

SOUTHERN
JEWISH

HERITAGE

VOL. 17, NO. 23

FALL 2004

Dr. Jean R. Freedman, Oral Historian

Sunday, September 19, 2004

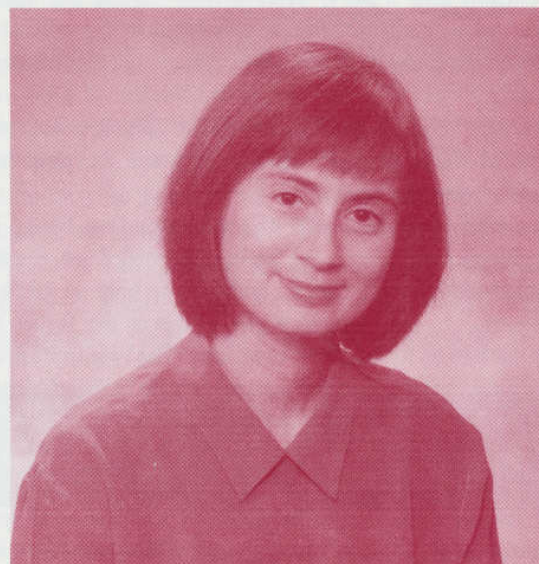
Memphis Jewish Community Center

Training Workshop: 12:15pm

(for Oral Historians and Others Interested in Attending)

Program: 2:00pm

Dr. Freedman, who was born in North Carolina, currently is an Adjunct Professor at Montgomery College, Rockville, Maryland. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, she received her B.A. degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Indiana University. She has presented numerous conference papers, including one at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society which was held in Memphis in 1999. In addition, she has authored a book, *Whistling in the Dark: Memory, Culture, and Politics in Wartime London*. Dr. Freedman's afternoon talk will focus on the importance and interest of oral histories. After one or two demonstration interviews, she will comment on the interview process, then will take questions from the audience.



Save the Date: Sunday, October 10, 2004
Rabbi Joel Finkelstein
will speak on Sephardic Jewry and American history

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986
P.O. BOX 242154, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38124

President's Message



May Lynn Mansbach

We all to some degree stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. In families, parents and grandparents influence our lives by providing a foundation of values and education, ideas and ideals, motivation and outlook. The life of an organization is influenced in a similar way. The success and vibrancy of today's Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South,

its optimism, inclusiveness, and can-do spirit rest upon the vision, dedication, and hard work of those who served in years past.

In the short time I have been president of the JHS, I have seen first-hand that the legacy of service continues. In arranging committees and projects for the coming year, I spoke with many of you. Everyone I spoke with agreed to work on a special project. No one turned down the request to serve. What a wonderful tribute to the culture so carefully and lovingly nurtured by the leaders who have come before me. I am enormously grateful to all who have paved the way and to all who are continuing the legacy of service.

Tradition and legacy, after all, are what the Jewish Historical Society is about. People join because they care about what happened in the past and about preserving this history—their history—for the future. In the words of Harvard's distinguished George E. Vaillant, MD, they are becoming "Keepers of the Meaning," those who make the past come alive for the next generation.

This year, with the help of an outstanding board and conscientious volunteers, we have assembled an exciting calendar of programs, projects, and trips to help us all "keep the meaning," to help transmit and interpret the forces that brought each of us to where we are today. The first three events are mentioned below. Watch for more detailed announcements of these and of our other scheduled speakers.

Our first program, on Sunday, September 19, 2004, will feature Dr. Jean R. Freedman, oral historian, who will conduct an oral history workshop in the morning and who will speak that afternoon at 2:00pm on why oral history is interesting and important.

On October 10, 2004, Rabbi Joel Finkelstein will help us celebrate the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America with a talk on Sephardic Jewry and American history.

Beginning on October 28, 2004, the Southern Jewish Historical Society will meet for its annual conference in historic Charleston, South Carolina. Please join us if you can, for what promises to be an exceptional weekend.

To paraphrase a saying of the Fathers, on whose shoulders we stand: Our portion is great; we are greatly blessed. Let us

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**Of Blessed Memory*

joyfully accept our bounty with a resolve to be benefactors of the future. Let us preserve our great history, and let us transmit our heritage to our children.

Granted, there is much to do. But if each of us participates in even one small project, the result will be great progress. The only way to "eat an elephant" is one bite at a time. On behalf of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, we look forward to welcoming you to any of the courses at our feast of history.

