

# Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South

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## VIGNETTES OF MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORY.....by Selma Lewis

The Jewish Community of Memphis and the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878: Yellow fever ravaged the river cities of the South in the 1870s, the worst epidemic occurring in Memphis in 1878. With no knowledge of the cause of the fever, the city had to endure devastating illness, death, and loss of population, as most of those who could afford to leave did so. Sometimes out of such a desperate situation, heroes arise.

Jews of the South established a Yellow Fever fund, and fraternal, social, and charitable organizations throughout the area collected money, goods, and clothing, while the membership tended the sick and assumed the responsibility of caring for the widows and orphans. B'nai B'rith at even mobilized the resources of its member lodges throughout the South.

Members of the Hebrew Hospital Association, according to J.M. Keating, editor of the local newspaper, "The Appeal", who wrote the history of the epidemic of 1878 were "especially notable for ardor, for steadiness, and single-heartedness, and for unstinted charity. They were no respecter of persons. They went from house to house, asking but one question: "Is aid needed"? They made no distinction. The lessons of humanity, which they had learned in the synagogue, they illustrated by a heroism in nothing less than that which inspired their fellow Christian fellow-workers".

The only organization which could in any sense meet the emergency was the Howard Association, which was established in 1873. It was modeled after a prototype created in New Orleans to respond to the dire situation caused by the yellow fever there. Volunteers were requested; among those who came forward to help were E.M. Levy and A.E. Frankland, who performed outstanding service in the epidemic.

The epidemic of 1878 was the most severe to strike Memphis. By the middle of September the death rate averaged 200 a day, with 8,000 to 10,000 sick with the fever. Nineteen members of the Howard Association, including the president, were sick or dead. New members were urgently sought. Out of greatly reduced population, nearly all of whom were already nursing the sick or burying the dead, eleven answered the call, every one of them already working as volunteers in the crisis.

Among the eleven volunteers to join the Howard Association was Nathan D. Menken. Menken was the son of Jacob Stanwood Menken, who had come to Memphis from Cincinnati, Ohio where he was born in 1840. (Jacob's father, Solomon, born in Amsterdam, came to the United States in 1826. His mother, Galathe Morange of Bordeaux,

France, was the daughter of a man who had been a prominent supporter of Napoleon I, serving as his ambassador to the court of Spain.)

In 1862, Nathan Menken's brother, Jacob Sanwood Menken, established a store at Main and Gayoso; in 1863, Menken and his brother, Jules, joined the organization. The store occupied five stories, each 150 by 117 feet, with over 300 employees. Within a short time, they had one of the most prosperous retail and wholesale dry goods houses in Memphis, which, according to "The Commercial Appeal", did much to make Memphis a commercial city."

The tribute written to Nathan D. Menken by Keating deserves to be quoted. He calls Menken: "a philanthropist, and an honor to the ancient race, whose good name he sustained by life and living...Mr. Menken was in many respects a remarkable person. One of the wealthiest merchants of the city, and a man of a very high order of talent and cultivation, although deeply devoted to his wife and children, he, long before the epidemic was officially declared to exist, resolved to give himself up to the Good Samaritan work of the Howards. He so wrote to his wife in letters that were full of the purest and loftiest sentiments. Conscious of the risk he ran, he advised her of his last wishes, and, thus prepared, entered himself a willing worker in a cause he might have turned his back upon without any question as to his motives...Like many others, he attempted too much, and fell an easy victim to the fever. At first, and for some weeks, he labored by himself, then with the Hebrew Hospital Association, and afterward with the Howard Association; all the time giving of his own bounty, his purse being as open as his heart. How many he relieved, how many griefs he assuaged, how many widows and orphans he comforted by ready help and a generous sympathy, is only known to the God he served so faithfully. His loss was a severe one, and his death was felt to be a public calamity, overshadowed by the plague."

In the Memphis Room of the Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Service, there is a picture of the members of the Howard Association of Memphis active during the epidemic of 1878. Nathan D. Menken, who died on September 2, 1878 is pictured in the circle of ten Howard Association members who died of the fever.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP !!



OUR ARCHIVES COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT ANY MATERIAL YOU HAVE RELATING TO EARLY JEWISH HISTORY IN MEMPHIS. PICTURES, BOOKS, SYNAGOGUE AND TEMPLE PUBLICATIONS, FAMILY HISTORIES AND EARLY DOCUMENTS.

