

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH

## NEWSLETTER

VOL. 2, NO. 3

JULY 1989

### The Time Is Now!

by Selma Lewis

That timing is important is a statement so familiar, and repeated so often that it has become a cliché. But often a cliché represents the truth. Several things recently have confirmed the conviction that the timing of our history of the local Jewish population is fortuitous.

Last month my husband and I were in New York City for a holiday. While visiting there I took the opportunity to consult the New York Public Library to investigate their holdings that might relate to our history. What I discovered was that there is an entire section of the library, a large part of the downstairs floor, that is devoted to Jewish subjects. The librarian in charge of the collection was helpful and cordial, and seemed to be interested in our project. He explained that the growth in the numbers of books and articles on Jewish matters has been tremendous in the last few years. He termed it a geometric progression. "You see," he said, "I used to be able to write by hand the cards for the card catalogue. These days, if there were no computer available, there would be no way that we could keep up with the new materials as they arrive. Interest in Jewish affairs is increasing greatly."

A more local example of the enhanced attention to Jewish matters can be seen in the application by the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South for a grant from the Tennessee Humanities Council. The purpose of the grant is to present a public program on the subject of the successive waves of Jewish immigration which form the Jewish community of Memphis. If the proposal is successful, the program will occur in October, 1989. While the grant application was in process, I became aware of another grant request made to the Council by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Several years ago I was privileged to serve as a member of the Council, which was then called the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities. During my time on that on that committee there was never even one request I could recall a project dealing with a Jewish subject. When I mentioned to one of the officers of the Council that it was interesting that there now two such requests, she informed me that there was yet another request on a Jewish topic, which meant that now there were three!

The timing of our history also seems to coincide with a recognition that the United States of America is composed of many diverse groups which have become an integral part of this country. While we Americans formerly thought of



member of the American Jewish Press association, the *Hebrew Watchman's* prestige has risen throughout the Jewish journalism field. He was honored by the Jewish press in 1965 and in 1975. In his beloved state of Israel, he was honored in 1972 when a cancer detection clinic named a blood bank and laboratory in his name. Again, in 1987, he and his wife were present when a playground in the Galilee settlement was established in their honor.

As we dedicate this issue of our newsletter to the memory of Leo I. Goldberger, we would like to say Shalom with the beautiful words written by his loving daughter, Dotty, and published in the May 4 issue of his paper, *The Hebrew Watchman*.

*Everyone's parents are 'special' to them but, please allow me these words.*

*Not very often through this life comes a man like Mr. Leo. The world is a better place for his having been here.*

*Everyone knows that he, tirelessly gave so much of his time, energy and financial aid to so many worthy causes, especially to his beloved Israel. But that is not about which I wish to speak.*

*It is the spirit of love he had for his fellow man for which he wished to be known.*

*This kind, considerate, gentle 'gentleman and scholar' personified what Hashem had in mind in His laws between man and man.*

*It is written that the greatest thing a man can leave is the 'crown of a good name.'*

*When I was young I thought our name was long. Now I know why. It had to be in order to cover all his good deeds and ways. His name was most fitting. He was pure gold.*

*"Goodnight" (you've earned your rest) "Sweet Prince."*

— Dotty

ourselves as belonging to an amorphous melting pot, it has recently been more common to regard this as a pluralistic nation, with each group retaining its separate identity, while being a part of the whole. This theory leads to the conclusion that become we can understand the history of our city, state, or country, we must first understand the history of each group.

This, historical trends, as well as the growth of general concern with Jewish history lead to the belief that our decision to write the history of our lives in Memphis is timely. And, even if it is a cliché, timing is important.

### IN MEMORIAM

On April 28, 1989, the Jewish community of Memphis lost one of its finest citizens and our society lost one of its dedicated members. Leo I. Goldberger, founder of *The Hebrew Watchman*, saw the great need for our community to be informed of local and world events affecting Jewish life and through his leadership, the paper became an integral part of the Memphis and Mid-South Jewish community. He served as editor of the weekly for a number of years after founding the newspaper in 1925 and was editor emeritus when his son Herman took over the *Watchman* helm in 1970. As editor emeritus, he continued a full-time schedule at the newspaper and nights usually found him attending a banquet honoring someone in the Jewish community or being honored himself.

His fame wasn't exclusive to Memphis. As a member of the American Jewish Press association, the *Hebrew Watchman's* prestige has risen throughout the Jewish journalism field. He was honored by the Jewish press in 1965 and in 1975. In his beloved state of Israel, he was honored in 1972 when a cancer detection clinic named a blood bank and laboratory in his name. Again, in 1987, he and his wife were present when a playground in the Galilee settlement was established in their honor.

### What's In A Name?

As our modest publication continues to grow and develop, a recent discussion with several members and officers indicates that the time has come for an appropriate name for our newsletter.

Please submit your entry or entries for our newsletter's new name on a 3x5 card or postcard and mail to David Schneider, P.O. Box 17304, Memphis, TN, 38187-0304.

All entries must be received by Friday, September 1, 1989. Entries will be judged by a committee made up of your officers and the winning entry will be used for our next edition.

Put on your historical thinking caps now and send in your entry. You can become part of Memphis Jewish History.

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH — FOUNDED IN 1986  
163 BEALE STREET, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38103



# Silberberg — A Family Genealogy

by Janice Greif Lazarus

Ten years ago my cousin and former Memphian Fritz Nussbaum delved into this family's extensive genealogical past. From Nussbaum and Silberberg to Lazarus, our tree originated with Seligmann Heinemann in Neidenstein, Hessen Germany in 1622.

Our tree has been a labor of love with all of our many relatives who are scattered around the country adding their own personal touches to the family treasure. Nussbaum though collected, compiled and researched most of the information.

