

Texas Jewish Historical Society

2025 Annual Gathering

April 25 – 27, 2025

College Station, Texas

(Please note that accommodations for attendees are split between two hotels.

The **Hyatt Place Hotel**, 1100 University Drive East, serves as the flagship location for registration, hospitality room, and meetings,)

Friday, April 25, 2025

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| 3:30 – 5:00 PM | Welcome Table & Registration, Hyatt Place Hotel, 1100 University Drive East, College Station, Texas 77840 |
| 6:00 PM | Meet in Hyatt Place Hotel Lobby to carpool to Texas A&M Hillel |
| 6:30 – 7:30 PM | Shabbat Services, Texas A&M Hillel, 800 George Bush Drive, College Station, Texas 77840 |
| 7:30 PM | Shabbat Dinner, Texas A&M Hillel |
| 9:00 PM | Carpool returns to Hyatt Place Hotel |
| 9:00 – 10:00 PM | Hospitality room open at Hyatt Place Hotel |

Saturday, April 26, 2025

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| 8:30 – 9:00 AM | Registration, Texas A&M Hillel, 800 George Bush Drive, College Station, Texas 77840 |
| 8:45 AM | Meet in hotel Hyatt Place Hotel Lobby to carpool to Texas A&M Hillel |
| 9:15 – 9:30 AM | Welcome – Joan Linares, President TJHS |
| 9:30 – 10:15 AM | <i>The Hillel at A&M - Tracing its roots to 1916</i> with Don Reiser |
| 10:15 – 10:45 AM | <i>Jewish Life in Bryan-College Station: The Legacy of Temple Freda</i> with William (Bill) Bassichis |
| 10:45 – 11:00 AM | Break |
| 11:00 – 11:25 AM | <i>Jewish Life in Bryan-College Station: Congregation Beth Shalom</i> with Dena Kahan and Leslie Feigenbaum |

11:25 – Noon	<i>From Odessa, Ukraine to Bryan, Texas: It's so much more than bagels</i> with Blake Zeitman
Noon – 1:15 PM	Lunch- Catered by Zeitman's Deli
1:15 – 1: 45 PM	<i>Aggie Stories: Texas A&M Jewish Student Experiences—Past and Present</i>
1:45 – 2:15 PM	<i>Jewish Studies Program at Texas A&M</i> with David Brenner
2:15 – 2:30 PM	Break

Art and History Enriching Jewish Studies: Presentations by 2 TJHS Grant Recipients

2:30 – 3:00 PM	<i>We had to know who we were; we had to know who we weren't,</i> Photography by Emily Williams
3:00 – 3:30 PM	<i>Sisterhoods of the Southwest: Jewish Women's Organizations' Impact on Community Development in the Borderlands</i> with Gabrielle Lyle
3:30 PM	Closing
3:30 – 6:15 PM	Open time to tour College Station or just relax
6:15 PM	Meet in Hyatt Place Hotel Lobby to carpool to Maria Mia Tex-Mex
6:30 – 8:30 PM	Dinner at Maria Mia Tex-Mex Cantina and Havdalah, 1007 Earl Rudder Fwy S, College Station, Texas 77845
8:30 PM	Carpool back to Hyatt Place Hotel
8:30 – 10:00 PM	Hospitality room open at Hyatt Place Hotel with desserts and schmoozing

Sunday, April 27, 2025

9:00 – 10:00 AM	TJHS Board Meeting, Hyatt Place Hotel, Hospitality Room, 1100 University Drive East, College Station, Texas 77840
10:00 – 10:15 AM	Break
10:15 – 11:00	Annual TJHS Membership Meeting, President's State of the Organization Address, Installation of TJHS Officers and Board Members
11:00 – 11:15	Closing

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Presenters

Dr. William Bassichis, a longtime member of the Texas A&M physics faculty, has been deeply involved in preserving the history of Temple Freda in Bryan, Texas. A former congregation president, he oversaw the structure's care for many years and played a key role in its transition to city stewardship for restoration. Beyond his work with Temple Freda, Dr. Bassichis is a distinguished physicist specializing in nuclear theory, solar energy studies, and vacuum environments, with previous faculty positions at MIT and research roles at leading institutions worldwide. He is also the author of *Don't Panic*, an innovative physics text for engineers and scientists.