PLEASE CALL - LAURA SPIEGLER 767-5924



Message  
from our President

As 1989 begins, we are happy to greet you with news of progress on our history of the Jews of Memphis. In December, we received a \$2,000 grant for the book from the Memphis-Plough Community Foundation. Their help has not only given us much-needed funds, but most importantly, it has validated our belief that this history will provide an important contribution to the entire community. We are very



excited and pleased, and we hope that this gift will encourage other foundations and individuals to join in support.

Selma Lewis, who has accepted the three-year commission to research and write this historical account, has already logged many research hours and many more hours in oral history interviews. Interlocking with the writing of the book, she is also making application to the Tennessee Humanities Council for a grant to present a program for the public. This would probably take the form of a one-day conference with workshops and a name speaker. The grant would enable the Historical Society to engage in a mutual exchange of information centering around Jewish settlement of Memphis and directly focused on material relevant to the book. The ideas interchanged with the public audience would enrich the writing of the history and would also be published as separate proceedings. We think it would be a significant event to present such a workshop to the community and hope that the forthcoming grant proposal will be accepted.

Once again, we want to remind our members to come forth with any documents or information you might want to share for research or reference. At present we have a small collection of archival materials. We hope that the future will bring a permanent location for it.

Harriet Stern

MAZEL TOV ... MAZEL TOV !!

Our very own Leonid Saharovici was chosen to receive this year's prestigious Baron Hirsch Member of the Year Award. The award was for his "extraordinary leadership as Chairman of the dedication committee for the new synagogue and as the Chairman of the congregation's Holocaust Memorial Committee". The award was presented at the general membership meeting, Sunday evening January 8, at the Synagogue.

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MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH

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FIRST INFORMATION ON A PETITION SIGNER

Our thanks to Mariam Jacobs Weinstein of Houston for this great note, our first information about one of the Signers of the 1852 Petition shown in our February 1988 Newsletter.

My cousin, Mrs. Reginald Wurzburg (also one of your members), forwarded a copy of your earlier Newsletter which contained a Petition from the Tennessee State Archives written in 1852. One of the petitioners, Sol Hesse, is my great grandfather. Sol came to the United States in about 1850 from a small village in Alsace Lorraine, France. We know nothing at this time about Michael Hesse (which is listed in the City Directory of 1855) or of Sam Hesse; although Sol did have a son in the 1870's whom he named Sam, possibly after this other man who is also listed in the 1855 City Directory. Unfortunately, we have very little information on the Hesse family, and no family documents.

I am currently an active member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Houston, so I hope to have more information on the family in the future.



## Eyewitness To History

By .. Skip Howard

Mr. Howard interviewed Dr. and Mrs. Adler for a Kristallnacht 50th Commemorative Program. This article was written from that interview.

Each November, the memories come flooding back for Memphis Herta Adler, who, as a young Jewish girl in Germany in 1938, witnessed the burning of the synagogue in her small town during the reign of terror we now call Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass).

During an interview conducted with Mrs. Adler and her husband, Justin, a Memphis neuropsychiatrist, on Friday, November 4, 1988, in preparation for the 50th anniversary observance of Kristallnacht, she talked about the events of November 9-10, as she watched an already demoralized society fall farther into an abyss that finally ended seven years later.

When Herschel Grynzspan, a Polish-Jewish refugee, walked into the German Embassy in Paris on Monday, November 7, 1938, and shot and killed Third Secretary Ernst Vom Rath, he was attempting to protest the forced deportation of his family and other Polish Jews from Germany to the Polish-German border.

His actions, however, unleashed in German people, fueled by anti-Semitic rhetoric, feelings of hatred for all Jews, Jewish businesses and Jewish institutions throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. These feelings manifested themselves in violent actions by mobs, directed at Jews, and under the watchful eyes of police, firemen and the Gestapo.

When it was all over, the stench of smoke hung in the air, shards of glass littered streets and sidewalks, and blackened shells of homes, businesses and synagogues dotted the landscape.

Official estimates of the two-day carnage record that between 36 and 91 Jews were murdered, 26 were injured, 7,500 Jewish homes and businesses were vandalized, and 76 of 267 synagogues damaged during the melee were completely destroyed.