Much of the distant history he collected came from a book written by the Chief Archivist of the German government at the conclusion of World War II. The book details the Jews of that area in the early 1600's.

Heinemann, who lived 63 years, was the first Jew to settle in Neidenstein. The small town, near the city of Kasel, was the home to all his descendants until after the beginning of the second World War. The house that my great-grandfather was born and raised in was built in 1820 — I was able to visit it in 1920.

Much hidden history can be learned from researching family history. A German edit written in 1812 proclaimed that all adult Jewish males could no longer retain their fathers' family name and would have to take a new surname. The government justified these actions by stating that more families would create more taxes and more young men would be supplied for the army. This is when the name Silberberg first appeared in our family. My great-grandfather went from Abraham Heinemann to Abraham Silberberg.

Prior to the latter part of the 19th century, Jews in Germany were not considered first-class citizens and certain penalties were imposed them. For example, until Bismarch established a more democratic form of government, about 1880, Jews were not allowed to travel from one area to another in their own country without obtaining a "Schultzbrief". This was an official travel pass obtained by many of my relatives.

My mother Sophye Silberberg Greif immigrated to the United States in 1901 from Neidenstein. She came to Memphis in 1903 and became an American citizen two years later through her marriage to her American-born husband.

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# Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South

## OFFICERS 1989-90

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2ND VICE PRESIDENT .....	Gloria Felsenthal
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TREASURER .....	Abe Schwab

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Harriet Stern

A time of change often provides an opportunity to look back as well as to look forward. As I leave office as your president I would like to do just those things, taking stock of our organization as a group and of our status in relation to our goals.

Our organization is no longer a newborn. We have passed our third birthday and have begun to find our way in the world. These initial years have witnessed a growth in membership that approaches our original goal of 200 members. Yet, even while acknowledging that historical societies are characteristically not mass membership organizations, I do not believe that we have yet reached all of those who would want to join if approached and who would like to be a part of our work. Nor, faced with other priorities, have we given the time necessary to reach out into the Mid-South region. To broaden the base of our membership is one of our goals and challenges for the future.

Looking backward over these three years reveals programs touching a variety of interests and drawing upon the talents and special knowledge of several of our members. David Schneider, Jack Lieberman and Lester Sewel have enlightened us on topics of Jewish coin and medal collecting, our communal history and a model family history. Additionally, the faculty of the Bornblum Judaic Studies program at Memphis State have given generously of their time to address the society in connection with exhibitions of Judaica from the Vatican and Danzig. In another program, Annette Levy instructed us on the formation of an archive.

The creation of an archive of the Memphis Jewish community remains as another goal yet to achieve. Now, however, the entire community can celebrate the efforts of Temple Israel, which under the leadership of Shirley Feibelman, also a Jewish Historical Society board member, has just established a congregational archive of professional quality.

Our main sense of accomplishment in these years is the commissioning of a history of the Jews of Memphis. That Selma Lewis accepted this task is a great fortune for us. The work is six months along toward a projected three-year fruition. Its significance has been acknowledged by a \$2,000 grant from the Plough Community Foundation and by the Jewish community through an allocation of \$8700 from the Memphis Jewish Federation. These support monies represent not only needed financial help but also a vote of confidence and an element of prestige for us.

Finally, we have made two other beginnings. We are engaged in assisting the *Hewbrew Watchman* in obtaining microfilm copies of all available back issues through the State Library and Archives in Nashville. It will be a great relief when this preservation is completed, as many of the volumes are in extremely fragile condition. Another beginning has been the initiation for what could be an award conference. The Tennessee Humanities Council has granted us funds for a conference next fall to be organized under the leadership of Selma Lewis and in cooperation with other organizations. This conference will concern the waves of immigration which have formed our community and will have Joseph Sarna of the Hewbrew Union College as guest lecturer.

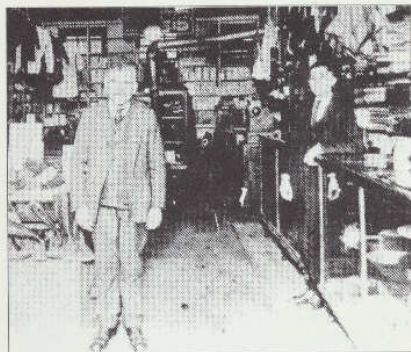
The pieces have begun to fall into place, and we have a foundation on which to build. Now the real work can begin — to archive, collect, preserve, educate, and inspire.

It has been a privilege to serve in this office. I have been supported by a wonderful Board of Directors. Their collective leadership and the unique contributions of each have been invaluable and have brought us to this point with good counsel, dedication and concern. Now under the leadership of Leonide Saharovici, we have a man of enthusiasm and vision who has already had much to do with charting the course of our organization. I am confident that the Society will go from strength to strength under his leadership.



# MEMPHIS' OLDEST WHOLESALER

by Lawrence Beck



At 17, with an employee (left) in Clarksdale

After living through deplorable conditions in Romania, Isidore Beck saw the Statue of Liberty upon his arrival in America when he was 16 years old. Today, he is able to look back on a full life as he recently celebrated his 92nd birthday.

Romania was a poor country and the opportunities were limited. Since Jews were not allowed to own their own land or serve as officers in the army, a young Isidore Beck began dreaming of the many freedoms in America. His is the story of the American Dream — that of a young immigrant creating a thriving business with his own two hands.

One day, when young Beck was 13 years old, he watched in the market of his small Romanian town as two drunken soldiers rode to the market on horseback. They knocked over peasant stalls and trampled their wares, chasing the peasants with whips. Afterwards, they turned around and laughed. Beck realized that these peasants had no recourse and decided then that he had to leave this country.

