



SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

VOL. 4, NO. 2

JULY 1991

ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, Aug. 1 - Temple Israel

The following officers have been nominated for election at our general membership meeting to be held at Temple Israel on Aug. 1, 1991, 7:30 p.m.

President - Gloria Felsenthal
1st Vice President - Steve Biller
2nd Vice President - Judge Irving Strauch
Secretary - Frederica Saharovici
Treasurer - Ruth Kahn

Directors

Helen Wax	Jack Lieberman
Jean Pierce	Nathan Goler
Marsha Bicks	Dr. Berkeley Kalin
Kirke Lewis	Rabbi Mark Mandel
Allen Israel	

Honorary Directors

(in appreciation for outstanding dedication and contribution to the society as charter members)

Abe Schwab	Laura Spiegler
Lester Sewell	Elias Goldsmith, Jr.
Harry Jaffe	David Schneider

The program for the evening will be a "walking tour" of the Jewish Historical Society and Temple Israel archives, both housed at Temple Israel. Shirley Feibelman, who wears hats for both the Temple and our society, will serve as curator and docent. ■

Mark Your Calendar Thursday, September 26

Dr. Carolyn LeMaster of Little Rock, will give a presentation on the history of the Jews of Ark. The program will include both a lecture and photographs. Please call Gloria Felsenthal, 682-7407, if you have Arkansas roots. Dr. LeMaster would like to include your family in her talk if she does not already have information.

William Loewenberg

Setting Standards for Community Leadership

by Dr. Selma Lewis

William Loewenberg joined Memphis' Ridgeway Country Club before he turned twenty-one years old. Born in 1902, he is the senior member of the club. He is also, in large part, responsible for the fact that it does not discriminate as do some clubs in other cities against any branch of Judaism.

Loewenberg was President of Ridgeway's Board of Directors when some one from the Orthodox community applied for membership. He was blackballed by a member of the board. At the same time, Loewenberg's good friend and golfing partner submitted his application. He then blackballed his friend, shocking his board of directors, who knew how much he wanted and expected him to be a member. He explained to the board that he understood that their rejection of the Orthodox applicant was on the basis of synagogue affiliation, an action he felt unconscionable. He shamed them into liberalizing their membership practices; both men were admitted as members of the club.

This attitude exemplifies the principles that have guided Loewenberg's life. He belongs to both Temple Israel and Baron Hirsch. His roots are to be found in both congregations. His maternal grandfather, Herman Selka, who moved to Memphis from Germany in 1872, was employed as a Hebrew teacher by Temple Israel. His maternal grandmother, Alwina, was the second person buried in the Temple Israel cemetery. His father, Ferdinand, who came to Memphis in 1868 or 1869 from Belitz, then Austria, now Poland, to avoid military conscription, was a charter member of Baron Hirsch. Loewenberg is committed to harmony among all Jews.

Loewenberg's father sold coal oil until



William Loewenberg

"Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company put them out of business by underquoting prices. (Interview with William Loewenberg.) Following that, he went into the dry goods business, opening a store on Mississippi at Calhoun. The family lived in the back of the store, moving there from Orleans Street. After ten years, he started a small leather business, distributing notions, shoe polish, and petroleum jelly as well. In 1919 Loewenberg's brother also started a leather business; soon the two businesses were merged. In 1920, Ira Lichterman married his sister, Lottie, and joined the business. On August 1, 1920, Loewenberg and Lichterman became partners, buying the business from Loewenberg's father. 1920 also witnessed a panic in the shoe business; merchandise declined to less than half of its original value as fashion changed from high to low tops. With inventories of high tops outdated, many leather

continued on page 2

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

President's Message



Gloria Felsenthal

In keeping with our mandate, our focus for the coming organizational year again will be to research, preserve, and disseminate history. To this end, we have three aims. We hope to see the completion of "Chronicles of Jews of Memphis, by Dr. Selma Lewis, and the beginning of publication plans. With your help we wish to expand our archival holdings. And our newsletter, "Southern Jewish Heritage" will continue to appear in your mailboxes quarterly, with historical and anecdotal information about all of us, our friends, and our forbears.

