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Belz-Parker Artists Ascending Concert Series: A Fifty Year History of Magnificent Music

This year Baron Hirsch Congregation will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its popular Belz-Parker Artists Ascending Concert Series, which features up-and-coming classical musicians from around the world. The concert series, created in 1966, was the brainchild of Philip Belz and Dr. Joe Parker. It has provided a showcase over the years for promising young performers, many of whom have achieved stardom since their appearances here in Memphis. The concerts have attracted not only local music aficionados, but others who have traveled from communities throughout the Mid-South to experience these amazing performances.

Leonid Saharovici, Joe Parker, pianist Keith Armstrong, Jack Belz, the artist's mother

Parker, who served initially as chairman of the series, was fortunate to be able to make contact with the Sol Hurok Agency in New York. They were supportive of the concept of encouraging young musicians early in their careers and helped the series get off to a good start with an exciting list of prospective performers.

The first season of Artists Ascending featured the following performers: Israeli pianist Daniel Barenboim, then just twenty-four years old; mezzo-soprano Joanna Simon, sister of singer Carly Simon; Theodore Bikel; and twenty-one-year-old Itzhak Perlman, whose seated performance, the result of his bout with polio, brought the applauding audience to its feet.

The second season brought equally talented musicians: soprano Roberta Peters; duo pianists Ferrante and Teicher; and two Moscow Tchaikovsky International Competition winners, violinist Shmuel Ashkenasi and pianist Misha Dichter. In season three, concertgoers heard tenor Richard Tucker; guitarist Carlos Montoya; soprano Martha Schlamme; pianist Grigory Sokolov; and the sensational twenty-two-year-old Israeli violinist Pinchas Zuckerman, who continues to thrill his audiences today.

In the seasons that have followed, Artists Ascending has treated its audiences to scores of gifted performers such as Gil Shaham; pianist Navah Perlman, daughter of Itzhak Perlman; Korean violinist Chee-Yun; pianist Orli Shaham, the talented sixteen-year-old sister of Gil Shaham; and Jonathan Biss, then only fourteen. Among the youngest musical prodigies who have appeared have been clarinet player Julian Bliss, age twelve, and pianist Ji-Yong, age eleven.

Leonid Saharovici, who now serves as chairman of the concert series, says that he, Belz and Parker forged special personal relationships with many of the musicians. He recalls that when they picked up young pianist

Please see **MUSIC**, *page 3*

President's Message . . . .

In 1978, when I moved to Memphis from suburban Detroit to go to graduate school, I remember my mother's horrified look and her first question: "Are there Jews in Memphis?" To be quite honest, I didn't know the answer. I only intended to stay here for a year, finish my degree, and move on. Fate intervened when I met my wonderful husband, a native Memphian and, to my mother's delight, a nice Jewish boy. I was going to be a Southerner!

By the time we married in 1982, I had learned that Memphis had an active Jewish community, comprised of people from all over the spectrum of Jewish practice and lifestyle. It took more time, however, to come to appreciate their deep historical roots and significant contributions to the fabric of life in Memphis and the Mid-South. After nearly 40 years here, I am still learning new things that make me proud to call Memphis my home.

My interest in Jewish history was piqued when I began my own search for family roots. Both my parents were immigrants – my father born in Poland and my mother in Canada where her family fled from Rumania and Russia. Why did they come to America and how did they get here? What social, economic and political pressures did they overcome? As I expanded my search I became fascinated with the brave immigrants who spread beyond the big cities to the small towns and communities of the Mid-South.

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South collects, preserves, presents, and interprets the history of the lives of Jews in this region. It is only by honoring and recounting our past that we can ensure the survival and stability of our Jewish communities and heritage. The JHSMM does this through its Oral History Project, its partnership with the Temple Israel Archives, and through a wide variety of programs and presentations, all free to the public, on various aspects of Jewish history.

In these challenging times, a sense of where we came from is critical to knowing where we are going and how we can get there. I hope you will join with the JHSMM as we celebrate our past and look to our future. It is an honor to serve as your president. I would love to hear from you. Your story is our story and I hope you will share it.