When he was 16, he and his 18 years old sister set out for America. They left their parents, who they never saw again and a brother who Mr. Beck did not see again for more than 50 years. They went by train through Austria, Russia, Poland and Germany to the Port of Rotterdam. There they met large numbers of Jews who had walked from town to town gathering more and more people on their way to the port of embarkation. In 1914 they set sail on a large ship, "The Rotterdam". Upon their arrival in New York, they along with the other immigrants lined the sides of the ship to view the great symbol of freedom, The Statue of Liberty. They were then processed at Ellis Island where, thanks to the help of a friend in Romania, Isidore Beck was able to show the then required \$10 gold piece which he had borrowed. After settling in his new home, the money was returned to his friend in the old country.

Having arrived in America, an Uncle helped Beck find a place to live and on his second day, he looked for a job. Unable to speak English, he consulted the Yiddish newspaper, "The Forward" to seek job openings. His first job was in a factory doing spinning. Later he worked making suitcases, automobile lamps and in the garment district. His pay at that time was \$2.50 a week for twelve hour day. On Delancy Street signs advertised a 7 course Friday night dinner complete with wine for 50¢. But the 50¢ was hard to come by.



Beck, today, in his wholesale shop.

After years of saving, he and an Uncle opened a dry goods store in Long Island. He lived above the store and ran it himself for 10 months, but the hot summer and cold winter sent him packing to New York where he started attending night school. This is where he learned English and hoped to realize his life long dream of becoming a doctor. He passed the Regents exam but the follow-up courses that were required were not offered at night and his daytime hours were reserved for work.

When his sister became ill and passed away, he felt he had to leave New York. He heard about a job opening in a dry goods store in Tunica, Mississippi from an Uncle and secured this job. Within a year, he had formed his own dry goods store in Clarksdale, Mississippi. "I had saved very little, but I bought out a store with my savings and credit which I paid off in no time," said Beck.

Pointing to a yellowed photograph of a young man in a store, handkerchiefs hanging over his head and hand lettered price tags propped against merchandise, Beck said, "That's the store right there. That used to be me. People used to come in and ask to speak to my father."

Beck was the first "one price store" in Clarksdale where merchants didn't put prices on their wares, but instead of haggled out a different payment from each customer. They usually began with a question, "How much have you got?"

Unlike them, Beck placed one price on his merchandise - 75¢ for a shirt, for example - and refused to budge, hence the name "one price store".

After seven successful years in Clarksdale, Beck decided to seek a new opportunity and switched to the wholesale clothing business and moved his business to Memphis. After several moves, he purchased his own building on Second Street across from The Peabody Hotel where the business is presently located.

The years of the great depression were touch on everyone and it was very agonizing for Beck to see many of his friends and customers going bankrupt. He was able to stay away from debt and keep his business as liquid as possible, thus he was able to stave off those dark depression days.

Over the years, he has seen radical changes — from all natural fibers to synthetics, from the haydays of the Twenties to the Great Depression of the Thirties and all the recessions and recoveries since. He has witnessed the rise, fall and rebirth of Downtown Memphis and the tremendous growth of our city. One of Beck's

great rewards was having the money to accomplish a costly yet priceless reunion with his brother who had stayed behind in Romania and who Beck had not seen for 50 years. Beck deposited "a lot of money" in a numbered Swiss bank account to ransom his brother and six other family members 17 years ago. His brother worked at I. Becks until his death a few years ago. Today, Isidore Beck's son, Lawrence keeps track of fashion trends as his father had done for so many years before. But retirement isn't in Beck's plans, either. He says of the business, "I love it. I'm here every day." Besides he loves meeting people. After all, he has been meeting them all his life.

## Society Elects Saharovici As President

Reprinted from:  
*The Hebrew Watchman*

Leonid Saharovici, vice-president of the Jewish Historical Society was elevated to the presidency Wednesday evening, May 24, at the Memphis Jewish Community Center.

Elected for one year, Mr. Saharovici succeeds Harriet Stern, who has been president since the inception of the group.

Highlighting the evening was an address by Society board member Lester Sewel who recounted moments from the lives of his grandparents, Sam and Sara Weinberk Steinberg, their involvement in Memphis history, and his childhood hears with them in their home on Peabody.

Another feature was an announcement that the Society had received three generous grants, including one each from the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis and the Memphis Jewish Federation toward the writing of a history of the Jews of Memphis, which is being authored by historian, Dr. Selma Lewis.

Dr. Lewis announced that a seminar on the subject, "Jewish Immigration: A Mirror of the South," will be held in Memphis on October 29. The Society will co-sponsor the workshop with the Tennessee Humanities Council, Memphis State University, the Center for Southern Folklore, and the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.

The seminar, which will be open to the public, will be funded by a grant from the Tennessee Humanities Council.

In stepping down as president, Mrs. Stern was honored as a "founding mother of the Society, which was organized in 1986, and was presented with a plaque in tribute to her dedication.

Mr. Saharovici, who made the presentation to Mrs. Stern also presented Davis Schneider with an engraved Kiddush cup in appreciation of his service as editor of the Society's newsletter.

The meeting was dedicated to the memory of Leo I. Goldberger, editor emeritus of *The Hebrew Watchman*, for his dedication to family and history and the recording of history through the columns of his newspaper. In offering the tribute, Mrs. Stern expressed to his widow, Reva Goldberger, that the Society shared her great loss of "our dear friend and founding member".

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# TEMPLE ISRAEL - A BRIEF HISTORY

by James A. Wax, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Israel

There were Jews in West Tennessee as early as the 1830s. In 1847, when Joseph I. Andrews (a descendant of Hyam Solomon) purchased a plot of ground in Memphis for burial purposes, there must have been sufficient number of Jews to justify the establishment of a Jewish cemetery.