May Lynn

Upcoming Programs

On Sunday, November 7, 2004 at 2:00pm at the Memphis JCC, Tova Mirvis, author of *The Ladies Auxiliary*, will talk about her latest novel, *The Outside World*.

On Sunday, January 9, 2005, at 2:00pm at the Memphis JCC, Tom Freudenheim, former Deputy Director of the Jewish Museum of Berlin and of the Jewish Museum of New York, will speak on the relationship of Jewish museums to Jewish History.

Make plans to attend these two stimulating programs.

Ongoing Oral History Project Conducted by JHS of Memphis and the Mid-South

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South has conducted an ongoing oral history project for approximately four years, with the goal of preserving the distinguished history of Jews in the Mid-South as a legacy for future generations. Harriet Stern currently serves as chairman of the oral history project.

This project began with the solicitation of existing genealogies from individuals who previously had researched their own family backgrounds. A number of these were collected, along with family histories and family trees. Once the project was publicized, it stimulated the interest of other individuals to research and record the history their families.

Soon a process of direct interviewing was begun. Historical Society volunteers serve as interviewers, using a basic set of questions for each interview. The initial group of interview subjects were persons whose families had lived in the Mid-South for at least three generations,

with an effort made to speak to the oldest living member of the family. Also selected have been persons who have played significant leadership roles in the various Jewish institutions and organizations in Memphis and its surrounding communities and individuals with distinctive life experiences. Because people's lives have unfolded in many different ways, every interview is personal, containing not only historical information, but also reminiscences and recollections that make each family history unique.



Debbie Weinstein (Right) interviewing Florence and Bernard Messinger

To date, about 85 persons have been interviewed. All interviews are recorded on tape, then transcribed into hard copy. The hard copy is sent to the interviewee to be checked for errors. Audio tapes will be stored permanently in the Jewish Historical Society archives, which are currently housed in the Temple Israel archives.

There is a great need for volunteers to transcribe the audiotaped interviews. If you are interested in doing transcriptions, please call Sumner Levine, 682-5935.

Excerpts from the JHS Collection of Oral Histories

Bernard (Berny) Messinger, interviewed by Debbie Weinstein

DW: What was your occupation after you graduated high school?

BM: I was a pickle salesman—that usually brings laughs...It was 1935, and that was nearly at the end or closer to the middle of the Great Depression, and my paper route was on Front Street where the wholesale houses were...and I started talking to Mr. Fred Brenner, who was the president of...wholesale grocery company...anyway, I delivered papers to this gentleman, Mr. Brenner, and each time I'd come through there he'd say, "Let me see the paper, son." It was the final edition and it had the markets, and while he was looking I was giving him a sales talk to start a subscription. Finally, he said, "Son, if you don't quit bothering me, I'm not going to let you come in here any more."

Please see Bernard Messinger, Page 6

Sumner Levine to be Installed as President of SJHS

The 2004 Southern Jewish Historical Society annual meeting will be held October 28-31, 2004, in Charleston, South Carolina. Those attending this conference, in one of the most beautiful and historical cities in the United States, not only will be treated to a program of great interest and diversity, but also will have the opportunity to visit many of the magnificent Charleston and Jewish edifices.

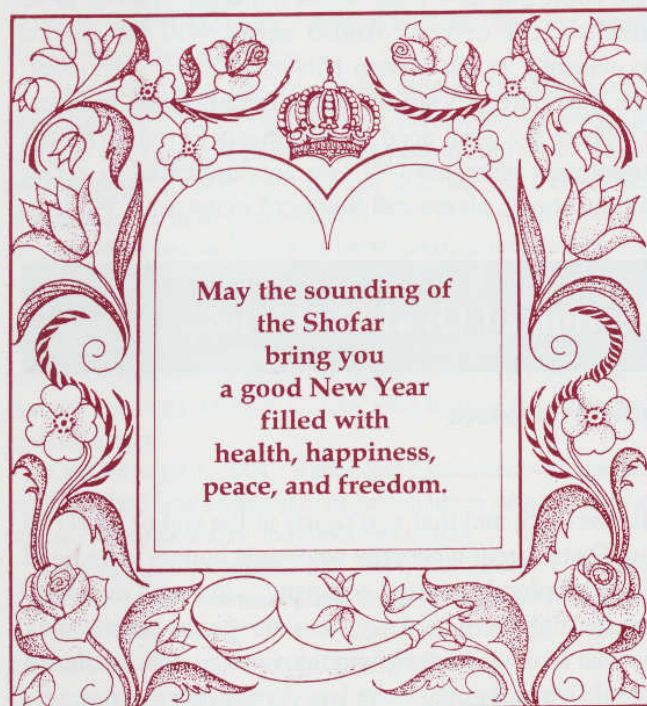
This year's meeting will have a decided Memphis influence. Sumner Levine, past president of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South and co-chairman of last year's highly successful SJHS meeting, will be installed as president of the SJHS. Sumner has been active in both the local JHS and the SJHS for a number of years and is looking forward to two productive years as president.