History is most interesting when it is about us—people with feet of clay—not only people who owned businesses but people who faithfully worked in these businesses, not only people who headed organizations but people who quietly carried out the missions of the organizations, not only religious leaders but lay men and women whose dedication to their faith was the torch which was relayed to the next generation. Don't be modest about your family. Send us information for our archives; call us about featuring your family in our newsletter (we will be glad to take the information and write the article). In the "olden days" information about the past was passed from grandma in her rocking chair to grandchild on her lap. In "the information age" we can create a larger audience. Were the "olden days" better? Tell us about them! ■

Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South OFFICERS 1990-91

PRESIDENT ————— Gloria Felsenthal
1ST VICE PRESIDENT-EDITOR ————— David Schneider
2ND VICE PRESIDENT ————— Judge Irving Strauch
SECRETARY ————— Harry Jaffe
TREASURER ————— Abe Schwab

DIRECTORS

Elias Goldsmith, Jr., Lester Sewel, Laura Spiegler, Ruth Kahn, Jack Lieberman, Krike Lewis, Jean Pierce, Helen Wax, and Nathan Goler

ARCHIVES AND ORAL HISTORY

Chairpersons: Judy Peiser and Laura Spiegler
Shirley Feibelman, Gloria Felsenthal, and Harry Jaffe

ORAL HISTORY SUBCOMMITTEE

Ruth Kahn and Lynn Mirvis

RESOURCE ADVISORS

Dr. Berkley Kalin, Selma Lewis and Marjean Kremer

PROGRAM

Chairpersons: Dessie Sewel and Leonid Saharovici
Frida Saharovici, Marcus Katz, Marsha Bicks, David Schneider
Sandy Lewis, Madelyn Atkins, and Harriet Alperin

MEMBERSHIP

Chairperson: Lester Sewel
Abe Schwab, Nancy Sissman, Herschel Feibelman and Ben Sissman

NOMINATING

Chairperson: Elias Goldsmith, Jr.: Lynn Mirvis and Marx Borod

BUDGET AND FINANCE

Judge Irving M. Strauch, Joseph Liebovitz, Jack Lieberman,
Bob Goldsmith and Aaron Shankman

Loewenberg

continued from page 1

businesses did not survive. During the year, profits for Southern Leather Company were \$102 over the partners' small draw. (*Ibid.*) The business did not begin to grow until about 1929 when Loewenberg married Ruth Brode from Washington, D.C.

Although his father did not leave him a large business, Loewenberg feels grateful to him because "he left me two things: a good name, and a vehicle to make a living." (*Ibid.*) This legacy has provided a foundation for the Southern Leather Company to become the large-

sion. (*Ibid.*) "We had wonderful family connections," says Loewenberg, to whom family is "all important." (Interview with Loewenberg.) He and his

brother-in-law, partners since 1920, "never had a problem." Children and grandchildren of both men currently work in the business.

Loewenberg's community work began in 1946 or 1947. At that time William Rosenfield was President and Stella Loewenstein was executive director of the Jewish Federation. Loewenberg was elected to the Board of Trustees, then became President of the organization. Since then, he has actively participated in organizations in the city that "try to help people." (*Ibid.*)

While working on the Social Service Committee of the Jewish Federation,

he and his brother-in-law, partners since 1920, "never had a problem." Children and grandchildren of both men currently work in the business.

Loewenberg says that an important influence in his community work was Bea (Mrs. Neuton) Stern. She encouraged him to work for The United Way. He later headed their annual fund drive.

