

The Texas Jewish Historical Society Magazine



September 2025

K. Wolens and his Texas Department Store by Gregg Philipson



K. Wolens Department Store, Kilgore, Texas, 1910s

Having grown up in a family of Jewish merchants in the Army and Navy Stores and other dry goods establishments in upstate New York, I became interested in the history of American Jewish retailers. There are so many fascinating stories to share I decided to build a collection of artifacts to preserve this aspect of our American Jewish identity. K. Wolens is one of those stories.

Abraham Kalman Wolens (1871-1953) was a Jewish pioneer in the Texas retail dry goods trade. You may have seen the K. Wolens name on a building, on a sign, an advertisement in a

newspaper or a magazine around Texas. This is the story of the man who made K. Wolens such a successful Texas enterprise.

Wolens immigrated to Corsicana from Poland, via Chicago, with his wife Ida, three young sons and one daughter. He arrived in Corsicana, Texas, around 1897. There he began his retail career selling eyeglasses. After a short time, he opened his first clothing store. This was the first chain of twenty-four stores he opened to be located across Texas. The company continued and the number of stores climbed to around fifty after 1953. The early

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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Texas Jewish history, oral histories, and requests for assistance with research are welcome, as are photographs and historical documents.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 12, 2025
Zoom Board Meeting

January 2026
Board Meeting in Corpus Christi, date TBA

April 24-25, 2026
Annual Gathering, Houston

Message from the President

by Sheldon Lippman



This past July, the TJHS Board of Trustees gathered for a lively and forward looking Strategic Planning Retreat. Together, we reflected on our rich history, assessed our programs, and dreamed big about how TJHS can grow into the future. One truth emerged clearly: the vitality of TJHS depends on the energy, creativity, and commitment of our members—both current and new.

For forty-five years, TJHS has preserved and shared the Jewish experiences of Texas—stories of courage, enterprise, faith, and community. Now, we're asking our growing membership to help TJHS write the next chapter. Whether you have deep roots in Texas or are a newcomer with fresh ideas, your skills, passions, and perspectives can make a difference.

TJHS committees are the heartbeat of its mission:

- Archives – Safeguard precious family histories and partner with leading Texas archives.
- Awards Committee – Shines a light on outstanding citizens in the Jewish community.
- Grants Committee – Empowers scholars, artists, filmmakers, and others telling the Texas Jewish story.
- Kessler Fund – Champions Jewish education from grade school to university.
- Membership Committee – Welcomes new friends and keeps our community connected.
- Burial Database & Cemetery Research – Memorializes and preserves the names of deceased Jewish Texans buried in any cemetery.
- Publications Committee – Brings our history to life through articles, photos, and family stories, particularly through the TJHS Magazine with a forty-five year history of quarterly publications.
- Meetings Committee – Creates meetings that inspire, educate, and connect—locally and online.
- Speakers Bureau – Shares Texas Jewish history through storytelling and information that captivates audiences everywhere. Speakers are available for groups and organizations in the Jewish and non-Jewish communities
- Website/Technology Committee –

Updates the online content that informs members, provides resources, and provides easy access to joining and renewing membership.

Every one of these programs needs new voices and willing hands. Imagine what we could achieve if more members stepped forward to help us preserve the past and inspire the future.

What does TJHS need?

- Tech-savvy volunteers to help launch virtual exhibits and digital archives; and enrich TJHS website with timely updates.
- Program ambassadors to spread the word about funding opportunities for historical projects and advocating for Texas Jewish history.
- Partnership builders to connect TJHS with cultural institutions, universities, and philanthropies.
- Storytellers/Speakers -- in print, in person, and online – to keep our history alive.

If you've ever thought "I should get more involved someday,"—that day is now. Together, we can ensure that the Texas Jewish experience is not just remembered, but celebrated, taught, and shared for generations to come.

I invite you to email me at president@txjhs.org to learn more about where your talents can make the greatest impact. Your participation isn't just welcome—it's essential. 🇺🇸

Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Fund

by Joan Linares

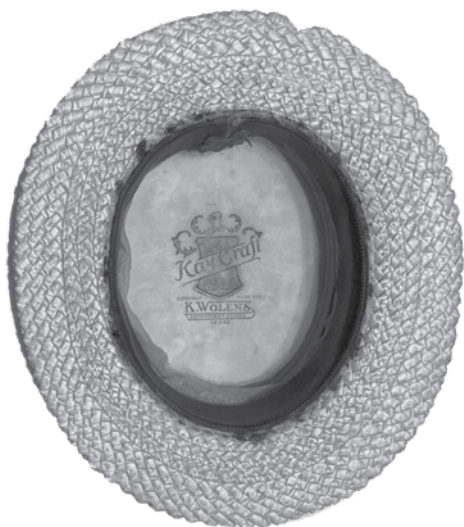
The Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund has made offers of \$2,500 to four Jewish studies programs in Texas for special projects. The projects will be chosen by the schools and they will be submitted to TJHS. The schools are the Program for Jewish Studies, Rice

University; Jewish Studies Program at Texas A&M; the Schusterman Center, University of Texas/Austin; and the Ackerman Center University of Texas/Arlington.