Mrs. Adler remembers the morning of November 10th as being "just like any other day, but kind of cloudy." She learned of the events of the night of November 9th from a neighbor who told her that the synagogues were burning. She went to investigate for herself and saw her synagogue--"one of the most beautiful synagogues probably in Europe at the time"--in flames, ringed by a brigade of firemen there to prevent the fire from spreading to adjoining buildings.

As she recalled, she was not the only witness to see the burning synagogue; there were many others watching. "There was standing next to me a man and a woman--they were strangers to each other, strangers to me. The man said to the woman, 'I think it's a shame, it's a real shame. I know so many good Jews.' And the woman turned to him and said, 'what do you mean good Jews?' They're all evil. A Jew is a Jew like a herring is a herring."

Mrs. Adler said she felt at the time that after news of the destruction reached the outside world, rescue attempts would be made. "I and many others went to the post office to send cables to the United States. We all felt very strongly that now our lives were threatened; and we couldn't survive

in Germany, and that the United States would open camps for us. We knew that there was a quota for immigration, and we all couldn't come there at the same time, but we felt that somehow or other we would be rescued. Camps would be opened some place where we all could spend time till our numbers were called to get visas...Of course, this never materialized."

At this point, most German Jews realized that now it was time to leave the country of their birth. Up till Kristallnacht, most Jews harbored secret hopes that all would eventually return to the normalcy of life prior to Adolf Hitler being made chancellor in 1933. "I was 15 when Hitler came to power in '33," Mrs. Adler said, "and we believed--and so did the majority of the German people--that it would be only a very short time before Hitler lost power. As you know, the political situation was such that every few months they changed the chancellor in Germany, and we thought it wouldn't last very long." Jews in Germany had been part of the landscape for many centuries. They had survived inquisitions, suppression and pogroms? to assert their rightful place in German society. They were German citizens of Jewish persuasion, and they wholeheartedly believed this would protect them from any trouble the new chancellor might cause.

Despite Hitler's written tirades and garbled racist propaganda about the fate of the Jews in a nation he controlled, any Jews chose to stay and weather the storm out. Others left in record numbers. One of these was Justin Adler, who decided to leave following a verbal skirmish with the SS.

"I graduated from the University of Heidelberg in Medicine," he said, "and I had an internship in Berlin in a large hospital. After two or three days, the Nazi SS men came around and decided that all Jews had to leave. So, all the Jewish doctors were immediately chased out. In my innocence at the time--it was 1933--I thought it was wrong thing to do, and I decided I wanted to complain." Dr. Adler went to the Berlin headquarters of the SS to do just that and was questioned by an SS officer. "I told him that I was fired from my job, that I thought it was wrong and that I wanted to complain about it," he said. The SS man encouraged Adler to "go home, forget about it." It was at this point that Adler began to seriously entertain the idea of leaving Germany.

"I left Germany by writing to my uncle, Mr. Herman Adler of Memphis, who provided the necessary affidavits, and I left Germany in August 1933...In the meantime, I knew what was coming, and I prevailed upon my family to come over here. My brother came in 1934 and my parents in 1937," he said.

Prior to his leaving Germany, Dr. Adler recalled that his father was forced, at his own expense, to print and have distributed abroad, newspaper reports and advertisements that disavowed any anti-Jewish actions by the Nazis. Dr. Adler has one of those advertisements in his possession today. Though brittle with the age of almost 60 years, the yellowed document still effectively chills anyone who reads it, especially in light of what history has taught us the Nazis did in 12 years of terror. Published in Dr. Adler's hometown newspaper on Thursday, March 30, 1933, the document reads: "Against the Atrocity Propaganda of Foreign Countries. We send the following telegram to Mr. Herman Adler, Adler Hotel, in Memphis, Tennessee, U.S.A. Inform the press and the public that stories of atrocities and reports of violence and tumult in Germany are simply lies and are to be denied and rejected. Combat the senseless agitation against Germany. Signed, Adolf Lauckheimer and Edward Lipmann."

( See KRISTALLNACHT Page 4 )



This letter was written by Arnold Blair, a Memphis business man with Driefus and Mulford Jewelry stores in Memphis. This is a remarkable first hand witness and participant's account of this significant event. Mr. Blair's widow and son still live in Memphis and we thank Mrs. Blair for giving us the opportunity to print the letter.