Although no records of religious activities exist for the early period, it is reasonable to assume that the Jews worshipped in private homes. In accordance with the older tradition, it may well be that daily services were conducted. Certainly, the High Holy Days and festivals were observed, as well as the traditional minyan when someone died. By 1953, one reliable source indicates that the Israelites were "regularly organized" for the purposes of worship. The Congregation, organized under the name B'nai Israel Congregation, Children of Israel. A charter by the State Legislature was issued on March 2, 1854. Although only ten names are mentioned in the charter of incorporation, the congregation began with thirty-six members.

The young congregation received a stimulus its first year by a bequest of \$2,000 from the renowned philanthropist, Judah Touro. Even with this benefaction, the Congregation was financially unable to erect a synagogue. The congregation worshipped in rented halls from 1853 to 1857, and in 1858 leased the Merchants and Farmers Bank Building at Main and Exchange Streets. This building was converted into a synagogue seating 150 men and 46 women.

Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, founder and organizer of American Reform Judaism, came from Cincinnati to dedicate the new sanctuary in March, 1858. The dedication service attracted international attention in the Jewish world, and was referred to in both French and German papers. Two years later, May 1860, the congregation purchased the property it had heretofore leased, and by November 1864, it was "entirely free from debt to all outsiders."

During the earliest years, cantors served as spiritual leaders of the Congregation. In December 1858, the Reverend Jacob J. Peres, a native of Holland, was chosen to serve the

Congregation as "lecturer, leader and teacher in English and German, and to lead the choir at a salary of \$600.00 a year." Peres, very soon after coming to Memphis, established a Hebrew School and performed his other assigned duties.

The first seven years of the Congregation were marked by ideological conflict. There were those who favored extreme orthodoxy and those who favored moderate Reform. Peres was caught in this conflict, and his relationship with the Congregation was severed in August 1860.

At this point in time, the Congregation was in transition, moving from Orthodoxy to Reform. In 1858, when the Congregation needed a spiritual leader, it had to turn to Isaac Leeser, the foremost Orthodox spokesman of the time, for his suggestions and recommendations. Two years later, when the Congregation again needed a rabbi, it sought the advice of the Reform leader, Isaac M. Wise.

In July 1860, the Congregation elected Rabbi Simon Tuska as its spiritual leader. Rabbi Tuska was a native of Germany and the son of a rabbi. he was educated both in the United States and Germany.

During his years of leadership, the Congregation became increasingly Reform. Among the changes in the liturgy were the elimination of all *piyyutim* (poems) with few exceptions, which liberal Jews regarded to be theologically and historically obsolete. In early 1863 a choir of fourteen was formed and instructed by the cantor, Mr. Ritterman. In May 1863 the Congregation had its first Confirmation Service, at which time four boys and three girls were confirmed. Significant also was the introduction of an abridged prayer book, "*Minhag American*," edited by Wise. Family pews, where men and women could together, were installed. These changes represented far-reaching steps in the direction of Reform. In the Civil War period, Tuska also introduced Thanksgiving and National Fast Day and patriotic services, none of which are a fixed part of the traditional synagogue ritual. Not all proposed changes were adopted. One of the most important changes occurred in 1870, the last year of Rabbi Tuska's ministry, when the Sabbath Service was to begin at 7:30, "and always to be altered to suit the season." The new schedule did not apply to the High Holy Days services until a few years later. When the Friday evening service was adopted, Rabbi Tuska delivered a discourse in English.

Tuska's leadership not only inspired significant changes in principles and practices, but broadened and intensified the program of education. In 1864, the Congregation opened the Hebrew Educational Institute. It was "a school for all branches." Several articles in the newspaper praised the school, and by June 1864, the enrollment had reached more than 100, representing many denominations. It is to the credit of the Congregation that despite the small membership and limited financial strength, it created an opportunity for education among the people of Memphis at a time when the normal life of the community was interrupted by the war.

The innovations which Tuska introduced were accepted and became part of the pattern of congregational worship. The religious and educational efforts were successful despite the strong financial limitations. The growth of the member-

ship was very slow. The establishment of another Jewish congregation in 1861 by Peres after his relations with the Congregation had been severed did not attract many Reform members. Perhaps, at most, two resigned from the Congregation. By April 1863, there were 87 members. The small membership and its limited financial strength inhibited its progress. In addition to the burden of maintaining the synagogue, the cemetery, which in 1860 came under the partial control and ownership of the Congregation, constituted a financial burden since the deed conveying the property imposed a small, maximum charge for burial privileges.

Rabbi Tuska was 25 years old when he assumed his position in 1860. He served during difficult time and under most adverse circumstances. The war, which affected the entire community, was most disruptive. The members, however, much interested, were unable to provide adequate financial support. He died in 1870 at the young age of 35.

In 1871, Rabbi Max Samfield was elected Rabbi for the Congregation for one year, and served for forty-four. He was a native of Germany, and like his predecessor, was the son of a rabbi. He was educated in Germany, and soon after coming to the United States, he served a congregation in Shreveport, Louisiana. In August 1871, he was installed as the Rabbi of the Congregation here in Memphis.

He began his ministry at the beginning of that disastrous and tragic decade of the 1870s. Yellow fever epidemics, which occurred with increasing frequency and paralyzed the development of the community and the Congregation.

In 1878, there were 78 interments in the Congregation's cemetery. The membership of the Congregation declined because of the deaths of so many members and the removal from the city of many other members. Delinquent dues for the year 1878 amounted to \$1600.00. The Congregation found it necessary to borrow money from Mr. Lowenstein, the President, and at one time was unable to pay Rabbi Samfield's salary. Although the years 1870 to 1880 were difficult and trying, the Congregation continued to improve spiritually.