A \$5,000 award was given to Jeff Aresty/Josh Merwin for Dream Big Book on Jacob de Cordova. (See ar-

ticle on page 6.)

Members of the Kessler Fund Committee are Chair Joan Linares, Jules Frapart, Jeff Levine, Scott Langston, Sheldon Lippman, Susan Novick, Hy Penn, Barbara Rosenberg, Ben Rosenberg, Lonnie Schooler, Suzy Seriff, and Advisor Bryan Stone. 🇺🇸



Straw Hat made exclusively for K. Wolens Department Store, 1920s.



K. Wolens Department Store, Wortham, Texas, 1915.



Token commemorating 50th Anniversary, K. Wolens Department Stores.



K. Wolens Department Store, Marshall, Texas, 1950s.



Wolens stores could be found in Corsicana, Longview, Kilgore, Corpus Christi, Denison, Tyler, Cleburne, Athens, Palestine, Gladewater, Fort Worth, Marshall, Overton, Bryan, Ennis, Mexia, Waxahachie, Grand Saline, Kaufman, Hillsboro, Crockett, Frankston, Wortham, Mabank and Velasco.

Wolens, much like the Philipson Army and Navy stores, found great success in many of the smaller communities that were

in need of the products and services these retailers offered.

Like the Philipsons, Wolens became an integral part of his community. He and his family were instrumental in building two of the three synagogues in Corsicana. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the Agudas Achim Synagogue in Dallas. For his fifty years of service to the shul and to the community he was elected Man of the Year in 1952.

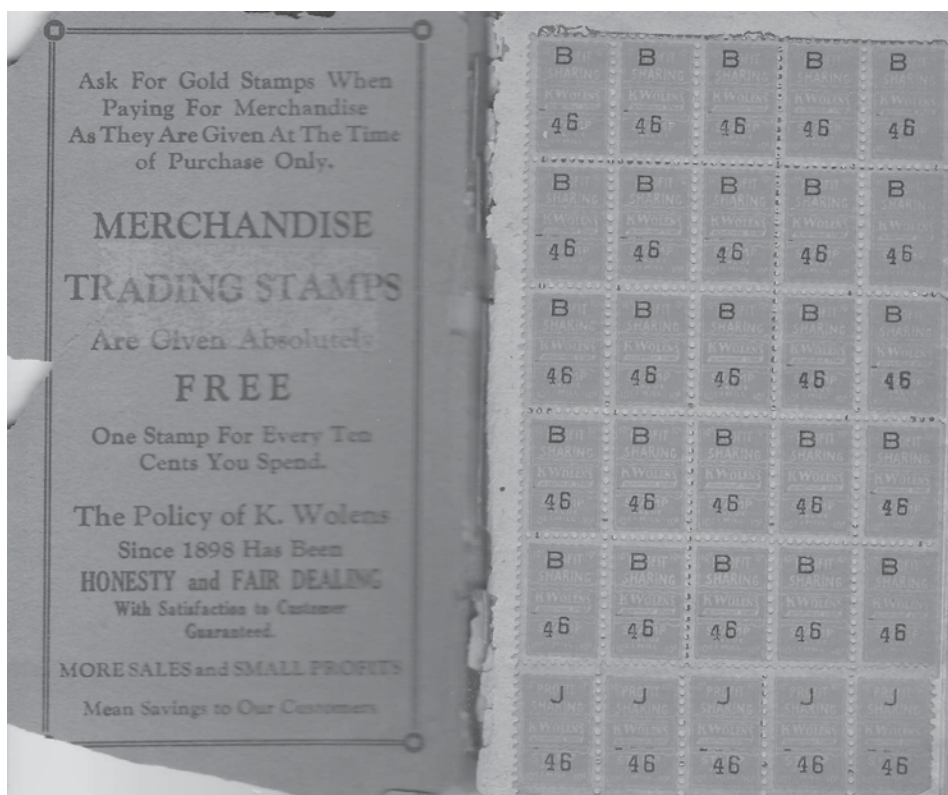
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Mr. K, as he was known, became a Texas philanthropist. The highlight of his philanthropic endeavors was being the largest individual donor in the campaign to build Memorial Hospital in Dallas. His contribution, a staggering sum at the time of \$50,000, became the cornerstone donation that catapulted the project from planning to reality. Among others, Wolens was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows, a world-renowned community service organization.

The K. Wolens chain of stores was sold in 1976. They were an important part of Texas history as they helped to build the Jewish communities where the stores were located. By the way, the Philipson stores are gone, too, after a seventy-year run in upstate New York.