Memphis, Tennessee

March 26, 1965

Dear Warren,

John Wesley, a very old friend, came by the house at 2:30 AM Thursday, March 25, 1965. It was bitter cold and raining.

He and I put a dozen sandwiches, six hard-boiled eggs, fruit and a thermos of coffee in the car, enough to last the 24 hours we would be on the road (one doesn't stop and try to eat in a restaurant in Mississippi and Alabama when traveling with a black man).

It was a long hard drive of 370 miles to Montgomery. We arrived there at 11:15 AM. On the outskirts, I asked a man at a filling station where the Civil Rights Marches were. He looked at John - then me - then spit on the ground.

Near the Capitol, we asked an Alabama National Guardsman and he shrugged.

We parked the car and started toward Main Street. We left our eyeglasses in the car and felt it best not to walk together. I was to lead and inquire and John follow.

At W.T. Grant I bought three packs of gum for 15 cents. I laid the even change on the counter and the female clerk said, "Gimmie a penny tax. Somethings got to pay for these niggers on parade."

A Negro Preacher directed me to where the march was forming.

It was an eerie walk. The town was under siege. Six helicopters circling overhead, very low, sounding like machine guns being fired slowly...Thousands of soldiers--at every corner--on tops of buildings...emergency trucks...State Police in green plastic helmets carrying their now famous "billies"...ABC, NBC, CBS with mobile and portable cameras everywhere.

After a three-mile walk (it all seemed to be uphill) we arrived at headquarters just in time to hear a white parade organizer giving instructions over a bull horn.

"Remember, six abreast, women in the center. Don't answer and don't hit back, no matter what--we shall overcome!"

A group of American Historians were forming.

"I'm Van Woodward, Professor American History at Yale--better put on your badge."

"I'm not a historian."

Well, maybe you'll help make history today. Join us."

So I joined Huftstadter of Columbia, Franklin of Chicago, Winkler of Rutgers, Weisberger of Rochester, Duberman of Princeton and twenty others.

White scum! Nigger lovers!" screamed a passing truckload. The march started. They had expected 10,000 and there were over 30,000 of us. First, hundreds of reporters from all over the world, magazine writers, feature writers, then a truckload of cameramen, then the pink luminous shirted 300 who had marched from Selma--sneakers and legs covered with Alabama mud--the white faces red with sunburn.

"What do we want - FREEDOM, FREEDOM! When do we want it? NOW, NOW!"

Then, Martin Luther King, Ralph Bunch and every name you've ever heard of in the Rights movement. Then the marchers. The line stretched for miles.

"Go back North! Everything was wonderful 'till you came!"

A one-legged man caused a chorus of "Left, left, left."

A nun's chastity was ridiculed.

"We shall overcome--yes, we shall overcome!"

I've never walked so straight or felt so tall.

Above the Capitol dome was the Alabama Flag, below it the Confederate Flag and on a pail set in the ground, our flag. The troops who guarded us had Confederate Flags on their uniforms. There were two solid lines of State Police stretched across the Capitol steps, a grandstand below them, the mobile TV units and the helicopters..Harry Belafonte, Peter, Paul and Mary--they sang their hearts out while we waited an hour for the end of the parade to join us.

"Mississippi, kneel and pray, Hallelujah" (Repeat)

"Wallace, kneel and pray, Hallelujah" (Repeat)

Then came the speeches.

"We come with the power of our souls and the presence of our bodies to love the hell out of George Wallace and the State of Alabama!"

"The next time the President calls out the Guard, let's see the American Flag at the top of the dome!"

During the Star Spangled Banner, the double line of troops just stood; no salute, no hats off, not at attention.

This thing just wasn't happening. Just a bunch of goddamn niggers and beatniks.

It was 75 ; at times it poured; and we stood till 4:00 PM. And it was over. I asked a trooper how to get onto Route 82-West.

"First turn to your left, nigger-lover."

It was a long hard drive home; rain and cold again.

Billie let me sleep late. At breakfast I read that Mrs. Viola Gregg Liozzo had been killed driving a Negro home to Selma!

"My country, tis of thee  
Sweet land of Liberty..."