Mimi Clemons

New on our Website!

Webmaster Dick Rubin has added an interesting new feature to our Jewish Historical Society website: a Program Archive. This will be a listing of all our programs, from the most current back to 1986, with information about speakers and descriptions when available. To view the archive click on "Programs" at the top of the home page, then on "Program Archive."

Please be patient! Dick is still in the process of researching and adding information, so the archive is not yet complete. However, you'll have more than enough to read if you check out our Southern Heritage Newsletter Archive, where you can access thirty years of our newsletters, containing a variety of articles related to the Jewish history of Memphis and the Mid-South.

www.jhsmem.org

MUSIC, *continued from page 1*

Keith Armstrong (now an acclaimed performer, composer and recording artist), Parker asked him "Are you hungry?" to which Armstrong replied, "I'm starving!" When Parker asked, "What would you like?" the reply was "Memphis Barbecue!" so Parker drove to Corky's. Armstrong took a look at the menu and said he wanted to eat everything, but he settled for a large pork sandwich, which he said he would eat while rehearsing at Baron Hirsch. "Sorry, but you can't take it there," said Parker. So they drove to Armstrong's hotel where he attacked his sandwich, then went on to conquer the piano at the synagogue.

Eleven-year-old pianist Ji-Yong at Baron Hirsch

Armstrong had admired the pocket watches and chains worn by Belz and Saharovici. Belz asked, "Would you like to have one?" The answer was an enthusiastic "Yes! I'd wear it to all my concerts." Belz drove home and soon came back with a watch and chain, which he bestowed upon Armstrong, who proudly joined the other two pocket watch wearers in a group photo.

Saharovici points out that a great debt is owed to the late Martha Ellen Maxwell, who not only served as a consultant and promoter, but who also became a supporter and dear friend of the series. She was honored with the Belz-Saharovici Medal, given to artists and others for excellence in musical artistry. Saharovici also credits the Commercial Appeal, Hebrew Watchman and local television stations for promoting the Artists Ascending concerts. About ten years ago an outreach program was begun, taking the artists to LeBonheur and other hospitals, schools, the Memphis Jewish Home and West Clinic to bring the joy of music to the greater community and to "educate by example."

In 1993 Artists Ascending was renamed the Philip and Sarah Belz Artists Ascending Series. Originally there had been a nominal charge for the concerts—$7.50 for a season's subscription or $3.00 for individual tickets, although these prices escalated in subsequent years. Thanks to a fund established by the late Philip and Sarah Belz, the concerts have been offered free of charge to the community since 1993. The series evolved in 1997 to become the Belz-Parker Artists Ascending Series, honoring both founders of the concerts which have become a mainstay in the cultural life of Memphis.

Leonid Saharovici is helping to carry on the magnificent musical legacy established by Philip Belz and Joe Parker. Philip's son, Jack Belz, also remains committed to bringing outstanding young talent to Memphis. According to Saharovici, a Fiftieth Anniversary event is being planned, tentatively for March, 2018. ✡

The Sumner Levine Speaker Series presents

Greg Siskind, who will speak on "Jewish Genealogy" September 10, 2:00 PM, at the MJCC

Greg Siskind is a Memphis immigration lawyer and the founder of Siskind Susser, the largest immigration firm in Tennessee, which he co-founded in 1994. He is the author of five books on various legal topics and serves on the board of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Greg has also been an avid genealogist since he was a teenager. He manages a family tree with nearly 3400 individuals dating back nearly 300 years. His talk will include: where to start your family tree research; the most important web sites to find helpful information; finding information from government agencies that is not online; working with documents written in Yiddish and other languages; researching in Jewish cemeteries; taking a roots trip to learn more about your family history.

Midnight in Tennessee: The Untold Story of the First Jewish Lynching in America

Late one summer's night in Franklin,Tennessee, in 1868, Samuel Bierfield sat in the back of a dry goods store with his black clerk Lawrence Bowman and another black man, Henry Morton. Fists pounded on the back door. A voice demanded that Bierfield open up. Bierfield shouted for the visitors to go around the front, unless they wanted to be shot. Moments later, the back door crashed open and a handful of masked men burst into the store.