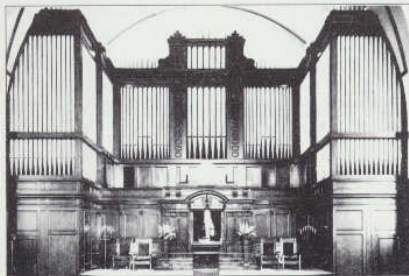
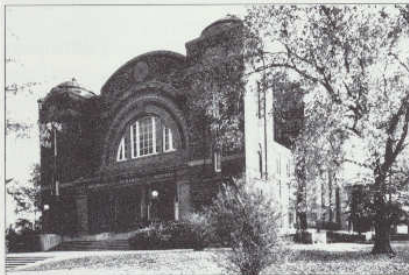
The Reform spirit persisted, and in 1875 it was unanimously resolved to enforce the rule that hats be removed. There were some other changes made in 1881.

The Congregation took an historic step in 1882 when it acquired the property of Beth El Emeth Congregation on Second Street, which it sold for \$3500.00 and its cemetery, which was also sold at a later date for \$1,000. Although the Congregation benefitted financially by the acquisition of the property of Beth El Emeth, the Temple membership remained the same. For a period of four or five years the membership was constant — about 125 members.

In 1882 the Congregation purchased property on Poplar Avenue between Second and Third. Within less than two years the new Temple was erected at a cost of \$39,130. In January 1884, the new Temple was dedicated. Within a year following the dedication, 45 new members were added to the roster.

In 1905 the Congregation celebrated its Golden Anniversary, at which time it had 262 families.

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Poplar Avenue Location



# The Writings of Memphis Hadassah History

by Freda Brode



Hadassah, the largest women's volunteer organization in the world, was founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold. The history of this magnificent organization is well documented, but what about the history of the Memphis Chapter. Who were the women in Memphis who wanted to promote her ideals and dreams by making Hadassah an integral part of the Memphis Jewish community.

When I was President of the Memphis Chapter in 1976-78, people would frequently ask me about the past and it was frustrating not to have the answers. Soon after my presidency ended, I had a great desire to research the past and put the history of Memphis Hadassah in book or pamphlet form. I spent many hours examining scrapbooks, reading materials and researching periodicals, and making many interviews. Time had eroded precious memories and fires which damaged Hadassah files in the National archives at Hadassah House along with the destruction of some of the early copies of the *Hebrew Watchman*, made the task more difficult.

As the years past, my interest waned a bit but was rekindled in 1987 with the help of the exhibition of Early Jewish History staged by the Center for Southern Folklore. Lee Ernst, Memphis Hadassah President, asked me to continue with the history of Memphis Hadassah. With the help of Harriet Beck and Lee Ernst, we began our task again.

In an interview written in 1937, Regina Goldberger Perlman recalled the early history as follows:

"Ben Avi came to Memphis in 1918. Ben Avi was one of that study group who had dedicated his life to Palestine. His astonishment knew no bounds when he found out that Memphis had no Hadassah organization. A meeting was called to remedy this situation, and into the home of Mrs. Sam Steinberg, there gathered the staunch Zionist women of the city. . . Mrs. H. I. Schaffer, Pearl Baruchman, Mrs. Raphael Gold, Mrs. Rosen, Mrs. D. Weiss, Mrs. D. Cohen, Mrs. Goldstein, Mrs. Berger, Mrs. A. Karchmer, Mrs. Joe Bloomfield, Mrs. H. Blumenfeld, Mrs. Sam Eber, Mrs. Fannie Dlugach, Mrs. S. H. Epstein, Mrs. Kantrowitz, Mrs. Platosky, Mrs. Robert Cohen, Mrs. H. E. Lewis, Mrs. M. Blumenfeld, Mrs. C. Ruchansky, Mrs. Shetman and Mrs. Bryan and others that I can't recall. Due to the birth of my oldest son, it was impossible for me to attend, but my name was included on the roll of charter members. Mrs. Raphael Gold became the first president. Hadassah had begun to function in Memphis! Rabbi Gold was called to New Orleans, and we lost our first president. However, I vividly remember the sewing machines in her home, and we made dresses for orphans. The next in line for office was Mrs. H. T. Schaffer who served for five years bringing to the office boundless enthusiasm and energy. Our quota was raised each year, and Hadassah became recognized as a functional unit." From an interview with the late Mrs. Louis Goodman, dues at the time were 25¢ and \$3.00 was collected at the first meeting.

Mrs. Perlman's interview continued, "In 1925 realizing that it would be necessary to find young blood to carry on the work of Hadassah and to provide a program for younger women, we conceived the idea of forming a Memphis chapter of Junior Hadassah. And once more, in the home of Mrs. Sam Steinberg, Junior Hadassah came into being with Mrs. Perry Sewel as its first president."

From its inception the organization captured the imagination of Memphis' women. Our chapter has grown rapidly, from the small sewing circle to a thriving chapter with two groups of 1400 women raising over \$100,000 a year for our projects. Memphis Hadassah is truly interwoven within the Memphis Jewish community. Hopefully, by 1990, I will have all of the wonderful facts and stories I have gathered ready for print and a long-time dream of mine will finally become a reality.

## 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.

## "JEWS IN EARLY MISSISSIPPI"

Book Review by Marc Hayden

One of the most obvious points that one notices in *Jews in Early Mississippi* by Leo E. Turitz and Evelyn Turitz is that many of the Mississippi Jews arrived in this country from Germany. Migrants from Germany and other parts of Europe came to this country in search of freedom. Reportedly 250,000 Jews had settled here from Germany alone by 1890.