Descendants of Abraham Kalman Wolens are many. My favorite part of this story is that his exceptional great-great grandson, Dr. Kaylan Silverberg and his incredible wife, Carol, are active members of the Austin Jewish community. Their love of America, love of Judaism and continued deeds of kindness are a living legacy to the life of Abraham Kalman Wolens. 🇺🇸



Gold Stamp book issued by K. Wolens Department Stores.

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.

TJHS on Facebook

TJHS on Facebook: Search *Texas Jewish Historical Society* and “Like” us!

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 if you will include your family’s history in *The TJHS Magazine*. 🇺🇸

Mazel Tov

Lila Katz, TJHS Board Member, who graduated University of Texas/Austin with a double major in Jewish Studies and Humanities with a focus on Jewish storytelling in musical theater. She will be spending this next year in Israel for rabbinical school.

Joan Linares, on the publication of her book, *Inside We Are All The Same*.

Tumbleweed Smith, aka Bob Lewis, on his induction into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in the Broadcast Museum in Kilgore, Texas. 🇺🇸

Dream Big Named First Recipient of Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund from TJHS

by Sheldon Lippman

The Texas Jewish Historical Society has named its first recipient of the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund. Dream Big, an educational initiative created by Josh Merwin, received the \$5,000 award.

Dream Big shares the story of Jacob de Cordova, a Jamaican-born Jew of Spanish descent. Among his many accomplishments, de Cordova was a visionary who created one of the first maps of Texas. While this project celebrates de Cordova as a founder of Waco, Texas, it also follows his journey through Texas and his impact on every major city along the way.

The project brings his legacy to life through a children's book, animated films, and a community celebration, all designed to educate, inspire, and preserve Texas history. Built around de Cordova's famed map of Texas, the story highlights

his contributions to the state and is integrated into Dream Big's STEAM-based multimedia platform, enriching student learning statewide.

As part of the program, ten Waco students participated in the Dream Big Creation Lab, collaborating to create the book and earning the distinction of becoming published authors. The project is in partnership with the Youth Innovation Studio, Triple Win Waco, and the Taylor Museum in Waco.

The initiative will culminate in a Dream Big Literacy Day event, where 5,000 printed copies of the book will be available. Half will be distributed free to the community and the other half will be sold by the Taylor Museum, along with 10,000 digital licenses that will be released. Added deliverables include an animated literacy film

and an animated music video to further engage audiences. The Kessler Fund covered the cost of the Creation Lab, and every other dollar collected will go toward releasing the 5,000 books to a wide audience.

TJHS established the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Education Outreach Fund to honor the late Rabbi Jimmy Kessler. He was the founder of TJHS, and his legacy of promoting and preserving the history of Jews and Jewish communities in Texas, will continue through educational programs for all ages.

Pre-order the Dream Big book on Jacob de Cordova and learn more about bringing a program to your community at DreamBigBooks.org.

For more information about the Kessler Fund, contact Joan Linares, TJHS Chairperson at txjhs.org. 

TJHS Membership Update

In 2023, TJHS introduced the new online Member Database on the TJHS Website. Today there are over seven hundred members with couples and partners listed as individual members.

TJHS membership operates on a "rolling renewals" rather than a fixed yearly calendar date. Your membership due date is the year-to-date of the last fee payment. The benefits of the rolling renewals are that members enjoy a full year of membership, regardless of when they join, encouraging and allowing sign up at any time throughout the year. This also spreads renewals throughout the year, which provides a more even and predictable revenue stream.

Members have been receiving a reminder postcard noting their pay-

ment date. The postcards are timed near or after the members' due date. You may renew your membership in several ways—

1. Online with credit or debit card form
2. By check with printable mail-in form downloaded from website or found on the last page of The Texas Jewish Historical Society Magazine.
3. To access credit/debit card or check-writing renewal forms online, open the website www.txjhs.org
4. Click on upper right menu of Home Page, "Website-Registered My Login" Enter your ID (your email) and Password in login box. Members with no password or

who have forgotten it can have a new password reset by writing to admin@txjhs.org

5. In the Members-Only-Dashboard, click on either "renew my membership by credit/debit card" or "renew my membership by check (print and mail in form.)"
6. Complete respective forms as directed.

In addition to renewing membership on the Members-Only Dashboard you can search the TJHS Membership Directory, review My Member Profile (as your information appears in the Directory), and view My Membership Details (when you renewed your membership, at what level and will tell you when to renew). Any questions, contact president@txjhs.org. 

Are you benefiting from the **Members-Only Dashboard** on the TJHS Website?

Whether you renew your TJHS membership by writing a check or using a credit card online, if you are in the TJHS Membership Database, you can access the **Members-Only Dashboard**.

Easy access: Click on **Website-Registered Members Login** on the home page at www.txjhs.org

- In the sign-in box, enter **Email and Password**
- Forgot or never had a password? Email admin@txjhs.org

What will you find on the **Members-Only Dashboard?**

- View and search the **TJHS Members Directory**
- View and edit **My Member Profile** - Check your name/contact as it appears in the TJHS Directory
- View **My Membership Details** - See your history of renewal payments and next due date
- **Renew My Membership** - click to pull up renewal form for credit card use. Check writers will find a printable form under Membership on the Home Page.

