

# Virtual Restoration of Small-Town Synagogues in Texas

## Introduction to the Texas Series

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August 1996

You'll not find a single Jew living in Gainesville or Mercedes or many other Texas towns which once had thriving Jewish populations and synagogues to serve them. The American Jewish Yearbooks from 1910 to 1928 list nearly 40 towns in Texas with at least one synagogue. Most remaining small-town Jewish communities have long since shrunk below minyan-strength. In the space of three generations Jews have come and gone.

The Texas Jewish Historical Society, to preserve at least something of these places, has underwritten a project to document the vanishing synagogues and their associated communities. This series complements the navigable 3D models, photos, and sound recordings made for each town and presented in summary form on the World Wide Web.

This is rich material worth a peek: See the Treasure of Wichita Falls, Buster's clubhouse in Kilgore, and Brenham's mikvah restored after 60 years; hear the story of Judge Joseph's death in Texarkana and Jefferson's doom; try the Hot Tamale recipe that built the "Annex" in Marshall in 1930. There are a few heroes whose energy and will hold their towns together – and villains who tore theirs apart. Each town is both part of a larger history and its own unique drama. Some are doozies.

In the following essays I'll examine how Jews came into the country--the separate and distinct flows of settlement; how they made a living--what they did, why they succeeded, and why they went out of business; what they built--synagogue architecture before and after WWII; how Jewish identity was maintained--who held on and who ran for cover; and finally how Jews moved on--why they left, where they went, and what was left behind.