

Schedule of Events for 47th Annual Gathering of the Texas Jewish Historical Society

April 24–26, 2026, Houston, Texas

Friday, April 24, 2026

3:00 – 4:30 PM *Welcome Table & Registration, Hampton Inn by Hilton Galleria, 4500 Post Oak Pkwy, Houston, TX 77027*

5:15 PM – *Carpool from Hampton Inn to Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism (HCRJ), 801 Bering Drive, Houston, TX 77057*

5:45 – 7:00 PM Shabbat Dinner at HCRJ

7:15 PM – Shabbat Services led by Rabbi Steven M. Gross, featuring special remarks by Renee Wizig-Barrios, President and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, followed by Oneg

8:45 PM – *Carpool returns to Hampton Inn*

Saturday, April 25, 2026

Morning Program

*All Aboard! Meet no later than 8:50 AM in Hampton Inn lobby to board Charter Bus to Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH), 5401 Caroline Street, Houston, Texas 77004. **Bus departs hotel promptly at 8:55 AM***

9:20–9:30 AM – *Enter HMH through security metal detectors and proceed quietly to assigned meeting room*

9:45–10:00 AM – Welcome Remarks

10:00–10:40 AM – “Voices of Resilience: A Story of Survival, Faith, and Song.” Anita Bonanno

10:45–11:15 AM – “Educating Houston: Teaching and Researching Jewish Studies at University of Houston (UH)”. Dr. Caryn Tamber-Resenau and Miranda Ruzinsky

11:20–11:45 AM – “A House with a Jewish Soul: Memory, Love, and Legacy in Galveston”. Marilyn Flick and Shelley Kessler

11:45 AM–12:30 PM – *Box Lunch in Meeting Room*

Afternoon Program: Options – Select (i) or (ii)

(i) 12:30–2:00 PM – Tours of HMH with Docents Lynn Gordon, Janet Pozmantier, and Ali Katz

(ii) 12:30–2:00 PM “Houston Jewish History as Lived Experience: Women of Houston”; Melissa Cohen Nickels, Curator, Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Jewish Archives, Rice University, in HMH Meeting Room

2:00–2:25 PM – *Break time and find seating in HMH Auditorium prior to 2:30 PM*

2:30–3:00 PM – “Texas Jewish Stories: Family Histories on the Journey to Texas”. Melanie Weinberger and Students from The Emery/Weiner School

3:05 PM–4:30 PM – “Grit and Grace: How Jewish Women Built a Better Texas.” Screening of film in HMH Auditorium, followed by Q&A with filmmaker, Barbara Rosenthal

4:45 PM– *All Aboard! Charter Bus departs from HMH to return to Hampton Inn*

Evening Program

6:15 PM – *All Aboard. Charter Bus departs Hampton Inn for HCRJ, 801 Bering Drive, Houston, TX 77057*

6:30–6:45 PM – *Take seats for dinner*

6:45–7:45 PM – Welcome and Blessings, followed by buffet dinner from Ken & Ziggy’s

7:45–8:15 PM – Enjoy dessert during presentation by Ziggy Gruber

8:15–9:00 PM – TJHS Award Presentations and Closing

9:00 PM – *All Aboard! Charter Bus departs HCRJ and returns to Hampton Inn*

Sunday, April 26, 2026

9:00 – 11:00 AM – Board of Trustees and Annual Gathering Meetings in Hampton Inn Meeting Room. Installation of Officers and Board of Trustees. State of the Society Address.

11:00 AM – Meeting Adjourned

Texas Jewish Historical Society 2026 Annual Gathering, Houston, Texas, April 24 – 26, 2026

Program Presenters

Anita Bonanno, born in Dallas, Texas, to Holocaust survivors Irma and Izy Freudenreich, shares a powerful story of love, survival, and resilience. Her parents met in the Łódź Ghetto and, despite being separated during deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau, were reunited and married just days after liberation from Bergen-Belsen—an inspiring story that shaped Anita’s life. Blind since birth and living with cerebral palsy, Anita has built a remarkable life defined by determination and artistry. A talented vocalist from a young age, she earned a music degree from the University of North Texas and enjoyed a 21-year career with Texas Medical Center. She has served as High Holiday cantorial soloist and performed at numerous civic and community events in Houston. Honored with Temple Beth Torah’s Ner Tamid Award in 2024, Anita continues to inspire audiences with her voice and her story, celebrating the enduring power of faith, love, and the human spirit.

Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau is assistant professor of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Houston and directs the UH Jewish Studies program. She is a biblical scholar who specializes in studying women, gender, and sexuality in the Hebrew Bible and other early Jewish literature.

Miranda Ruzinsky is a Public History M.A. candidate at the University of Houston and a Lydia Mendoza Fellow. Her current research focuses on Holocaust remembrance and the power of narrative to inspire social justice. Miranda worked on the Sephardic Latinx Oral History Project, volunteers for the USC Shoah Foundation’s antisemitism collection, and is a published writer for Houston History Magazine.

Marilyn Flick shares a personal story connecting her family to Galveston’s Jewish history. Her husband’s family once owned a home in Galveston that later became the residence for congregation B’nai Israel’s rabbi; years afterward, Marilyn and her husband purchased the house themselves. The home holds special significance, as it was there that Rabbi Jimmy Kessler proposed to his wife, Shelley. Marilyn and TJHS Board Member and Past President Susan Zack Lewis are lifelong friends who grew up together in Big Spring, Texas. Marilyn currently lives in Houston and makes frequent visits to the family home in Galveston.

Shelley Kessler is a descendant of Jewish immigrants who came to America as part of the Galveston Movement in the early 20th century. She is one of the few remaining descendants of Jewish immigrants from that time period still living on Galveston Island. Shelley is actively involved in preserving and nurturing the story of the Galveston Movement. She is a member of the Galveston County Museum’s podcast team where she shares her family’s immigration story and the Galveston Movement. Shelly’s late husband Jimmy (*may his memory be a blessed memory*), who died in 2022, was another key figure in Galveston’s Jewish history. Jimmy Kessler served as B’nai Israel’s rabbi for 32 years until his retirement in 2014. He also was the founder and first president of the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Melissa Cohen-Nickels is Curator of the Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Jewish Archives at Rice University. As an educator and historian, she has taught history at The Emery/Weiner School and in Fort Bend ISD. Currently, Cohen-Nickels is teaching at the religious school for Congregation Beth El in Missouri City. She also has worked closely with the Houston World Affairs Council as a member of its Core Teacher Council, creating programming and curriculum.

Melanie Weinberger is a Middle School English Teacher at The Emery/Weiner School (EWS). Melanie grew up in Houston and attended EWS from sixth to twelfth grade. Melanie attended the University of Texas at Austin and earned a degree in Applied Learning and Development. She taught in Austin for eight years, and developed a passion for teaching students to become readers and writers. She moved back to Houston and joined EWS in 2025. Melanie enjoys walks with her dog, Reese, listening to music, crafting, and spending time with friends and family.

Barbara Rosenthal is an award-winning filmmaker with nearly four decades of experience creating documentaries that educate, inspire, and deepen public understanding of history and culture. Her most recent film, *Grit & Grace: How Jewish Women Built a Better Texas*, explores 19th- and 20th-century Texas history through the lives of five influential Jewish women and their lasting community impact. Three years in the making, the film reflects Rosenthal’s lifelong passion for women’s history and storytelling. Her previous work includes *Seders & Cigars – A History of Jews in Tampa* (2019), now archived in the Library of Congress.

Ziggy Gruber is a Houston-based restaurateur and cultural preservationist best known as the owner of Kenny & Ziggy’s New York Delicatessen, which he opened in 1999. He is the third generation to run a Jewish Deli; his grandfather Max Gruber left Budapest, Hungary, worked in New York delis, and in 1927 opened The Rialto Deli on Broadway; his father Gene (Eugene) Gruber then

continued in the business. Gruber trained from an early age in his family's Jewish deli tradition and later studied at Le Cordon Bleu in London before working in Michelin-star restaurants. In 2016, he co-founded National Deli Month to celebrate and preserve Jewish deli culture while raising funds for local nonprofits. Through this initiative, Kenny & Ziggy's supports the Holocaust Museum Houston, hosts annual luncheons for Holocaust survivors, and lends deli memorabilia to museum exhibitions. His work bridges food, memory, and Jewish heritage, making a lasting impact on Houston's cultural landscape.

Holocaust Museum Houston Docents:

- Lynn Gordon
- Janet Poxmantier
- Ali Katz