Welcome New Members!

Dr. William Fisherman
Lakeway, Texas

Randy Milstein
Plano, Texas

Sharon Abelman Gerwitz
San Antonio, Texas

Dr. Alan Rosen
Bellaire, Texas

Gerilyn & John Gordon
Houston, Texas

Cara Jones
Fort Worth, Texas

Bill Scholl
Zurich, Switzerland

Contributions

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

Gift membership to Sharon Abelman Gerwitz from Bernard Rabinowitz

Gift membership to Randy Milstein from Rusty Milstein

Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund Contributions

Diamond

In memory of Cheryl Andrew, Michael Cohen, and Lolli Rosenberg Scott

Joan & Ruben Linares

In memory Dr. Larry Barzune

Sally Drayer

In honor of Joan Linares publishing her book *Inside We Are All the Same*

Barbara & Ben Rosenberg

In honor of Tumbleweed aka Bob Lewis on his induction into the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in the Broadcast Museum in Kilgore, Texas

Joan & Ruben Linares

Barbara & Ed Stone

TJHS Board Meeting in New Braunfels

Photographers for the Board Meeting were Sally Drayer, Marilyn Lippman, Joan Linares, Davie Lou Solka



Attendees Sunday Morning Board Meeting.



Havdalah with Michael and Lynda Furgatch.



Jan Hart, Sharon & Sonny Gerber, Anita Feigenbaum, Mary Ann O'Loughlin, Marilyn Lippman, and Rob Markman at Havdalah.



Shana & Edward Bauman, Edward & Barbara Stone at Havdalah.



Joan Linares signing her book, Inside We Are All The Same to Sharon Gerber.

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Board Members on Sunday morning.



Sheldon Lippman.



*Sally Dayer,
Davie Lou Solka.*

*Jeff Levine,
Barbara Stone,
Membership
Co-Chairs.*



Scott Langston, Bob Lewis, Barbara Rosenberg, Shana Bauman, Susan Lewis, Jan Hart, Davie Lou Solka.



*John Campbell, Gayle Cannon, Sonny Gerber, Sheldon Lippman,
Ben Rosenberg, Nelson Chavitz, Rob Markman*

Meet Your Board

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 President 2002-2004) z”l met at Echo Hill Ranch in 1960, and were married in 1961. They have three children and six grandchildren. 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. Jan has served in many positions in the Texas Jewish Historical Society, and currently is co-chair of the Speaker’s Bureau. She is proud to be part of five generations of women who are members of Hadassah. Jan recently moved to Austin from Temple, and enjoys reading, bridge, and all that Austin has to offer.

Marilyn Lippman, a Dallas resident with strong ties to Fayette County, serves as Treasurer of Temple Israel in Schulenberg, and is a Board Member of the Jewish Cemetery in Hallettsville. After a distinguished forty-year career as a Business Operations Manager, Marilyn retired from Corporate American and is currently pursuing Master Gardener Certification in Dallas County with an expected completion in May, 2026. Her interest is purely for the joy of deepening her knowledge of gardening—especially Texas native plants. In her leisure time, Marilyn enjoys walking her golden doodle, Paddington, taking Tai Chi classes, reading, and continuing her work with the TJHS Meeting Committee.



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 for-

mer newspaper columnist and has written articles on travel and Texas history. Jane is a charter member of TJHS, and is a member of the Grants Committee.

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 is retired after thirty-five years as a pediatrician in the Kingwood-Humble area. He currently serves as

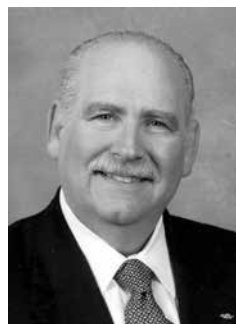


a Docent at the Holocaust Museum of Houston, and serves on the Board. He is also a Board Member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. Hy is married to Lynn Gordon Penn for thirty-seven years, and performs as the Magician, “The Great Hydini.”

Marc Wormser, TJHS Past President (2012-2014), 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, also a TJHS Board Member, travel whenever they can.



Jules Dorfman Frapart, 1st Vice President, was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and grew up in Brownsville surfing, playing music, and working in the family business. He attended the University of Texas/Austin, where he met and married his wife, Phyllis (Goldstein). They returned to Brownsville where they opened and ran a jewelry store and a children’s clothing store for twenty years. He completed his bachelor’s degree from University of Texas/Brownsville, and was the textbook manager for UT/Brownsville for fifteen years. Jules taught middle school for Brownsville ISD for five years and has sold insurance policies for New York Life Insurance Company after com-



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pleting his insurance certification. Jules has been active in the Jewish community of Brownsville, and is involved with the Masonic Fraternity. He was recently accepted to membership in the Sons of the Republic of Texas. He belongs to the Chais of Texas, a Jewish Motorcycle Alliance, Texas Club, and before COVID, he made several trips a year on his motorcycle with the Free Masons Riding Club. He and Phyllis have two daughters and four grandchildren. Jules is now retired and enjoying life. He and Phyllis recently moved to Austin after forty-eight years in Brownsville.