Bierfield tried to make a run for it. He dashed out of his front door onto Main Street, where about a dozen men were waiting for him. He ran past the mob and into a stable. But the men quickly found him and dragged him into the street. Bierfield screamed and begged for his life. He offered the men money. He swore he would leave town straight away and never return, if they would only let him go. But the men had not come to bargain. They had come for a lynching.

The big tent at Robinson's Circus had not long since closed down for the evening that Saturday night. Although it was almost midnight, many of Franklin's residents were still awake. The commotion drew people to their windows and into the street. John L. Burch, a magistrate, tried to intervene. But the mob fired pistols into the air. They ordered everyone back indoors and warned them to keep away from their windows.

Moments later, five shots rang out. One bullet pierced Bierfield's hip. The other four entered through the front of his head. The pistols were fired from such close range that gunpowder burned Bierfield's clothes and skin. After the mob rode off, the people of Franklin came out of their homes. They found Bierfield's body lying on the corner of Indigo and Main streets. Bowman, who had been shot once, was found nearby, mortally wounded.

On August 16, 1868, an inquest jury of eight men recorded that the gunshots that killed Bierfield were fired by "a person or persons to the jury unknown." Incredibly, the jury added that "from the evidence the jury are unable to say whether the deed was done maliciously or feloniously." Someone must have thought better of that last statement because those lines were later crossed through.

No one took evidence from Bowman before he died. Some newspapers claimed that he was shot by accident. Dr. Daniel Cliffe later recalled that Bowman said he was shot on purpose. Morton, who escaped through a neighboring house, was the only one of the three who lived to tell the tale. Several newspapers blamed the murders on a new, rapidly growing organization of disaffected, white Southerners that called itself the Ku Klux Klan. "Lynch Law in Williamson County," thundered the Nashville Press and Times. "Murderous outrage at Franklin," reported the New York Times. The Jewish Messenger noted that "living in Tennessee can hardly be recommended." Even Democratic newspapers admitted grudgingly that though Bierfield was "an earnest Union man, he was quite an inoffensive Gentleman."

Although we think of lynching today as a person being hung from a tree, a lynching is any extrajudicial murder by a mob. Thousands of blacks were lynched across the South following the Civil War. The lynching of whites was rare and the lynching of Jews rarer still. Partly because of its rarity, the lynching of Leo Frank, in 1915 in Georgia, is famed as an example of the American Jewish dream turned sour. Which is why it is so strange that the lynching of Samuel Bierfield almost 50 years earlier is barely a footnote in American Jewish history.

The American Jewish Archives at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center contains no references to Bierfield in its catalog or in its collection. The Institute of Southern Jewish Life refers to Bierfield only briefly in its encyclopedia entry on Nashville. The lengthiest treatment Bierfield has received to date is the three pages historian Morris Schappes devoted to him 60 years ago in his "Documentary History of the Jews in the United States" under the heading "Double-Lynching of a Jew and a Negro."

If Schappes had wanted to piece together Bierfield's life when he researched his book in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he would have struggled. In those days, Williamson County's clerk held some of the county records while other documents were kept separately at the county courthouse. Williamson County's first archivist, a volunteer, didn't begin publishing and transcribing county records until the 1970s. The Williamson County Archives, which contains many of the clues to understanding Bierfield's life and death, wasn't founded until about 20 years ago.

Up to now, the few who have researched Bierfield's murder have relied mainly upon newspaper accounts, which portrayed Bierfield as a two-dimensional character, a carpetbagger and a Radical Republican. Absent from these portraits of Bierfield are key details, such as where Bierfield was from and what he was doing in Franklin during the mid to late 1860s. They are the kind of details that are passed down through family histories and hidden away among family papers. The kind you might stumble upon if, say, you were to track down Bierfield's distant relatives.

