Marc Wormser

Davie Lou Solka

Bob Lewis

Gayle Cannon & Jan Siegel Hart

Willie Braudaway

Vickie Vogel

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## TJHS Photo Exhibits

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 [txjhs\\_exhibits@txjhs.org](mailto:txjhs_exhibits@txjhs.org).

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