Jeff Levine, 2nd Vice-President, was born in Houston, but spent much of his life up north. He had the opportunity to return to Texas in 2017, when they moved to Austin. He and his wife, Gail, have two sons who both live in Los Angeles, CA. Jeff and Gail are musicians and enjoy fitness and the outdoors. Jeff is a retired IBM marketing manager.



Susan Goodman Novick is a fourth-generation El Pasoan, and has written several books and articles about El Paso families. She holds a Master of Library Science degree from The Catholic University of America, a Master of Public Affairs degree from The University of Texas/Austin, and an A.B. in History from Smith College. She is a Certified Archivist who



works with individuals, organizations, and businesses to find, save, understand, and explain their history. She and her husband, David, are active members of Temple Mount Sinai in El Paso. Susan serves as Corresponding Secretary of TJHS.



Melissa Cohen Nickels is a historian and educator dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich history of the Jewish community in South Texas. With a background in history and education from the University of Illinois and MEd from the University of St. Thomas, she brings a deep

understanding of historical research and pedagogy to her work. As the curator of the Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Archives at Rice University, Melissa develops programs that engage students and the broader community in exploring oral histories, archival research, and historical storytelling. She was a history teacher for ten years in Fort Bend ISD and for six years at The Emery Weiner School. Melissa enjoys traveling internationally, road tripping to National Parks with her family, along with hiking and exploring.



Shana Bauman lives in Monte Belvieu with her husband, Ed, and was raised in Bellaire, Texas. She recently became a grandmother to a beautiful baby girl, whose family lives in Israel. She graduated from the University of Houston with a BS in Medical Technology/Biology and retired years ago as Blood Bank Supervisor at a local hospital. She now spends

her time volunteering at the hospital, the local food pantry and ushers with her twin sister, Martha, at a major theater in Houston. She recently acquired Master Naturalist status which is a program run by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department that focuses on restoring prairies, wetlands, and other habitats for our flora and fauna. She is a member of Hadassah and enjoys camping and outdoor activities with Ed. She is looking forward to multiple visits to Israel to visit her granddaughter. Shana is Chairwoman of the Awards Committee.



for fifty years, where she represents several clients through local and area media outlets. She also serves as Technical Director when Tumbleweed has a speaking engagement. Susan is an avid Mah Jong enthusiast and plays weekly. She

Susan Zack Lewis, TJHS Past President (2019-2021), is from Big Spring, and is married to Bob Lewis, aka Tumbleweed Smith. They have two sons, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Susan is involved in many civic activities in Big Spring. She and Bob have owned Multi Media Advertising

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has a degree in Interior Design and is currently studying watercolor with a local artist.

Howard “Rusty” Milstein, TJHS Past President (2010-2012), was born in



Longview and still lives there. He is retired from Industrial Steel Warehouse. 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 his wife, Mitzi z”l 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.

Barbara Green Stone, Membership Chair, is a fourth generation Texan, who was born in Dallas and grew up in Lafayette, Louisiana, and Dallas. She earned a B.S. in Medical Technology from the University of Texas/



Austin, where she met her Houston-born husband, Edward. They have two sons and one granddaughter. Barbara is a longtime volunteer with Temple Emanu-El Women of Reform Judaism in Dallas. Her

hobbies include photography, crocheting for donation, reading, travel, and genealogy (including prior to the internet). 🇺🇸

In Memoriam



Morton H. Meyerson, TJHS member, died August 5, 2025, in Dallas. He is survived by his daughters, Marti Meyerson and Leslie Gordon, six grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

May his memory be a blessing.

Dr. Gabriella Lyle Receives Grant from TJHS

Dr. Gabrielle Lyle has received a grant of \$2500 from the Texas Jewish Historical Society for the development of a book, *In the Land of Chaos and Challah*. The grant will aid Dr. Lyle in her research travels in South Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico.



Books to Read



Inside We Are All the Same, by Joan Linares. Self published on Lulu.com Available in Hardback.

Does TJHS Have Your Current Email Address?

Does TJHS Membership have your current email address? You can check your Member Profile on the Members-only Dashboard for your current mailing and email addresses. Go to Website-Registered Members Login on TJHS Website. If you cannot remember your password or have other questions, send an email query to admin@txjhs.org

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Writing Runs in the Brenner Family

by Vickie Vogel

This column is based on information available in the TJHS 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. We want the TJHS archives to be as complete and accurate as possible.