Here then, for the first time, is a much fuller picture of Bierfield's story than has ever been told. It is based upon archival research, interviews with scholars, historians, and family members, on-the-ground reporting, and never before

seen documents, including letters written by Bierfield in the last years of his life.

Today, the few Jews who know Bierfield's name remember him as the first Jew to be lynched by the KKK — a categorization that implies that it was specifically Bierfield's Jewishness that marked him out for death. But the historical record suggests something much more complex.

Bierfield was murdered during the opening phase of Reconstruction, when the social, political and economic lines of the South were being radically redrawn. The Civil War and Lincoln's assassination were still fresh in people's minds. So too was the fact that while blacks could vote for the first time, many former Confederates were banned from voting. Bierfield was lynched one year after Republicans swept to victory in statewide elections in Tennessee on a tide of black votes and as the Republican Ulysses S. Grant looked poised to win the presidential election of 1868.

Yes, Bierfield was a carpetbagger and a Jew. Yes, he treated blacks with more empathy and respect than most whites in Williamson County. But that was not sufficient for the Klan to want Bierfield dead. It would take something more for the people of Franklin to turn on their Jewish neighbor. In the summer of 1868, the South was a racial and a political tinderbox. All that was needed was a spark.

Captain George Judd and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Gelray were dispatched to Franklin by Major General William Carlin, head of the Nashville headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau, to investigate the murder of Bierfield. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was established in 1865 to negotiate labor contracts between freedmen and farmers, as well as to ensure former slaves had access to education and healthcare. The Bureau was almost universally reviled by former Confederates who saw its agents as meddlers who usurped the authority planters once enjoyed over slaves. In Tennessee, the Bureau had the added difficulty of maintaining order across the land that gave birth to the Ku Klux Klan.

The Klan was established in Pulaski, Tennessee, about 60 miles south of Franklin, in 1866. The Klan's reputation today as a virulently anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic organization is a holdover from the second iteration of the Klan, which began in Georgia in 1915. The first Klan, which died out in the 1870s, focused almost exclusively on intimidating and killing blacks as well as whites who supported and helped former slaves.

Klan violence did not begin until the end of 1867. But when it did, it spread rapidly across the South. In June 1868, a Freedmen's bureau agent in Columbia, 30 miles south of Franklin, warned about the "reign of terror" sweeping Middle and West Tennessee. In an official report, the agent, A. H. Eastman, recounted tales of black residents roused from their homes, being beaten, whipped and lynched. He told of schoolhouses burned to the ground and of white teachers beaten and driven from town. Black and white Union sympathizers lived in perpetual fear. "I have been sleeping for months with a revolver under my pillow, and a double-barreled shot-gun, heavily charged with buck shot at one hand, and a hatchet at the other," Eastman wrote.

In Franklin, Judd and Gelray focused their investigation on one piece of evidence — a widely publicized letter between two black men that appeared to show that Bierfield was complicit in the earlier fatal shooting of a white Williamson County farmer, Jeremiah Ezell. In the letter, Israel Brown wrote to John Nolan that Bierfield had promised to pay Brown and others for the killing of Ezell. Somehow, the letter found its way into the hands of the Nashville Union and Dispatch, a Democratic newspaper, where it was published on August 17.

As Judd and Gelray began their investigation, the Dispatch published an article declaring that the Brown letter provided ample evidence of Bierfield's guilt. The newspaper declared that Bierfield's murder was retaliation for Ezell's murder and not, as some began to fear, the result of anti-Semitism. "The Radicals in our midst are trying in every manner to prejudice the Israelites in the State to believe it is a war waged against them," the Dispatch reported. "When they come to consider the facts and the circumstances surrounding the deceased, we think they will readily number him among the very few criminals of their nation."

But Judd and Gelray concluded that the letter was a forgery. Nolan denied knowing anyone by the name of Israel Brown. And O.J. Kennedy, a white Franklin resident and the last person to see the letter, told Judd that he had lost it. "I told him that it was curious he should lose it, and still it should come out in the [newspaper] on the next day," Judd wrote in his official report of the investigation.