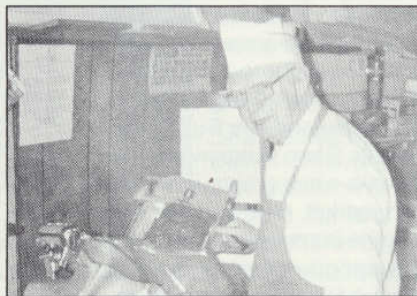
Loewenberg was Chairman of the Jewish Federation drive in 1948, the year of Israel's independence. He and his family continue to be large contributors to Israel. He points out that he is "first a citizen of the United States; then a loyal Jew", adding that he feels fortunate to be alive in this country when all other male Loewenbergs were killed by the Nazis. (The females were sent out of the country to safety while the men remained

been a more lively force for good community. His championing of for all people-blacks, youth, t

continued on

Abraham's Deli

continued from page 3



Jack at work

then a neighborhood sundry (the 7-11 of its day) serving the Italian-Jewish community of the Pinch, and afterwards the mainly black residents who moved in.

When Jack Abraham bought the sundry, "the Main and Jackson Cafe", he kept the name as well as a range of offerings, from five and ten cent beer to ice cream and newspaper-wrapped crackers and slices of bologna. When the area declined and buildings were torn down, he adapted to the change by specializing in ready-made sandwiches for three waves of muddy, shirtless construction workers of the Cook Convention Center, the Crown Plaza Hotel, and the new bridge. Following that, in one last amendment, he and Rosa Lee upgraded the menu and upscaled the name to "deli" to attract a yuppier lunch clientele from banks and government offices. This group, among diverse others, joined the workers to create a final mix of the melting pot of customers. Thus the deli repeatedly changed with the neighborhood, and its history reflecting those changes.

Jack came to the business knowing his meats, having started out in Abraham Brothers Packing Company owned by his father, Ben and four brothers who came to Memphis from Hungary via Scranton, Pennsylvania and first went into small grocery businesses. When the company was sold, he operated a series of eating places, one the Bomah Restaurant at Cleveland and Union. In that same arcade, Wallace Johnson maintained an office. As Rosa Lee tells it, Johnson and Kemmons Wilson came into the restaurant every morning and there dreamed up the Holiday Inn concept. They tried to get Jack involved,

but he was too busy pouring coffee and dishing out eggs to stop and listen.

In the Pinch, with Rosa Lee always working with him through the years, Jack demonstrated whatever creativity he might have missed out on with Holiday Inn. His business sense fit all situations.

During cotton seasons, buses picked up groups of pickers in the area. Jack favored the drivers with free beer. Consequently, the busses made a stop at the store, where the workers made purchases of lunch staples, cotton work gloves, cigarettes, snuff and other items. Jack also found watches to be a popular specialty. When picking season started, he bought a large supply and allowed a lay-away. Sadly enough, he recounts, at the end of the season, a watch might be all the pickers had to show for their labors.

Sunday "blue laws" offered a particular challenge. Sterno and "belly washer" (2 liter size Double Cola) were the ingredients of a popular, potent alcohol substitute. Jack kept the combination sacked up under the counter, in readiness for "runners", who took it to the "cookers" to be brewed.

Without a doubt, Jack "ran the corner". When things became rowdy, he used his own method. He disciplined those who disturbed the peace by barring them for a week, and he kept book by posing the names on a wall calendar. No one ever defied him. When the week was up, Jack welcomed them back inside with pitchers of beer on the tables for everyone.

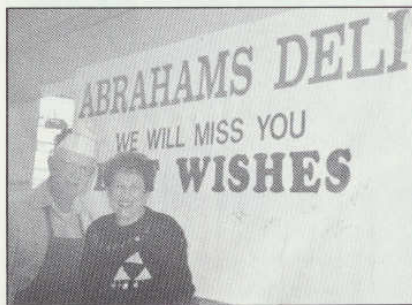
Over the years, the Abrahams had no problems with crime, violence or race. Neighborhood kids broke in now and then to pilfer change or cigarettes, but they never took food or vandalized the building. Rosa Lee's brother, Morris, did become victim of a crime. For al-