Journalist Marie Brenner comes from a long line of writers and artists. Chayim and Deborah Brenner had a son, Isidor, in 1874 in Kurland, a German duchy controlled by the Czar. After World War I, it became part of the new nation of Latvia.¹ Isidor immigrated to Aguascalientes, Mexico when he was 17. He married Paula Duchan (1883-1971) who was from his home town and had immigrated to Chicago where they met in a boarding house in the 1880s. Paula worked in a sweatshop. Isidor came to Chicago from El Paso. They married a week later. After spending a year in El Paso, they moved to Aguascalientes. Isidor and Paula worked at a hot springs spa as waiter and cook, respectively. Not uncommon in that era, they were not part of a formal Jewish community and were isolated from their religion.

Isidor and Paula had two sons and three daughters: Henry in 1903, Anita in 1905, Dorothy in 1907, Milton Conrad in 1911, and Leah in

1915. They moved back and forth from Aguascalientes to Texas during the Mexican Revolution, before settling for good in San Antonio in 1916. Isidor had served as purchasing agent for Pancho Villa, who warned him of

the coming bloodshed, and helped the family catch a train to the United States.² Isidor started one of the first discount chains, Solo-Serve, Inc. Isidor “made and lost and made five fortunes in Mexico and Texas,” ac-



Anita Brenner, Marie Brenner's aunt. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/262533181/anita-bremmer>

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cording to Marie.³ In the 1920s, Solo-Serve had a rooftop garden theater which screened movies on Saturday night and hosted tea dances on Sundays.⁴

The Brenner children faced antisemitism, confusing and troubling to them since they had had limited access to their Jewish background in Mexico.

Older son Henry married Esther Newman. They had one daughter, JoAnn Ruth Brenner Carpenter, who became a teacher and guidance counselor in Corpus Christi.

Isidor and Paula's second child, Anita (original name Hanna) was a writer and anthropologist. Born in Mexico, she was educated in the United States and returned to Mexico in the 1920s, feeling an outcast from her Jewish roots. Isidor consulted his rabbi at San Antonio's Temple

Beth El who arranged for Rabbi J. L. Weinberger, head of the Mexican B'nai B'rith to meet her and smooth her transition back to Mexico. Her groundbreaking work *Idols Behind Altars* was the first comprehensive documentation of Mexican art from prehistory through the 1920s. She became an important link between Mexican and American culture. She helped Diego Rivera find recognition in New York.⁵ Anita also was a journalist in political commentary, sympathizing with leftist bohemian movements. Her writing appeared in the *New York Times*, the *National*, the *Jewish Daily Forward*, *Mademoiselle* and other prestigious newspapers and magazines. She also wrote about the Mexican Revolution, interviewed Leon Trotsky in Mexico, and became an editor of *Mexico This Month*. She died in an automobile accident in Jalisco in 1974 at the age of 69 and is buried in Aguascalientes. Anita's daughter Susannah⁶ became a journalist and history professor at Iberoamericana University in Mexico City. Among other publications, she wrote *Anita Brenner, A Mind of Her Own* about the life of her mother.⁷

Dorothy Brenner, born 1907, was the "most stylish and bohemian" of the siblings. She was a "flaming redhead and bon vivant" who lived in Mexico City "with a tenor of the Belles Artes" and often visited the family in San Antonio.⁸

The baby of the Brenner family, Leah, was known for her books about Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Leah worked for Rivera from 1939 to 1945.⁹ She also wrote a children's book illustrated by Rivera. When she returned to the United States, she lived in New York for a time before settling in San Antonio where she continued as a freelance writer. Her papers are housed at the Harry Ran-

som Center in Austin. Leah died in 2004 at the age of 88. She is buried in Temple Beth El Cemetery in San Antonio.¹⁰

Marie Brenner's father, Milton, was born in 1911 in Aguascalientes. She called him "very Texas, boastful and confident as if he'd been born in a uniform." Milton became chairman of Solo Serve Corporation after Isidor's death. He married Thelma Long Brenner in 1945. Their son, Carl Andrew, was born 1947 and daughter Marie Harriet was born two years later.¹¹

Thelma Brenner grew up in Boston. During World War II, she worked at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the primary intelligence and espionage agency and precursor of the CIA. She and Milton met at an officers' dance at the Washington Jewish Community Center. She checked out his background and financials and found the Wharton School grad, a lieutenant colonel, an attractive prospect. Milton was in charge of the finance division of the Air Transport Command. Thelma's last assignment was as a typist/researcher on the team preparing for the Nuremberg trials. Thelma and Milton soon married, and Thelma adjusted to married life in San Antonio in 1945.¹²

Thelma was college educated and did graduate work in psychology. She and her friends organized against the Vietnam War as "San Antonio Mothers for Peace." When Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara came to San Antonio for a lecture, the women forced their way into his hotel room and confronted him about the war. Hotel staff had given them access because their husbands were powerful men.¹³

Marie Brenner graduated Alamo Heights High School in 1967, where her classmates named her "most cul-