My love to all,

KRISTALLNACHT .. From Page 3

Mr. Adler said that probably one of the greatest indignities he suffered before leaving Germany was in 1937 when the Gestapo decreed that all Jews were to be issued passports called "Kennkarte." "They took pictures and registered us," she said, "and gave all the Jewish men the name 'Israel' and all the Jewish women the name 'Sarah.' And we had to repeat this name. I was asked, 'What is your name,' and I replied, 'My name is Herta.' They became very incensed and furious and said that my name is now Herta Sarah." Mrs. Adler believes the registration was a preparation for the time when they began to arrest all Jews and send them to concentration camps.

With everything that was going on, she said most Jews were absolutely amazed that they could walk the streets, that they could breathe, that the people would not attack and kill them. "You must realized, on the other hand," she said, "that it's amazing that not all the Jews in Germany were killed before they established concentration camps, because they certainly gave the German people permission to kill the Jews wherever they saw them."



## A Heritage Revealed: The Jewish Presence In Arkansas

Focusing on the Jewish community in Arkansas, its contributions to the state and the rich heritage of its people, the exhibition is based on the work of author Carolyn Gray LeMaster and is supported in part by a contribution from the Ottenheimer Brothers Foundation.

During 1985 research for the exhibition "The Shovel Speaks, The Trowel Talks" which featured 4 archaeological sites around Arkansas, the Abraham Block house was founded to be the oldest apparent Jewish family site in the state. Carolyn LeMaster's work came to the museum's attention while researching the Block house in southwest Arkansas. Up to that time, it was thought that the first Jewish settlers in Arkansas were in Little Rock. She found there were widely scattered settlements, each having profound affects on the surrounding area; economically, socially and culturally.

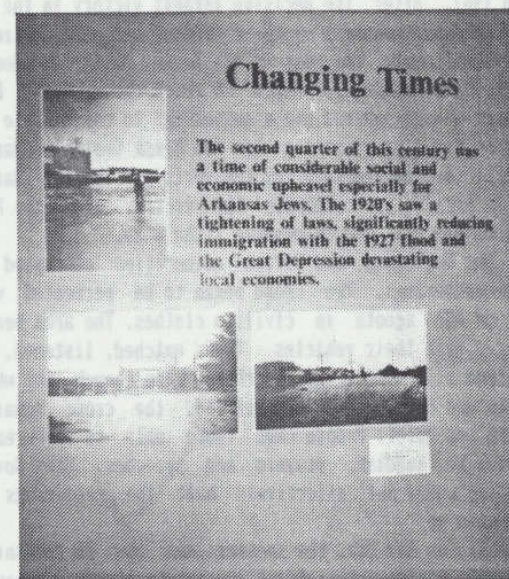
This exhibition represents the museum's continuing effort to bring historical information to the public that may be new to them. A Heritage Revealed is a straight historical presentation of Jewish immigration, settlement and contributions to Arkansas.

The exhibit is divided into 4 specific sections: The Remote Arkansas (1825-1865), Coming Together (1865-1930), Changing Times (1930-1950) and a montage of images entitled Faces and Places. The first section demonstrates a Jewish presence in Arkansas prior to the conclusion of the Civil War. The next two divisions represent the two varied waves of Jewish immigrants, the first from Western Europe and the second from Eastern Europe. The final section is composed of the very best of over 5,000 images of home life, religious ceremonies, economic successes and cultural contributions made by these settlers and their descendants.

Significant artifacts used in the exhibit have been gathered from across the state. They include two portraits, one of Abraham Block and one of his wife, Francis, both dating from the 1850's. Religious artifacts are varied, from the 1867 corporate seal of the Little Rock Reform Congregation to prayer books and arks. One of the arks is a crude wooden version from the turn of the century, when the Wynne congregation met above a Jewish-owned shop. Commercial memorabilia ranges from merchandise purchased at M.M. Cohn Co., and a menu and place setting from Brier's Fine Old



Restaurant to a merchant account book from Charles Dante in Dumas. The exhibition takes a comprehensive view of Jewish immigration to Arkansas and influence of the Jewish community in the state. Through a variety of avenues, it paints a portrait of yesterday and today, intertwined.