On the second day of their investigation, at 10 a.m., Judd and Gelray strode past the 30-foot-tall columns at the entrance to Franklin's courthouse. Inside, Williamson County's sheriff had gathered Franklin's most prominent citizens at Judd and Gelray's request. In Judd's official report of his investigation, published in the Nashville Republican on August 21, he wrote of the townspeople: "Most of them were former rebels to my certain knowledge, and I think more than one concerned in the killing of Bierfield and Bowman, were there."

Gelray addressed the courtroom, his piercing eyes framed by a sweeping mane of dark hair and a bushy goatee: "Does anyone know of Bierfield's advising the negroes to organize and fight the whites, Ku Klux Klan, or anything of that description?"

No one answered.

"Is there any man here who can say anything against the character of Mr. Bierfield in any way, shape, manner of form?"

No one answered.

Carlin repeated the questions. Still no one answered.

Judd wrote in his report: "All looked like a set of whipped

Please see **LYNCHING**, *page 6*

LYNCHING, *continued from page 5*

curs, as they are."

He concluded by noting that Bierfield ran a very successful dry goods store and that business was improving. The motive for the murder, as far as Judd could see, was jealousy on the part of a business rival, or rivals, who were "vexed at his success."

During the second half of the 19th century, tens of thousands of Jews sailed from Central and Eastern Europe to North America, lured by the promise of economic opportunity and religious freedom. After spending time in crowded northern cities, many of these immigrants soon headed south. They started out as itinerant peddlers with the hope of eventually establishing themselves as merchants. In Nashville, in 1860, one-quarter of the city's 100 Jewish families listed their profession as "peddler." After the Civil War, even more Jews headed south searching for opportunity. Between 1860 and 1880, the Jewish population of Tennessee roughly doubled from about 2,000 people to about 3,800.

Peddlers were soft targets for robbers. They often traveled alone and carried money and valuables with them. Jewish merchants, ensconced in their stores and homes, were only marginally safer. The 50 years after the end of the Civil War were littered with cases of Jewish peddlers and merchants who were attacked, robbed and in some cases killed. Jacob Simon was robbed and murdered in his store in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, in 1887. Peddler Gustav Loeb and his wife Julia were robbed and murdered in 1895 in Kentucky. Abram Surasky, another peddler, was robbed and killed in 1903 in South Carolina.

Many peddlers and merchants operated on credit and some of the violence, borne of jealousy, debt and frustration, took on a distinctly anti-Semitic tone. In Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, on a Sunday night in March 1887, a masked mob opened fire on the storehouses of two successful Jewish businesses, H. & A. Kahn and Felix Bauer. The mob put up signs telling Jews to leave the county by April 1 or face death. Horrified by the mob's actions, parishioners denounced the act and Louisiana's governor offered a reward for the attackers' arrest.

But money was not the only motive for harassment and murder of Jews. As newcomers to towns and cities, Jews were often seen as outsiders. Because many Jews in the South were willing to trade with blacks, they were also seen as social and political rebels.

Samuel Bierfield appears to have arrived in Toronto, Canada, in the late 1850s. From his letters, it seems likely that he grew up in or around Riga, which is today the capital of Latvia, but was then a major port city in the Russian empire. In a short letter written to his parents in March 1859, when Bierfield was about 18 years old, he says that he has moved out of his uncle's home in Toronto and that he goes to school regularly. "I can wright [sic], read and speak English," he tells them. By 1865, Samuel is listed in Toronto's city directory as a "salesman" living at 422 Queen West St., a five-minute walk from his brother Benjamin, a grocer, who lives at 254 Queen West St.

The following year, Benjamin Bierfield is still listed at the same address, but Samuel has disappeared. Some time in 1866, Samuel Bierfield moved 750 miles south to Franklin, Tennessee. In a June 12, 1867 letter to his parents, Bierfield says that he is working for a local merchant and earning about $1,000 per year, more than twice what his uncle Morell paid him in Toronto. Still, life is hard. He has lost almost all of his money on two speculative ventures — a billiard room and a cotton deal — that went sour.