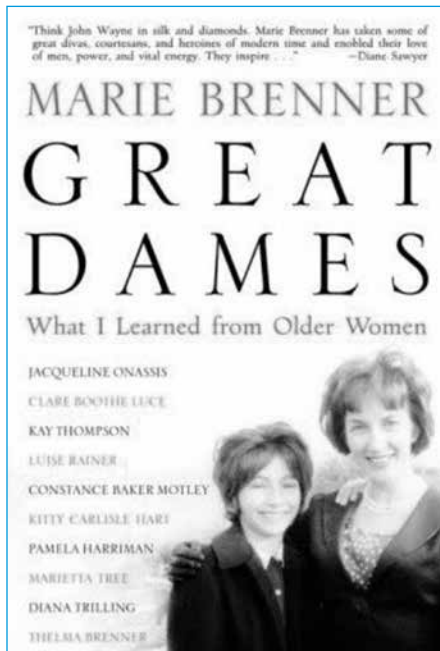


Paula Brenner, Marie Brenner's grandmother by famed photographer, Tina Modotti, 1924. Institute of Arts, Gift of the Leah Brenner Trust, 20024.89.3. Accessed at <https://dia.org/collection/portrait-leah-brenners-mother->

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tured.” She attended the University of Pennsylvania and graduated from the University of Texas in 1971. She received a master’s degree from New York University Film School in 1972. While there, she ran up a \$1000 department store charge, and Milton refused to pay. She sold ice cream from a pushcart in Central Park to earn the money to pay the debt. Then she wrote about her adventures and sold it to *New York Magazine* and her true career was launched. By 1971, she had become the youngest story editor in Paramount Pictures history. When that operation moved to the West Coast, she stayed in New York, becoming the quintessential New Yorker, dressed in black and making contacts, writing as an investigative journalist and writer-at-large for *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker*, and *New York Magazine*. She was the film critic for *Texas Monthly* and wrote for *Redbook*, the *Village Voice*, and other publications.



Cover of Marie Brenner's book with her and her mother Thelma, who is discussed in the last chapter of the book.

In 1976, Marie wrote her first novel, *Tell Me Everything*, about three women fighting post-feminist despair. San Antonio welcomed her home for a book signing. She told interviewers she writes because she “didn’t want to answer someone else’s phone.”¹⁴ Milton’s side of the family were all writers in Mexico, but Marie was the first novelist.

In 1978, her second book was *Going Hollywood*, an insider’s look at power and pretense in the movie business, based on her experiences while working for Paramount.

After a stint as foreign correspondent from London, Israel, Germany and France, she returned to the US as the first female baseball columnist covering the American League, traveling with the Boston Red Sox and writing for the *Boston Herald-American* in 1979. Her column, “Marie Brenner’s Red Sox Diary,” was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Baseball introduced her to her first husband, Jonathan Schwartz, a radio personality whom she met in the Yankee Stadium press box. A daughter was born before their divorce in 1984. In 1985, Marie married New York venture capitalist Ernest Pomerantz, also a former San Antonian.¹⁵

Marie Brenner gained acclaim for her writings. She won the Front Page Award for the most distinguished magazine story of 1986, based on an interview of Michelle Duvalier after she and her husband, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, had fled Haiti for the south of France. *House of Dreams: The Bingham Family of Louisville* was a critically-praised best seller in 1988. *Texas Monthly* called her Texas’ own “New York media star.” Liz Smith said she was the “best magazine writer in America.” Critic Rex Reed called her “a helluva writer.” She wrote celebrity profiles



Marie Brenner

for everyone from Princess Diana to Itzhak Rabin. “My entire life, everyone has told me secrets,” Marie said.¹⁶

Hollywood called, as some of her writings inspired movies, such as *The Insider* in 1999 about the tobacco industry (from her *Vanity Fair* article *The Man Who Knew Too Much*), Richard Jewell in 2019 based partially on a 1997 article, and *A Private War* about journalist Marie Colvin in 2012. Her 2002 article on the Enron scandal was used to question witnesses in a Senate committee hearing. She’s credited as producer on *Where’s My Roy Cohn?* from 2019, which was nominated for a video source award by the International Documentary Association.¹⁷

Hard-hitting journalism often leads to pushback from the subjects. Barbra Streisand and Jon Peters sent her a funeral wreath after an article about them she wrote in *New Times* magazine. At a black tie dinner in 1991, Donald Trump poured a glass of wine down Brenner’s suit because she had written an unflattering article about him.¹⁸ She followed up in 2018

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with *Ruthless: How Donald Trump and Roy Cohn's Dark Symbiosis Changed America*.¹⁹

In 2008, Brenner wrote a memoir about her relationship with her brother, Carl. Thelma used to call Carl and Marie “apples and oranges,” as they were so different. Carl joined the John Birch Society as a teenager, praised George W. Bush, criticized Marie’s “ACLU friends,” and became a born-again Christian. A trial lawyer, he threw that career over at age 35 to become an apple farmer in Washington State. “Carl,” Milton told him, “Jews don’t farm.”