The exhibit was organized and researched by Carolyn Gray LeMaster, a journalist. She began working on the project three years ago with help from the Arkansas Endowment for the Humanities grant. Much of the research was done at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

Our thanks to Ms. LeMaster for permission to print her article and reproduce her pictures.



# THE HISTORICAL MONUMENT of MINSK

By Roman Mitelman

There is a landmark unknown to most foreign tourists who visit Minsk, the capitol of Byelorussia, yet many residents are familiar with it, and all Jews know of it. If one should desire to see it, he would be lead through the part of Minsk that is reminiscent of "Fiddler on the Roof", up to Ratomskaya Street - the center of the former Minsk Ghetto. There at the bottom of the ravine, one can see a monument made of black granite. Among the many monuments in the Soviet Union, this one is unique.

After the city of Minsk was liberated from the Germans in 1944, many survivors returned. They tried to look for their families, relatives, friends and homes, but only few of them were lucky enough to be successful. The loss among the Jewish Population was especially profound. More than 70,000 Jews had been killed by the Germans and their collaborators in the Minsk area. Not one Jewish family remained untouched by the tragedy; all had experienced losses.

It was then that the Jewish People decided to erect a monument to the memory of the victims. Money was collected from among the survivors, and the dedication ceremony took place in 1946. Against the stark black granite, the inscription in Yiddish reads: "This monument is dedicated to the memory of Jews murdered by the Nazis." In 1946, in the Soviet Union, it happened to be possible to erect a monument with such an inscription. A year later, such a dedication would not have been allowed. And it happened somehow that for the next two decades, the Soviet authorities ignored the black piece of granite with its inscription. the situation changed.

In 1967, after the decisive Israeli victory in the Six Day War, a consciousness of their historical and national identity rose among the Jews in the Soviet Union. Suddenly, hundreds, even thousands, began to visit the monument. Four dates were usually marked for a gathering: to commemorate the victims of the biggest pogrom in the Minsk Ghetto in March, to observe the anniversary of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in April, to celebrate the victory over the Nazi Germany on May 9th, and to observe Tisha B'av.

At the Beginning, the Soviet authorities attempted to stop the gatherings. The crowd began to be permeated with Police and KGB agents in civilian clothes. The area became surrounded with their vehicles. They watched, listened, and transmitted all to their headquarters. Even though the whole situation was tense and electrified, the crowd remained organized and quiet. People came there only to lay wreaths and listen to Kaddish, prayers and speeches. The Soviet authorities could not effectively halt the gatherings and finally gave up.

Usually on May 9th, the speaker was one of refuseniks-officers (E. Davidovich, later L. Ovsistcher). The speeches were devoted to the topic of Jewish participation in the Second World War, stressing the fact that half million Jews actively participated in the war against Nazi Germany as soldiers, officers, generals and partisans. One hundred fifty-five Jews had been decorated with gold stars as Heroes of the Soviet Union (some of them twice), thousands and thousands of others had been rewarded for bravery with orders and medals. The speakers emphasized again and again the fact the Jews were murdered only because they were Jews.

Such speeches were unusual in the Soviet Union because

the government-controlled media ignored the Jewish presence in the war as both fighters and victims. Jews were always termed under the heading of "Soviet citizens", thus effectively removed from their Jewish identity. Even the murdered at Baby Yar, ninety percent of whom were Jews, were termed simply as "Soviet citizens".

Before a speech, wreaths were laid at the monument with ribbon inscriptions in Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew. The ribbons would then disappear overnight. Sometimes a reader stood close to the monument and read poetry on Jewish themes to the whole crowd. The authorities were scared, although there was nothing for them to fear. Many things have changed in the Soviet Union during the past several years. Maybe now the KGB has disappeared from Ratomskaya Street, taking their walkie-talkies and cameras with them. Maybe the ribbons on the wreaths remain for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

If any Jews should visit the Soviet Union and have the opportunity to stop in Minsk, he should go to Ratomskaya Street. It is a worthy place, where one can stand and look at the black granite monument, perhaps in silence or perhaps in prayer.

Roman Mitelman is an Engineer from Minsk who emigrated with his family from the Soviet Union to the U.S.A. in 1979. He now resides in Memphis, Tennessee.