The 126-page book contains an inciteful introduction which describes that lack of freedom in the Old World, how the Jews prospered in the field of education and how they assimilated in the South. Before some synagogues were build many of the churches opened their congregations for Jewish weddings. So it wasn't uncommon for some Christian businesses to close when a prominent Jew died.

But the main thrust of the book is two fold: to remind us of the towns that have either fallen silent or those which have settled into the Mississippi countryside anonymously. And to those characters who were anything by anonymous: From Lee Kuhn and Mayer Levy to Morris Lewis, Sr., and Paula Ackerman.

In addition to having to contend with a new and mystifying world, Mississippi Jewry encountered the Civil War and General William T. Sherman. He burned Meridian but General Ulysses S. Grant spared Port Gibson. He declared this land "to beautiful to burn." Those cities which were spared burning or looting by the Yankees then had to contend with the yellow fever epidemic. Many times the fever struck a more devastating blow then did the ravages of war. Yellow fever reportedly killed thirty three percent of Greenville's 2,000 people — of which 18 were Jewish.

The small Mississippi cities shares rich heritages during those war years such as when Mayer Levy sued the federal government. "During the Civil War General Grant sent General McPhearson to the store for merchandise," he wrote. "He took a little more than \$5,000 in merchandise including 100 pairs of ladies' shoes valued at \$1.00 a pair. Neither the USA nor the Union ever paid for the merchandise." Levy lost the case because he was ruled no longer a citizen of the United States. When Mississippi seceded from the union he relinquished his rights.

Rabbi Bernard Gotthelf helped spearhead a campaign to elevate the rights of rabbis to serve as military chaplains alongside their Christian counterparts. It was given a shot in the arm when President Abraham Lincoln appointed Gotthelf as only the second Jewish chaplain in the army. After the war he became the spiritual leader at Anshe Chesed Congregation in Vicksburg until he died of the yellow fever. The synagogue's cemetery was situated where part of the seige of Vicksburg later took place.

Lee Kuhn was a local philanthropist in the city. After his death he not only left the City Catholic Charity Hospital most of the money from his estate but he willed that another hospital be built in honor of his family. He also donated \$20,000 to house the underprivileged — a fund that's still in existence today.

Morris Lewis, Sr., aided the city of Lexington greatly by helping to build a number of conveniences such as the first cotton compress, light plant and sewage system. As an organizer of one of the main city banks during the 1930 depression years, he was able to protect his depositors from those hardships. He told his children, "If things do not work for the best, I may not have much in material wealth to leave you when I die; but I promise I will leave you with the greatest gift one can own — and that is a good name."

Israel Marks headed a group that ran a grocery and general merchandise store that could also be converted into a hotel. After annual sales hit one and a half million dollars he and his partners built Meridian's Grand Opera House out of gratitude for their good fortunes. The first presentation was a Johann Strauss opera with Enrico Caruso headlining one of the remaining concert acts.

After her husband died after serving as rabbi at Temple Beth Israel in Meridian for 26 years, Paula Ackerman succeeded her husband at the pulpit. When asked to describe her daily schedule she revealed that she started work at 5:30 a.m. and finished late at night. Nearby travelers would attend her services hoping to snicker at the city's foolish decision. They usually left inspired.

Ackerman served in many of the synagogue's sisterhood groups and was also a member of the national committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for more than 10 years. At age 55 she was voted as one of the Ten Outstanding Jewish Women for that year.



## Temple Israel - A Brief History — continued from page 4



*New Location On Massey Road*

At this time, the president of the Congregation spoke of "the necessity of building a new temple." It was not until December 1912 that the Congregation purchased the property at Poplar and Montgomery. The cornerstone was not laid until June 1915, and the dedication services were held in May 1916. Before the new Temple was dedicated, Rabbi Samfield had died after serving the Congregation for 44 years.

Rabbi William Fineshriber, who had come to Memphis in 1911 as an associate rabbi succeeded Rabbi Samfield. In 1917, the United States was forced into war. One hundred thirty one men served in World War I, a very high number considering the membership of the congregation was 450 families. Rabbi Fineshriber served the congregation until 1924 when he received a call from a Philadelphia congregation.

In 1925 Rabbi Harry W. Ettelson was installed as the fifth rabbi to the Congregation. It was during the incumbency of Rabbi Ettelson that the religious school building was erected and dedicated in October 1950.

In June 1946, James A. Wax, a native of Missouri, came to Memphis as an assistant rab-

bi. He served as junior rabbi until April 1954 when he was installed as rabbi of the Congregation, a position which he held until March 1977.

As early as March 1957, there was discussion about acquiring land in East Memphis. Not all members favored the move. Some wanted the Congregation to have two locations, the one on Poplar and in an eastern section. Others wanted to purchase the Shrine property and enlarge the Poplar Avenue property. In April 1958 it was desired to get professional help in finding the most desirable location. A survey was to be made to determine where parents with children live and where those members without children reside. There were two motivating factors: one, accessibility, or convenience of the general membership, and two, the increasing enrollment in the religious school. The suggestion was made that some classes of the Religious School meet on Satur-

day. Some parents strongly objected to this proposal, and they rented quarters in a branch bank out in the eastern section.

In September 1964 the Congregation purchased fifteen acres on White Station Road. Plans were being made to erect a facility when the Congregation had a special meeting in September 1966 and voted against the program to erect a new building on White Station.

In November 1971 at a special congregational meeting, the Congregation voted to accept the Abe Plough Family Foundation challenge gift of \$1,000,000. The cost of the new facility was set at \$3.5 million.