What drew Samuel Bierfield to this part of Tennessee? The Jewish community in Nashville was established during the 1840s. The community almost tripled during the 1860s as the city swelled with Union veterans and speculators from the North.

Like other Jews across the South, Nashville's Jews supported the Confederacy during the Civil War. They raised money for wounded Confederate soldiers and, after Nashville's capture by Union troops, Jacob Bloomstein, a merchant, was arrested and imprisoned for smuggling goods to the Confederacy. After the war, there was a high turnover of Jewish residents as business prospects rose and fell. There were also frequent arguments within and between the city's congregations. Writing in the Jewish Messenger, in 1870, Mosche Schnurrer noted that "Nashville has four congregations with scarce sufficient numbers to sustain one." Schnurrer guessed that the discord was caused by "business jealousy and diverse other reasons." Even so, he said life in Nashville, "delightfully situated on the Cumberland River," was good. Compared to places like New York City, there was little poverty and rent was cheap.

Nashville did not appeal to Bierfield. He decided to try his luck 20 miles south in Franklin, a bustling farming town tucked into a bend in the Harpeth River. Williamson County has always been the richest county, per capita, in Tennessee. The rich loam of the countryside surrounding the county seat of Franklin was perfect for growing cotton, corn, wheat and tobacco. The railroad, which arrived in Franklin in 1858, allowed goods to be transported quickly and easily to Nashville and beyond.

The Civil War had little physical effect on Franklin. Nashville and Williamson County were controlled by the Union from 1862. The worst fighting during the Battle of Franklin in 1864, which claimed more than 2,000 lives and injured more than 7,000 men, most of them Confederate soldiers, took place on the outskirts of the city. Even today, the antebellum homes and churches are untouched.

But the war did have a great impact on society. In 1860, Williamson County was home to 11,300 whites and 12,200 slaves. After Tennessee seceded from the Union, in 1861, many blacks fled to Nashville or were pressed into ser-

vice by the Union Army. Almost all of the county's whites joined the Confederate Army.

As peace settled over the South, Williamson County's blacks and whites found themselves living in a new reality. Tennessee's slaves were emancipated in February 1865. Meanwhile, many former Confederate soldiers chafed under the leadership of the Radical Republican Governor William Brownlow, who denied them the vote. Tensions between blacks and whites, Democrats and Republicans, boiled over in the summer of 1867.

Bierfield wrote to his sister Sarah that America was a tough country to start a business in. "I have lost about $500 in six months, all that I was worth, in a riot that occurred here the other week between the Black men and the White men."

The Franklin Riot occurred just a few weeks after Bierfield applied for U.S. citizenship at the Williamson County Courthouse, renouncing his fealty to Tsar Alexander of Russia. Although Bierfield seems to have accepted North America as his new home, he was not tied to Franklin. In October 1867, Bierfield wrote to his parents that he intended to return to Toronto by January the following year. His uncle Morell had offered him a job at more than double the pay he used to earn. Plus, Morell said Bierfield could take over his business when his uncle "goes home."

Bierfield was optimistic: I am at present keeping a brand store for the same man I used to manage for last year for you must know that I am considered quite a good merchant and invested with all the authority of the House. I am buyer for them and consequently must travel a great deal which I like. I would like to see Russia again and hope I will someday. Then we can talk over old times and all about America the land of Gold as you call it.

Instead of moving to Toronto, Bierfield was still in Franklin a few months later and still struggling financially. In a letter of January 12, 1868, to his now married sister, Bierfield says that he has been nominated for a Circuit Court Clerk's position. If elected, the position paid a salary of $2,000 per year. Bierfield adds that he is planning a trip to the South that should pay off handsomely for his employer and for himself.