May Lynn Mansbach, current president of the Memphis and Mid-South JHS, will be part of a panel discussing oral histories. She has headed the Memphis project for a number of years and has a great deal of personal expertise on the subject. Dr. David Patterson will introduce one of the programs which will

commemorate the 150th anniversary of Brith Sholom Beth Israel. This program is sponsored by Bornblum Judaic Studies Program. Drs. David Patterson and Jack Rosensweig, co-chairmen of the SJHS/JHS liaison committee, will conduct a meeting for the local JHS chapters.

In addition to Memphis involvement, there will be many national figures featured in the program: Hasia Diner, New York University, will speak on "Wandering Jews, Peddlers, Immigrants, and the exploration of New Worlds." This program is also sponsored by Bornblum. Gary Zola, HUC/American Jewish Archives, will speak on "What have we wrought? Reflections on 350 years of American Jewish History." Marc Lee Raphael, College of William and Mary, will speak on "The past we live in with every breath we draw." Jeffrey S. Gurock, Yeshiva University, will talk on "A commentary on a Synagogue history: Brith Shalom Beth Israel and American History." On Sunday evening, Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe will comment on Stephen Fried's book, *The New Rabbi*.

For further information, contact Sumner Levine, 682-5935, physum@midsouth.rr.com. ☆



Husband and Wife Rabbinical Team Are New Associates at Temple Israel

Rabbis Tara Feldman and Meir Feldman are making history as the first married couple to serve a Memphis Jewish congregation. The Feldmans have been appointed as the new associate rabbis at Temple Israel.

Tara Feldman was ordained at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in 2002. Following her B.A. degree in Russian Language and Literature from Vassar College, she pursued a masters degree in Elementary Education and taught in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Tara will concentrate on family issues, counseling, and women's education.

Meir Feldman was ordained at HUC-JIR in 2003, following nine years as a gifted attorney. A graduate of Brandeis and law review honors student at Yeshiva University Cardozo School of Law, he practiced in New York and Los Angeles and served as Assistant United States Attorney in the Los Angeles office. Meir will focus on adult learning and strengthening bonds within the larger Memphis religious community. ☆

New Book Chronicles History of Temple Israel

Children of Israel “Illuminates the Southern Jewish Experience”

In 1854, seven years before the start of the Civil War, thirty-six German Jewish immigrants and their families banded together in Memphis to form Congregation Children of Israel, the city's first synagogue. Today, Children of Israel—now known as Temple Israel—is the largest Jewish congregation in Tennessee and one of the fifteen largest Reform congregations in the United States.

In *Children of Israel*, Judy Ringel tells the dramatic story of this 150-year-old congregation, starting with its rough-and-ready early years, when the members had to enact a special rule to prohibit worshippers from bringing concealed weapons into the synagogue. Woven into the context of Memphis's overall history, the book follows successive generations of the congregation as they face the perils of the Civil War, the devastation of the yellow fever epidemics, the hardships of the Great Depression and World Wars I and II, and the challenges posed by the civil rights movement. Along the way, Ringel details the congregation's journey from Orthodox Judaism to Classical Reform and back to “mainstream Reform” in response to changes in emphasis in the American Reform Movement. She also traces the emergence of women as synagogue leaders and rabbis.

Children of Israel is illustrated throughout with rare photographs and documents from the Temple Israel Archives. Beautifully designed and engagingly written, this colorful volume brings the history of Temple Israel to life, focusing on the visionary leaders who shaped the congregation's identity, and especially on the eight remarkable rabbis who inspired among its members a passionate commitment to community service.

Kudos for the book have come from Jewish leaders and scholars, as well as historians:

From Gary Philip Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives: “This is a well written, lively manuscript, which continually reminds readers that the story of Temple Israel is inexorably linked to the history of [Memphis]...This volume is much more than a self-referential chronicle. It

is a useful case study of Jewish life in Dixie and, as such, it will undoubtedly appeal to scholarly and general audiences alike.”

From Rabbi David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: “Judy Ringel has written a fascinating and fast-paced narrative of the history of this congregation and its lay and rabbinic leaders...It profoundly illuminates the Southern Jewish experience and added deeply to my own knowledge of the Jews of this region. The book constitutes a significant contribution to

Southern and American Jewish history.”

From Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, President, Union for Reform Judaism: “*Children of Israel* is a joy to read. Its vivid portrayal of the congregation's rich and colorful history...is a treasure for the Temple Israel family and, indeed, for all Memphians.”

From Perre Magness, author of *In the Shadow of the Elms*, *Good Abode*, and *Past Times*: “Judy Ringel has done an outstanding job of combining careful research and good storytelling in *Children of Israel*. She vividly portrays the importance of Temple Israel in the lives of its members and in the community as a whole.”

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Judy Ringel has lived in Memphis since 1964. She is a magna cum laude graduate of Case Western Reserve University. During the 1980s and early '90s, she was the senior editor and, later, associate publisher of Memphis magazine. She and her husband, Nick, have been members of Temple Israel for forty years. ☆



Excerpts from the JHS Collection of Oral Histories

Bernard Messinger, *continued from Page 3*

But, anyway, when I was graduating I applied for a job with him. He said, "What kind of experience do you have?" I said, "I deliver, I collect, I keep records of payments." He said, "Well, son, you know, for every job I have, there are ten men waiting out there who are experienced and that's not the kind of experience that would help you here." ...So I went to another customer who was a division manager for General Motors, at that time on Front and Huling, Mr. Charles Bland, and I explained to him what I was looking for, and I said, "You know, without experience you don't get a job, would you let me work for you for free this summer so that I can pick up some experience, I'll sweep the floors, I'll do anything you ask me to, I do take a little shorthand and I can type, ...just give me an hour and a half a day to carry my newspaper route and the rest of the day is yours. I said, "The only thing I want in return is if my work is satisfactory, give me a letter of recommendation." So he did, and I did and he gave me the letter, and I went back to Mr. Brenner, and he gave me the job. ☆

Regina Schwarz Goldberger, interviewed by **Lynnie Mirvis**

LM: For those people who don't know, what is a victrola?

RG: A box with a place where you put the record and place where you put the needle.

LM: Did it have a horn?

RG: No, the horn was already out. I bought it and I had records. I had that victrola and the kids grew up with it. They had their own records....I could tell you stories. I'll never forget the first time I heard the---voice coming out of the air--the first time I ever heard anything like that voice inside---what do you call that? (LM: A crystal radio) Did you ever see one that would play...by a piece of wire placed on quartz and when it played you could hear it, if you were right up close to it. You could hear the music—the music, whether it was from Philadelphia or Kentucky or any place it was coming from. In those days, Memphis didn't have one—a station. The first time I heard the radio I thought to myself, now I'll be able to have music all the time. There weren't a lot of records to buy. And then...somebody at the shop...made me one of those things with a crystal in them and we could hear it play and Eugene (Eugene Goldberger, Regina's son) would listen to it. It came from KEKE Pittsburgh. At five o'clock in the evening. And he'd worry the life out of me. "Mama, is it five o'clock? Mama, what time is it?" Finally he quit asking me and he learned to tell time by it so he wouldn't miss any KEKE, because that's where the beautiful music came from. People want to know how I taught my children (to love music). I didn't teach them. They were crazy about it just like I was. It was in their blood.

Like I told you, the first dollar I ever made before I ever married--I went down to the store and bought a victrola so we could hear music. So my children were used to it all the time. They heard it. Of course I put music on when he was an infant six months old maybe. He sat up and he heard the music. That's the truth. I just don't understand. I tell you what's the matter. Most people don't have the music in their homes....now Eugene played the violin and he could have been wonderful, and his teacher saw me in the street one day and...said, "Mrs. Goldberger, if you would make Eugene practice, he would become a great musician...I didn't tell him that Eugene didn't practice, he brought it home and stuffed it under the bed and went to listen to the music on the radio. It wasn't until he was in the service with a man who was a great lover of music and he also played the violin, and he told Eugene one day, "Throw away that paper, you're not playing music by notes, you're playing by ear." So from then on, Eugene learned to play by notes. When that man died, he sent all his music to Eugene. He was from Seattle. They became such good friends. They visited each other. You can't expect your children to love good music if they don't hear it. ☆

Continued on next page

Fagie Dubrovner Schaffer, interviewed by May Lynn Mansbach

MLM: You told us, you lived at 109 Commerce and that was in the Pinch, and what was it like there?