In July 1973, it was reported to the Board that proceedings involving the purchase of 30 acres of land on East Massey Road were being undertaken. This is the site recommended by the site committee and the architects. In July 1973, the Board authorized the purchase of the Galloway property for \$700,000 cash.

At a special Board meeting in August 1973, the Board voted to sell the White Station property for \$1 million. The property on East Massey Road was acquired in November 1973. In May

1974 contact was made with the Bellevue Baptist Church to sell the Temple property on Poplar. On October 18, 1974, an agreement was made to sell the Temple property on Poplar for \$940,000, transaction to be on June 15, 1977 when all Temple activities would be moved to the new location. In January 1976, Abe Plough increased his challenge gift by \$500,000. The Service of Farewell at Poplar and Montgomery was on September 10, 1976.

The new Temple was dedicated on September 17 and 18, 1976. Participating in the dedicatory services were the Presidents of the U.A.H.C., the H.U.C. and the C.C.A.R. The total cost of the building was in excess of \$7 million, of which a total of \$2 million was contributed by the Abe Plough Family Foundation, the largest gift ever received by a Jewish congregation in all of Jewish history. The Congregation enjoyed the rare privilege of knowing there was no mortgage on the new building.

Through the major focus of attention during the latter years was on the building project, attention was also directed to the programs and practices within the Congregation. In 1977, the Kiddush and Candlelighting ceremonial was introduced in the Friday evening services. In March 1977 the Congregation voted to engage a cantor who would be a regular part of the religious service and engage in other activities within the congregation. Other changes were made from time to time.

In May 1964, Rabbi Harry K. Danziger, a son of a rabbi, came to Memphis as an assistant rabbi, with the exception of four years when Rabbi Danziger served other congregations, he has for over a score of years, served our Congregation with dedication and distinction.

## Silberberg - A Family Genealogy

*continued from page 2*

My brother and I were born in Memphis as were my mother's five grandchildren. My grandparents, Simon and Regina Silberberg, came to Memphis from Germany in 1936 and lived here until their deaths. We were lucky to get them to our country although my grandmother died three weeks after she arrived.

Today we look to the future and the new members of our family. Two and a half years ago I experienced one of my biggest thrills, the birth of my first great grandchild, Jordan Gene Kramer, to my granddaughter and her husband, Julie and Phillip of Nashville. I wonder how he'll react when he's grown and sees a record of his family history. Through my experience with the family tree, I can share some interesting times with Jordan. A genealogy chart is a treasure to own, mine contains many names and gives me a feeling of where my roots came from. A family chart is on-going, never-ending record of your loved ones.



# HISTORY AND SCOPE OF OPERATIONS OF THE MJCC

By Barry Weiser, Executive Director

The Memphis Jewish Community Center has been serving the community of Memphis since 1949. The Center was located during its first seventeen years at 1026 Court Street in the mid-town area where it occupied limited facilities.

Through the work of dedicated lay and professional leaders, the programs and services have skyrocketed in numbers since their inception in 1949. The day camp was started in 1950; athletic leagues, 1950; nursery school, 1951; children's program, 1951; Jewish Youth Council, 1952; affiliations with the Community Chest (now United Way), 1952; Youth Corp, 1954, educational trips, 1958; family life education, 1959; senior citizens program, 1959; concert and lecture series, 1960; programs on college campuses, 1961; and we have continued to expand our scope of services since that time.

With the population shift to east Memphis, there was a recognition of the need to provide expanded services in that area and in June of 1967, the new site was opened for day camp and outdoor recreational programs with full occupancy in the fall of 1968. Further expansion of the Center was completed in 1980 with the addition of a new gym, two more racquetball courts, a jogging track, fine arts wing and remodeling of other areas. In 1985 and 1986, three group service wing rooms were converted to accommodate the growing need for additional preschool rooms, and a fourth room was added in 1987.

Unique emotional, physical and historical ties exist between the MJCC and the State of Israel. Our members are encouraged to understand the history and development of the modern State of Israel and its biblical origins. We maintain close



1026 Court Street in the Mid-town area

contact with Israel, bring Israeli entertainers and scholars to the community, and Israeli Boy and Girl Scouts to work with our day camp program. In cooperation with the Memphis Jewish Federation, whenever a shaliach was brought into the community for two years, all of the support and supervisory services were provided by the Center. In addition, the Center also provides all of the supervisory, administrative and support services for two other Federation agencies — the Jewish Student Union and the Jewish Elderly Transportation Service (JETS).

The Memphis Jewish Community Center is proud to be one of the forces in the community

providing a variety of services to meet the needs of a growing, thriving Jewish community with its many social implications. Our purpose and scope has always been to provide the highest quality of service for our membership while never losing sight of our responsibility to the total community.

The Center is equally proud of its services to the general community. Over the years, the Center has been the flagship of the Memphis Jewish community representing the best values in Jewish life to the over-all population of greater Memphis. Examples of this include the far-reaching effect of the OP-ACT program which was coordinated by the Center in the summer of 1968 following the death of Martin Luther King. The predicted 'long hot summer' never materialized as 1200 children from poverty areas of Memphis received a much-needed service. Surely OP-ACT played a vital role in defusing the potential violence. Since then OP-ACT has continued as an autonomous agency providing many services to the inner city.

Our staff is frequently consulted by other organizations interested in providing quality camping and other program services in Memphis. Among these are the Porter-Leath Children's home, the Park Commission and the Board of Education. In 1973, United Way looked once again to the Jewish community and specifically to the Jewish Community Center, to undertake the planning, initial administration and supervision of Runaway House, a project that would deal with the growing number of teenagers who are leaving home with nowhere to go.