Anna Olswanger, 7117 Harps Mill Rd., Raleigh, NC 27615 is writing a children's book set in Memphis in 1928. She would like to obtain photocopies of early (no later than 1940's) singing telegrams, also photocopies of c. 1928 telegrams.

most 35 years, he operated the Main and Jackson Liquor Store in a section of the deli building. In 1974, he was shot in a robbery and subsequently closed the business and retired. But as to violence in the deli itself, there were no bad incidents. Race was no issue either. In the times of segregation, Abraham's had a back room where black customers had tables and a juke box. When integration came, Jack simply closed the back room and served everyone out front. Most of the customers at the time were construction workers who worked together, and no one seemed to care.

But Jack's popularity and respect came especially from his kind dealings with his clientele. "He took care of his regulars," says Rosa Lee, recalling that he would call a cab or doctor when necessary. At times he loaned money. One regular, who carried out garbage and did odd jobs for them to make ends meet, got paid on Friday, but inevitably spent his wages by Monday. Jack would loan him a few dollars to tide him over until the next Friday, when the cycle would repeat itself.

Jake Schnorr, owner of the North End, is planning to display a few pictures and mementoes salvaged from Abraham's Deli. His explanation sums up the feeling the deli left behind: "I love the building and I love the Abrahams and I'm so sad they're gone," Schnorr was quoted as saying in a recent issue of the Commercial Appeal. "They were wonderful neighbors." ■



Rosa Lee and Jack - 1991



Rosa Lee at work



The B'nai B'rith Home was created totally from money raised in the District-wide community. The District and communities from which the residents came provided the bulk of its operating funds until the Home became an independent, non-profit entity in the 1950's. In 1955 it was determined that, in the best interest of all concerned, the assets and the operation of the Home be turned over to a non-profit private corporation. This was done with two requirements made upon the new entity: first, that the name continue to be B'nai B'rith Home, and second, that kosher meals be provided in the facility.

In the early 1960's the old stucco edifice was replaced with a then-modern steel and concrete building. The new design was better able to provide for the medical needs of the residents, and was patterned to deliver the highest standards of nursing home care available at that time. In those years and with the passage of new Medicare laws, the thrust had changed from a facility that provided for the social needs of its residents, to a true medical care facility.

B'NAI B'RITH HOME TODAY

Many changes have occurred in the sixty-four year history of B'nai B'rith Home,

and today it operates as a functional, 159-bed nursing home, providing skilled and intermediate care for the elderly. Only a small part of the original building remains, primarily in the kitchen area. Women outnumber men by four to one. The current average age of the residents exceeds 85 years, and they are much more debilitated, with the overwhelming majority in wheelchairs or on walkers. Most need help with the ordinary tasks of daily living, such as taking medications, eating, dressing and bathing. A special dementia wing has been set up for dealing with the various levels of confusion caused by the onset of Alzheimer's Disease, and other similar types of dementia. Intensive physical therapy is provided to restore function or to maintain the highest level of functioning possible. Activities still play a major role at the Home, but have changed to meet the needs of those who are less physically and mentally able to participate in larger group activities. Where there are a multitude of programs designed for the larger groups, such as monthly birthday parties, Bingo, speakers, etc., today a number of individual activities, including small groups and one-on-one are provided for those who are unable to take part in the larger