FS: Well, this was a four tenement house, brick building, and in it four different families lived there. We had a downstairs apartment with three rooms and a bath and I was born at this place...Then my father's place of business was directly around the corner. The butcher shop was downstairs and the living quarters were upstairs. We lived there until I was nine or ten and Mama evidently felt that we needed more room and better space, so to speak, because in the Pinch there was not a tree, it was all upstairs and the apartments didn't have any windows. The front bedroom had windows, but what they call shot-gun apartments, straight through. I recall one skylight in one of the rooms. The back room was a kitchen enclosed by a small porch where the outdoor plumbing existed. There was no indoor plumbing...



Fagie Dubrovner Schaffer

MLM: What other memories do you have that stand out from that period?

FS: I can remember going to the Neighborhood House which was in the vicinity...Miss Goldbaum was the instructor, sort of the caretaker at the Neighborhood House...She was helpful to the immigrants, because when they came to this country, it was very difficult for them. They had to help out at work, they did not know the language. Fortunately for us, we lived in the Pinch where mostly Yiddish was spoken. That was our first language. But they did have to know enough English to carry on their business...After we left kindergarten, we went to Christine School, which was also close by...all the Jewish children went there....I can remember going to kindergarten; I can remember my first day in school. My sister-in-law, Shirley Dubrovner, was the one that taught me my ABC's before I got into school. We had a teacher—she was a very old lady in those days. Her name was Miss Monstratt, I believe. The children would go up and show the teacher a loose tooth. She would say, "Let me see it," and she'd pull the tooth with her two fingers. That was our first dentist. ☆

Jack Landman Goldsmith, interviewed by Sidney Friedman

SF: Who were your ancestors that immigrated to this country?

JG: The Goldsmith family started with my grandfather, Jacob Goldsmith, whose father was Frederick Goldsmith and his mother was Sophie Ottenheimer....In 1870 he moved to Beale St....and with his brother they opened up a store...In 1878 there was a terrible yellow fever epidemic in the city of Memphis. It decimated the whole town. So my grandfather didn't know what to do. He had a little girl two years old and a pregnant wife, so he knew that they couldn't live in Memphis. So he packed up my grandmother who was pregnant and the two-year-old girl and took a river packet up to St. Louis. I'm sure in my own mind that it was not like taking a cruise on the QE2...He had some relatives there and he stayed there and in 1878 my father (Fred Goldsmith) was born in St. Louis. He was the only member of the Goldsmith family that was not born in Memphis—due to the yellow fever, of course. In October of 1878, my grandfather got news that there was a very heavy frost in Memphis and he figured that killed all the germs and he would come back. He came back and took the boards down from the store on Beale St. That was the only time from 1870 to 2003 that Goldsmith's was ever closed.

My grandfather was a very frugal man. I guess that's one of the reasons he was so successful. In any event, I can recall as a young man one day in the store—the cashier sometimes would drop a notion bag on the floor or a large piece of string...and I would see him go by and pick up the notion bag and string and take it to the cashier and say, "I think we can use this over again." ☆

From the JHS Oral Histories: Advice For the Younger Generation

The question, "What advice would you give to the younger generation?" elicited a variety of responses:

Jerome Makowsky: I think what I would tell them, I've tried to tell my grandchildren, to get as much education as possible. When I look back, I think I should have stayed in college longer....I believe any child today who is smart enough and can afford to do it should go all the way through and get their PhD. I really believe that. Now some will say they don't need that. But when I look around and see successful people and smart people that I admire, so many of them have their doctorate. I would encourage them to do that.

Jocelyn Plough Rudner: I'd say, "Get with it." I've got some girls who are doing it in their own way and I'm really proud of them...But I would say, "Get involved in something you believe in and would help your community—or your country, depending upon what your viewpoint is." Memphis is such a classic example of needing help. Here we are now...a big community with mostly poor and disadvantaged....I think we've got an awful lot of work to do.

Joel Bernsen: Stay in Memphis. I think it's a wonderful city culturally. It's a nice place to raise children. I think I mention this to a lot of people that a millionaire does well anywhere and a poor man can't do well most anywhere, but if you're somewhere in between, you will do better in Memphis than anywhere else—or almost anywhere else.

Leo Bearman: I probably would give none. And tell them not to take any advice from me and do what they felt was the right thing to do. And that sometimes varies from generation to generation. I don't mind giving advice on law, that's what I'm trained to do. And I don't mind giving advice on teaching. I guess the one piece of advice that I really do give to young people is to read intensely. I think that's crucial. It makes no difference if they are going to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, street sweepers, whatever. Other than that, I try to avoid giving too much advice.



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