Soon after, Bierfield raised enough capital to open his own store. Judging by the inventory of goods taken after his death, he focused on clothing and accessories. The inventory included 38 men's and boys' hats, 35 pairs of assorted suspenders, 17 business coats, thousands of buttons, hundreds of pairs of boots and shoes, hundreds of yards of denim and muslin, and dozens of hickory and calico shirts. Bierfield also sold gents' collars, cotton and gingham handkerchiefs, combs, needles, pocket knives, scissors, hair pins, pocket books, bottles of men's cologne and Galaway's Magic Oil, cakes of soap, spectacles, and two small mirrors. His single copy of the Hebrew Bible was probably not for sale.

Samuel Bierfield may not have known the Ezells, but he certainly knew their relatives. In March 1867, Bierfield signed a $1,250 marriage bond for the wedding of Henry P. Sweeney to Elizabeth Cotton. A marriage bond was a guarantee that there was no legal impediment to a marriage.

Elizabeth Cotton and Henry Sweeney were first cousins. They were also first cousins with Mary and Jeremiah Ezell. The families were tied to the Ku Klux Klan. Family lore passed down through the Sweeney side of the family has it that Henry Sweeney's mother used to leave bedsheets on the front porch in the evening for the Klan's nighttime raids. The sheets were returned before dawn and left on the porch to be laundered and made ready for the next night's activities.

No one picked up on this link between the Ezell family and Samuel Bierfield at the time of the murders or since. If Bierfield was in any way seen as complicit in the murder of Jeremiah Ezell, it is conceivable that the Cottons, the Sweeneys and the Ezells might have decided they had a right and a duty to take matters into their own hands.

It's also possible that Bierfield was framed for Ezell's murder by a business rival. Colonel House, for example, who owned the dry goods store from which the Union League was ambushed in the riot of 1867, may have felt threatened by Bierfield. Newspaper accounts of Bierfield's murder all speak of Bierfield owning his own store by the summer of 1868. An account written 60 years later by a local Klan sympathizer, John F. Campbell, places Bierfield's dry goods store on the same block on Main Street as House's store. House was among six charter members sworn into the Ku Klux Klan of Williamson County in 1868. The ceremony took place in his store. If Bierfield was doing well, what better way to get rid of him than to fabricate evidence that Bierfield incited blacks to kill Ezell, and then use the Klan to put Bierfield out of business.

John Pogue Jr. was arrested for Bierfield's murder in September 1868. An eyewitness, Ed Lyle, claimed that he saw Pogue shoot Bierfield. During the few days Pogue spent in the Davidson County Jail, seven people came forward to give Pogue an alibi. On September 28, Judge John Hugh Smith had no option but to release Pogue. The Republican Banner said that Lyle had perjured himself in order to collect a $500 reward offered by Governor Brownlow for information leading to Bierfield's killers.

After September 1868, Bierfield's murder became lost among the hundreds of lynchings that plagued the South through the decades that followed. At its peak, between 1880 and 1930, there was an average of one lynching per week. More than 200 people were lynched in Tennessee, most of them black. If anything, Bierfield's lynching was remarkable because he was white and because he was a Jew. But the most remarkable aspect of all may be that it has been forgotten and ignored for so long. ✡

This is an abbreviated version of an article that appeared in ***The Forward*** *in December, 2014. The author, Paul Berger, is an award-winning investigative reporter.*

Mark Your Calendars!

Program Schedule 2017-2018

September 10: Greg Siskind, lawyer and avid genealogist: *Jewish Genealogy*

October 25 (Wednesday): Paula Burger, author of *Paula's Window: Surviving the Holocaust*
(Partnership with the Tennessee Holocaust Commission)

November 13 (Monday): Annabelle Gurwitch, comedic actress and author
(Partnership with MJCC)

January 28: Rita Goldberg, author of *Motherland*, a second-generation Holocaust memoir
(Partnership with the Tennessee Holocaust Commission)

February 4: Bus tour of Jewish sites downtown led by Judy Peiser

March 25: Dr. Michael F. Roizen, American anesthesiologist, internist
and chief wellness officer at the Cleveland Clinic:
Age Proof: Living Longer Without Running Out of Money or Breaking a Hip
(Partnership with MJCC)

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