Outdoor Entertainment



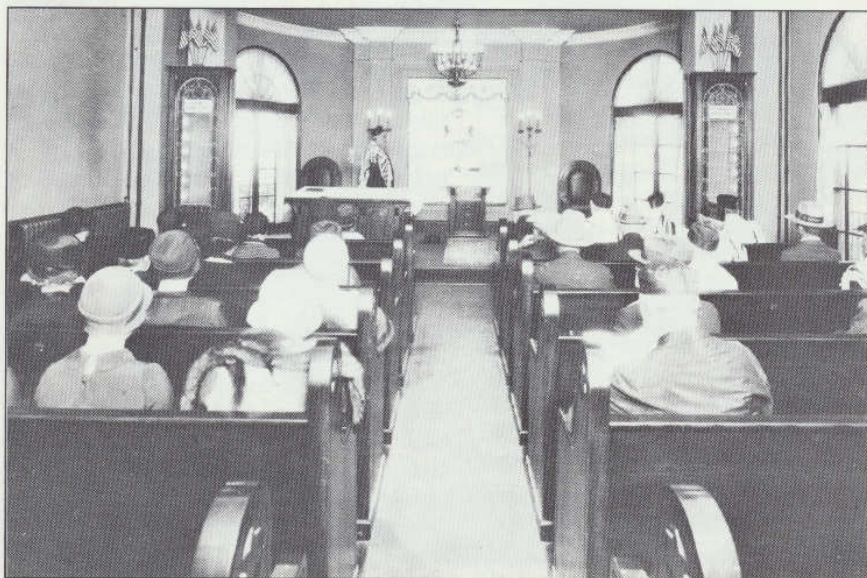
Having a Party

group setting.

Very intensive nursing care is provided for the increasingly frail group of residents who require tube feedings, IV therapy, hyperalimentations, and individualized hands-on care. A dozen or more different special diets are provided and an on-site Pharmacy provides even the most intricate pharmaceutical components on very short notice. The DRG system in hospitals causes the dismissal of elderly patients sooner than ever before, making it necessary for the Home to provide a more intensive level of care, bordering on the acute, for more and more admissions.

THE DREAM AND REALITY OF THE FUTURE

The Board of Directors, in a continuing effort to update and provide the highest level of nursing home care possible, realized that with a building whose newest sections go back to the early '60's and with some parts going back to 1927, that it was time for a change in order to be able to continue providing the highest level of care possible. Also, the Jewish community had moved into the eastern edges of the community, along with the Jewish



B'nai Brith Chapel

continued on page 6

B'nai B'rith Home

continued from page 5

Community Center. Jewish Family Services, the Temple, and all synagogues. Considering that the center of the Jewish population was elsewhere, and that the building on Tucker would not be able to provide the newest and most technologically modern facility for the care of the elderly, the decision was made to purchase land in the eastern sector and build a state-of-the-art healthcare center for the Memphis community. The new facility will bring to the Memphis community a programming and design appearance unequalled anywhere in the area, plus structural innovations that will serve as an example for healthcare facilities across the country.

Seventy-seven acres of land were purchased on the corner of Bazeberry and Walnut Grove, and the new facility will sit near the center of the property, at 36 Bazeberry Road. The new care facility will cost more than \$14 million, and the Home has undertaken a \$6 million