When he was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma, an aggressive cancer, Marie spent weeks with Carl on his apple farm in 2001, hoping to mend their frayed relationship. She worked beside her obsessive-compulsive brother in the orchards and the packinghouses. Carl returned to Texas in 2003 intending to commit suicide and obliterate all traces of himself. Marie was determined not to let him be forgotten. She learned in March, 2003 her ailing brother had killed himself. Her memoir, *Apples and Oranges: My Brother and Me, Lost and Found*, was published in 2008.²⁰ In 2009, Alfred Uhry was commissioned to adapt it for the stage.²¹ It premiered at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta in 2012.²²

In 2019, Marie and her husband Ernest donated over five hundred photographs from their collection to the San Antonio Museum of Art, which led to the exhibit *Capturing the Moment*.

Four Corners, a long-running Australian documentary TV series, aired *Trump: the Comeback King* in February, 2025, which featured Marie Brenner.²³

Grandparents Isidor and Paula died in 1952 and 1971 respectively. Thelma Brenner, Marie’s mother,

died in 1989. Milton Brenner, Marie’s father, died in 2000 in San Antonio, age 88. Isidor, Paula, Thelma, and Milton are buried in Congregation Beth El Memorial Park.

Marie Brenner’s daughter, Casey Schwartz, is also a writer. Her works include *Attention: A Love Story*, and *In the Mind Fields: Exploring the New Science of Neuropsychanalysis*. Casey is a frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, and a contributing writer to the *Washington Post’s Book World*.²⁴

Marie Brenner’s latest book is *The Desperate Hours*, about New York Presbyterian hospital’s fight to save a city on the pandemic’s front lines.²⁵ She lives and writes in New York City.

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, all material comes from Box 3A169, folder “People by occupation, social workers - writers,” Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/brenner-anita>; Austin American-Statesman Life/Style, November 2, 1976, C1 by Jane Ulrich Life/Style Editor; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/223959894/isidor-brenner>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/223959956/paula-brenner>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Brenner; Michiko Kakutani, “When He Tried to Vanish, His Sister Wouldn’t Let him,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2008 accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/books/20kaku.html>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/262533181/anita-brenner>; Jan Jarboe, “Words Don’t Fail Novelist,” *San Antonio Light*, October 28, 1976; email Marie Brenner, July 9, 2025.
- 2 Publicity from Nancy Nelson, The Nelson Agency, New York City, undated. In Box 3A169 *ibid*.

- 3 Kakutani, *op cit*.
- 4 Brenner, Marie, *Great Dames: What I Learned From Older Women*, Crown Publishers: New York, 2000, p. 230.
- 5 Nelson, *op cit*.
- 6 Anita married David Glusker in New York. They had two children, Dr. Susannah Joel Glusker and Dr. Peter Glusker. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/brenner-anita>. Anita’s papers are at the Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Texas.
- 7 https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/182065492/susannah_joel-glusker:
- 8 Email Marie Brenner, July 8, 2025.
- 9 <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/sanantonio/name/leah-brenner-obituary?id=50161180>
- 10 <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/133395473/leah-brenner>; <https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00744>
- 11 https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/47014924/carl_andrew-brenner.
- 12 *Great Dames*, *op cit.*, pp. 228-229; email Marie Brenner, July 8, 2025.
- 13 *Ibid*.
- 14 Jarboe, *op cit*.
- 15 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Brenner
- 16 Nelson, *op cit*.
- 17 https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0107493/awards/?ref_=nm_awd
- 18 <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/marie-brenner/>
- 19 Audio CD from Simon & Schuster, ISBN-13, 978-1508278283
- 20 Marie Brenner, *Apples and Oranges: My Brother and Me, Lost and Found*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, ISBN 9781429924801. E-book available from Macmillan Publishers.
- 21 wikipedia *op cit*.
- 22 <https://www.google.com/search?q=apples+and+oranges+stage+play+Uhry>
- 23 https://m.imdb.com/title/tt35871333/?ref_=ttch_ov_i
- 24 Email Marie Brenner, July 8, 2025.
- 25 <https://www.mariebrenner.com/books> 



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.

On the form below or online, please show how your project meets our mission.

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: _____

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Title and Description of project.

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

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

Please detail the timeline of your project.

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 or go to www.txjhs.org and click on "Apply for a Grant" at the top of the page.



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Early in his rabbinical education and career, Rabbi Kessler lamented the absence of significant records of the Texas Jewish experience in local, state, and university libraries. His frustration turned to action when in 1980 in San Antonio he organized a meeting of like-minded Texans for what became the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

TJHS continues to expand and share the understanding of the Jewish presence in Texas through education and outreach.

The Kessler Fund is an inducement to share the incredible history of Jews in Texas with a broader community through an ever-expanding scope of projects such as invitations to renowned speakers to the TJHS Annual Gatherings, research grants to university students in Jewish studies, partnering with other organizations to expand educational programs for young people, piquing the interests of people from all religions to the richness of Texas Jewish history, and more. This Fund is a long-term commitment to the legacy of Jimmy Kessler for which \$250,000 has been set as a launch goal.

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