In the summer of 1982, the Memphis Jewish Community Center made it possible for diabetic children in Memphis to attend a one-week comprehensive day camping program that was held at the Center in cooperation with the local chapter of the American Diabetes Association. The Center provided all facilities as well as specialized staff to make this camp a positive experience for 40 diabetic children, and it is now an annual program.

Beginning in 1985, the Center's Health Fair (which has been an annual affair for many years for senior adults) was offered to all residents of the greater Memphis area age 18 and up. New in 1985 was co-sponsorship with Methodist Hospitals, thus providing a more extensive service. 1985 also saw the Center become an important link in our community's 'Adopt A School' program.

Among the programs recently established are an exercise support program for post-mastectomy patients, and a special aquatics program for arthritic individuals which meets three times weekly in conjunction with the Arthritis Foundation. A city-wide adapted aquatics program for victims of muscular dystrophy has also been instituted at the Center.

Three years ago, in cooperation with the Cerebral Palsy Association, the Center began the first day camp for C.P. children in the city. This

program which began as a one-week program, met for seven weeks in 1987 and 1988, and will do so again in 1989.

In February, 1986, our Center became the first agency to house a cardiac rehab program for children outside of a hospital setting. The program is offered in conjunction with U.T. School of Pediatric Medicine and LeBonheur Children's Hospital, and is continuing to show remarkable results.

Almost five years ago, the Center made a major commitment to maximize Jewish education at the MJCC. Since that time, there have been many strides made in this area. Hebrew has become an important part of the curriculum of the Herbert Shainberg preschool, for nursery as well as kindergarten students. Prior to each major Jewish holiday, there is a special display in the Center lobby dealing with the holiday and how it can be celebrated in the home. The Center's scholar-artist in residence program has expanded greatly due to a grant from the Lowenstein Foundation. This has enabled us to bring in noted Jewish scholars and entertainers, and the program will expand again in 1989. A major goal of the scholar-artist residency program is to provide a vehicle whereby the entire Jewish community - orthodox, conservative, reform and unaffiliated - can come together and become more aware of the commonalities we share rather than the differences.

Last year, the Center established the first Judaic Video Library to be housed in any Center in the United States or Canada. The establishment of the library is a continuation of the Center's commitment to a process begun in 1983 with the Commission on Maximizing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of the MJCC. Since that time, and as a result of the Commission's work, Jewish education has been one of the major priorities of the Center.

In 1988, we received a grant from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture as part of the "Independence and Interdependence: Israel-North America Cultural Exchange" to fund a five-day artist-in-residence program featuring Israeli conceptual artist Joshua Neustein.

The Center's concern for the elderly population in our community and our ability to reach and serve this group has remained a priority. During the past year, the Center applied for and received a grant from the Plough Foundation, and a gift from Dorothy and Nathan Shainberg to fund the purchase of a customized full-sized van for use in our senior adult programs. Because of the cooperation of both of these funding parties, and the quickness with which the Center was able to move, our seniors experienced no loss in continuity of their regular programs.

Also in 1988, in order to deal more effectively with the concerns related to A.I.D.S. on the part of our members and staff, the Center established a committee to formulate a set of procedures and guidelines, and to sponsor an open forum to

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## MJCC

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respond to community concerns, demonstrating the Center's ability to cope with a myriad of issues. Obviously, issues related to illness and disease are ones which everyone would like to avoid but which must be dealt with.

In recent years, the Center has had to cope with the problems and ramifications of liability insurance coverage. In 1988, the Center established a blue ribbon risk management committee that met numerous times, and completed a Risk Management Manual for the Center that is being used as a guideline for Centers throughout the country.

The scope of the Memphis Jewish Community Center's activities has evolved to a point where there are now over 75 activities occurring in the building in any given week. Activities such as ear-

ly child hood development classes and programs, exercise programs, Jewish educational programs, trips for all age groups, family activities, family life education programs, elementary, tween and teen groups, all types of health and physical education activities, groups for older adults, classes and activities in the arts, dramatic groups

for children, teens, adults and older adults, individual and group counseling for all ages plus many other activities too numerous to mention.

In summary, the Memphis Jewish Community Center is truly the CENTER of the Memphis community. It is both a service agency and a dream come true in which we can all take pride.



*Present building on Poplar Avenue near Kirby Parkway*

## THANKS! To Our Contributors

MEMPHIS JEWISH FEDERATION  
PLOUGH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

IN HONOR OF HARRIET STERN - OUR SOCIETY'S FIRST PRESIDENT  
Mr. and Mrs. David Schneider and Mr. and Mrs. Leonid Saharovici

IN HONOR OF LEONID SAHAROVICI - BARON HIRSCH MAN OF THE YEAR  
Mr. and Mrs. David Schneider, Mr. and Mrs. Jay Kahn and  
Dr. and Mrs. Tom Stern

## Society Elects President

*continued from page 3*

Other officers are David Schneider, first vice-president; Gloria Felsenthal, second vice-president; Harry Jaffe, secretary. Board members are Elias Goldsmith, Jr., Shirley Feibelman, Ruth Kahn, Jack Lieberman, Kirke Lewis, Jean Pierce, Laura Spiegler, Judge Irving Strauch and Mr. Sewel. *Ex-officio* board members are Harriet Stern, Rabbi James A. Wax, Marx Borod and Judy Peiser.

Mark Hayden will serve as an assistant to the editor of the Society's newsletter.

## A THOUSAND POINTS OF LIGHT

Congratulations to our Treasurer Abe Schwab on being one of the first Memphians to be recognized for his great volunteer work for the Opheum Theatre.



**JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH**

163 Beale Street • Memphis, TN 38103

*Address Correction Requested*