BARON HIRSCH .. From Page 7

Many new programs and ideas were now developed at Birsch Hirsch. A College of Jewish Studies for adult education bringing distinguished scholars and personalities for lectures, retreat and Shabbatonim, creative youth programs, a sleep-away summer camp for children, collegiate activities, an outreach to all of the Jewish faith in the community and those in the smaller outlying communities, programs for singles as well as senior citizens, pilgrimages to Israel and much more. The Chief Rabbi of Israel came to speak and the 38th President of the United States, Gerald R. Ford, addressed the congregation. Much excitement and activity were generated, but the need to serve the majority of the members of the congregation who now resided in East Memphis became imperative.

Two mobile rooms were given to the congregation, and one of its members allowed the use of a lot he owned on Yates and Shady Grove Road, where they were placed. Sabbath services were held there, and the unit was called the Baron Hirsch Young People's Synagogue. In 1977, the congregation purchased the estate and residence of Isaac Hayes, the Academy Award winning singer. This new facility was named Baron Hirsch East. The larger home became a synagogue and religious school. Attendance at Sabbath morning services increased each week, making it necessary to expand the building to accommodate this ever growing new congregation.

The Administrative Offices and Office of the Rabbi were moved to the East building. Construction began for a Chapel Hall and Youth Room.

The new chapel soon became inadequate. Sabbath morning services and other activities were often filled to overflowing. The congregation now began to develop plans for the construction of a new sanctuary and social hall. New plans were drawn to include the remodeling of the Country Day School Building which was donated to include the

( See BARON HIRSCH Page 8 )



## BARON HIRSCH CONGREGATION:

### A BRIEF HISTORY

By .. Rafael G. Grossman  
Senior Rabbi

In its earliest beginnings, a group of eastern European Jewish immigrants founded a cemetery and named it for Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a well-known Austrian Jewish philanthropist. At this time, Baron de Hirsch was contributing much of his fortune to help his fellow Jews. Later, in 1862, a congregation was founded, but did not obtain its first permanent place of worship until 1890.

Two years later, in 1892, a church at the corner of Fourth and Washington Street became the Baron Hirsch Synagogue. The charter of incorporation was applied for under the name of Baron Hirsch Benevolent Society. The congregation engaged its first Rabbi, Benjamin Myerowitz, who was succeeded by Rabbi Bressler and then by Rabbi Lieber Cohen. Rabbi Cohen, in later years, became a well-known figure in New York's Rabbinic circles.

During the 1890's, the congregation established its first program of religious education for children, and in 1897, held its first graduation from the Baron Hirsch Sunday School.

Ground was broken to build a new synagogue in 1914. A new building for the school and social activities later known as the Menorah Institute followed. For many years the synagogue and institute on Washington and Fourth served as the primary focal point of the Jewish community.

Twenty-four year old Henry Raphael Gold became the Rabbi of Baron Hirsch in 1916. He was to become a luminary of American Jewry, serving Baron Hirsch for three years. He then studied medicine and eventually became one of the foremost psychiatrists in the nation. He was succeeded by Rabbi J.G. Barcarat. Rabbi Elizar Stampfer followed Rabbi Barcarat.

The immigrants became acculturated to the new community and country. The back packers were now merchants and salesmen. Sadly, a worldwide economic depression struck. Members of the congregation banded together to provide food, clothing and other needs to those among them less fortunate. To their great credit, their compassion and sense of responsibility went far beyond the confines of the congregation or Jewish community. They reached out to neighbors of other faiths and races and won the hearts and eternal gratitude of many Memphians.

A new Rabbi was then engaged at Baron Hirsch. Rabbi Morris N. Taxon came to Memphis in 1931 and served until his death ten years later.

Rabbi Isadore Goodman succeeded Rabbi Taxon. Rabbi Goodman served Baron Hirsch until his death twenty years later. About this time Leizer Shore became the Sexton of the Synagogue. A scholarly and pious Jew who became an institution in the community, his wise counsel, wit and devotion will always be remembered. He served for many years. His demise several years ago was deeply mourned. The need for larger facilities to serve the ever growing membership and the transition of its families from downtown to other parts of the city convinced William Gerber, the President of the Congregation, that it was time to build a larger Synagogue elsewhere. Philip Belz then became President of the Baron Hirsch Congregation and Chairman of the Building Committee. The construction of the greatest synagogue edifice ever known in this nation was the result of