Dr. David Brenner has taught German, Jewish, and International Studies at Texas A&M University since 2016. In addition, he has been a guest professor of German Studies and Jewish Studies at Cornell University, Rice University, Universität Konstanz, and other leading universities. Brenner is also the author and translator – from German and from Yiddish -- of numerous books, essays, and articles. His most recent monograph is *German-Jewish Popular Culture before the Holocaust* (2014). At present, he is translating a biography of the German-Jewish philosopher and public intellectual, Theodor Lessing (author of *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 1930).

Leslie Feigenbaum is the Associate Dean for International Programs and Facilities and a Senior Lecturer at Texas A&M University. He earned his M.S. in Construction Management from Texas A&M in 1985 and is affiliated with the College of Architecture - Department of Construction Science, where his research focuses on Construction Estimating and Planning. In addition to his academic work, Leslie serves as Co-President of the Texas A&M Hillel and is a member of the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Dena Kahan's connection to Congregation Beth Shalom began 68 years ago when her parents, Bettye and Frank Kahan, brought her to Bryan as a newborn. Her parents were among the original group that formed the Jewish community that eventually became Congregation Beth Shalom, and their dedication to service instilled in her a lifelong commitment to giving back. Dena spent over 30 years teaching elementary school in the area where she grew up. As a dedicated member of Congregation Beth Shalom, she has served on the board, held various offices, and participated in numerous committees. She also enjoys contributing to Friday night onegs and other social events. Teaching religious school for many years was a meaningful experience, allowing her to learn as much from her students as she taught them. She has also been actively involved with the Sisterhood, serving as an officer and committee member.

Beyond the congregation, Dena is deeply engaged in the Bryan-College Station community. She volunteers with the Prenatal Clinic's fundraising committee, the local food bank, and as an escort at Planned Parenthood. Each week, she reads with a bilingual student at Bonham Elementary. Her newest volunteer role is at the BEE (Brazos Employment Enterprises) retail store, where she helps promote and sell products made by adults with disabilities, supporting their employment and skills development. In retirement, Dena enjoys dedicating more time to service and pursuing her personal interests. She hopes her life reflects the values her parents instilled in her—giving back to both her religious and local communities.

Dr. Gabrielle Lyle earned her Ph.D. in History from Texas A&M University in 2024, specializing in Jewish communities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Her dissertation, *B'nai Borderlands: The Development of Jewish Communities in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands in the Twentieth Century*, explores the connections between Judaism in the borderlands and the broader Jewish world. Her research has been supported by the Southern Jewish Historical Society, the Arizona Historical Society, and the Texas Jewish Historical Society where she was a grant recipient. Dr. Lyle is also the recipient of several prestigious fellowships and awards, including the 2022-2023 Portal to Texas History Fellowship and the 2023 Lynna Kay Shuffield Memorial Award in Texas Jewish History. Dr. Lyle currently teaches History at Sam Houston State University.

Don Reiser grew up in College Station, where he was quite literally raised at Texas A&M University's Hillel House. With his father serving as a biochemistry professor at the university and his mother as TAMU Hillel's director for over 25 years, Hillel became the heart of his Jewish upbringing. "If you were a young man growing up in a synagogue in a city, that synagogue would have been your Jewish home. I was a very lucky young man. I grew up in a small college community, where Hillel was my Jewish home," Reiser reflects. He fondly recalls having many "brothers" during his formative years. A proud member of the Texas A&M Class of 1966, Don later moved to Houston, where he built a successful career in insurance and personal finance.

Emily Williams is the recipient of the 2024 Lynna Kay Shuffield Memorial Award in Texas Jewish History. She holds a BA in fine arts and history from Haverford College and an MFA in photography from Louisiana State University. Her current body of work "We had to know who we were; We had to know who we weren't" explores Jewish identity, history, and memory in the rural and small-town Deep South. She has received funding from the Southern Jewish Historical Society, Texas Jewish Historical Society, and the LSU School of Art Graduate Student Scholarly & Creative Activity Support Fund, and is a current Jewish Alabama Folklife Fellow.

Blake Zeitman was born in Houston but spent his high school and college years in the northeast. When Blake's great-great-grandparents travelled across the Atlantic from Odessa, Ukraine they brought with them the clothes on their back, a few dollars in their pockets, and a desire for a better life for their family. Two years later, they opened the original Zeitman's Grocery Store in Portland Maine. Blake carries that legacy forward today in Historic Downtown Bryan where in 2021 he opened Zeitman's Grocery Store and Deli.