his leadership. The new Baron Hirsch Synagogue and Educational Building became home for the largest Orthodox congregation in the United States, a status the congregation still enjoys. A new Cantor was engaged, Rabbi David W. Skopp. Later he assumed additional duties of Assistant Rabbi. As the new Baron Hirsch reached its completion, the membership included over 1,000 families and more than 500 children in its Religious School. People came from all parts of the world and wondered how a small community could support a synagogue with permanent seating for more than 2,000 people and, when expanded into its magnificent auditorium, would accommodate 4,000. People of all faiths flocked to see this magnificent achievement. Former back peddlers and their children could stand before G-d and their fellow Americans and proudly point to this remarkable synagogue while saying, "Thank G-d for America." In Memphis, Tennessee, the heart of the Christian Bible Belt, an Orthodox synagogue, greater than any other, stood.

The ancillary facilities of the synagogue were abundant. They included a daily chapel, study room, youth center and lounge, over forty classrooms, offices, two large auditoriums, a library, twenty-one entrances and exits, and a mikvah that met important Hallachik requirements.

Nearby, new homes were built by member families who wanted to be near the synagogue. Some bought homes just for Shabbos. A Community and a deep Jewish spirit evolved around the new Baron Hirsch. Davening, studying, and living in the new community were very exciting.



*Fourth and Washington*

After the death of Rabbi Goodman, Rabbi Chaim Seiger was engaged as Rabbi of Baron Hirsch. Ten years later, Rabbi Seiger changed professions. Once again Baron Hirsch needed a Senior Rabbi. Rabbi Rafael G. Grossman accepted the congregation's invitation. He came to Memphis from Long Branch, New Jersey, where he was Rabbi of Congregation Brothers of Israel, Dean of the Hillel School, a member of the faculty of Monmouth College, and President of the Rabbinical Council of New Jersey.

( See BARON HIRSCH Page 6 )



remodeling of the Country Day School Building which was donated to Baron Hirsch and for the construction of a contiguous sanctuary and other ancillary facilities. Baron Hirsch East now became a full service synagogue and though services were still being held at the synagogue on Vollintine, all activities were now taking place in the East Synagogue. The need for space became urgent. Baron Hirsch having acquired the Country Day School property through the benefaction of a non-Jewish philanthropist and the efforts of one of its members, moved once again.

The gymnasium became the sanctuary and meeting room. The congregation officially approved the architect's new plans and procedures were established for a fund raising campaign leading to the creation of a new Baron Hirsch complex.

On December 31, 1987 the last services were held in the great Baron Hirsch synagogue on Vollintine. With great joy was Baron Hirsch now reunited in one synagogue. Construction began for a vast and beautiful complex to serve the membership of the congregation.

Today Baron Hirsch is a synthesis of the old and the new. It enjoys the affiliation of many lifetime members along with the membership and active participation of a large group of young families. Our history is still being written, and we look forward to future chapters even more productive than those of the past.

# SHALOM

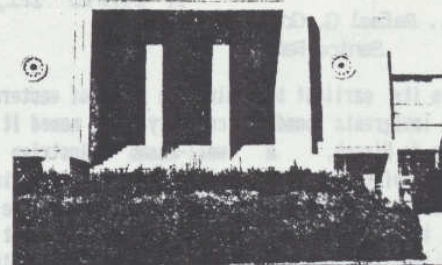


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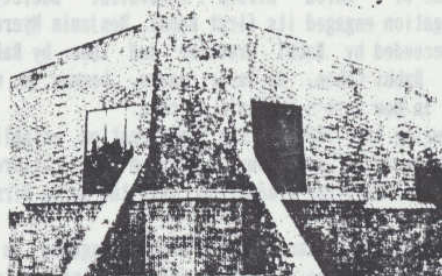


After the death of Rabbi Goodson, Rabbi Chaim Torgor was engaged as Rabbi of Baron Hirsch. Ten years later, Rabbi Torgor changed professions. Once again Baron Hirsch needed a Rabbi. Rabbi Torgor's friend, Rabbi Chaim Torgor, accepted the congregation's invitation. He came to Memphis from Long Beach, New Jersey, where he was Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, one of the oldest synagogues in the country. He was a member of the faculty of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



*Vollintine and Evergreen*



*Winter Oak and Yates*