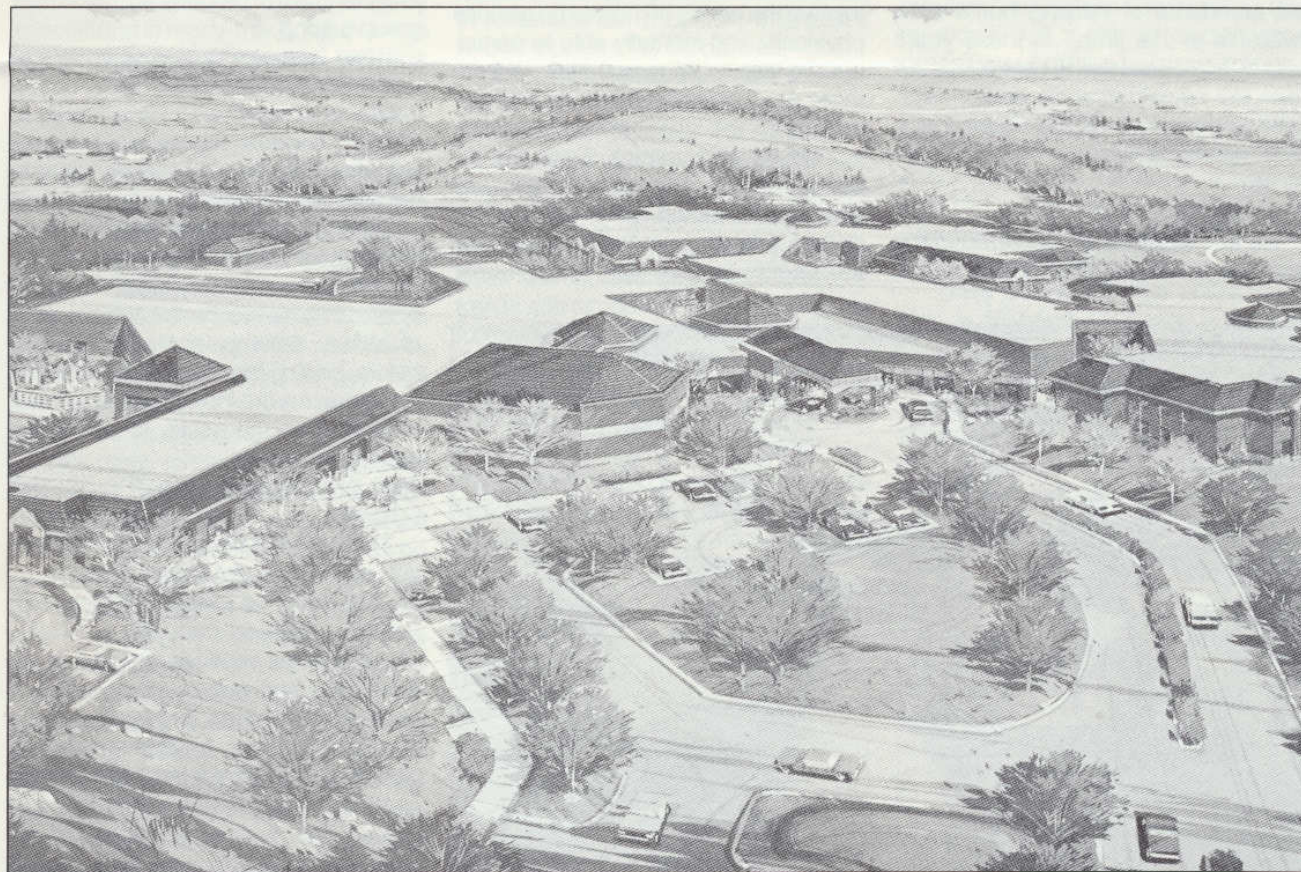
fund raising campaign to complete the financial package for the project. Construction has now begun on the 130,000 square foot facility, which will be divided into four clusters--a new and innovative design approach. One cluster will be for residents who are the most independent. A second cluster will be for traditional incapacitated nursing home resident, one devoted to the special needs of those with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementia, and the fourth for rehabilitative nursing and critical care. An adult daycare center will provide families with an alternative to full-time placement in the healthcare facility.

There will be therapy support areas, which include facilities for hobbies and crafts, physical, occupational and speech therapy, memory development, a low-vision reading center, and an educational center with a library of information on aging. Gathering spots have been placed in the midst of pleasant surroundings for visits with family and friends, including a veranda with natural light

and plants, an auditorium, a deli, and Wandering Garden totally enclosed by landscaping for confused residents that provides an outdoor environment with total security.

The Synagogue will provide a beautiful place of worship with special provisions made for lighting, sound amplification and seating. It is the goal of this project to be a model of diversified and compassionate care--a warm and inviting place to live with sunlit atriums and caring people--A PLACE THAT FEELS LIKE HOME.

A nursing home is a composite of many things. What makes a good nursing home a great one is the sense of caring. That feeling is passed from the Board of Directors to the Administration, to the staff, and to the residents and their families. The B'nai B'rith Home has cared for over sixty years, and will continue to care in the future.



An aerial view of the proposed care center and campus.

Loewenberg

continued from page 2

and aged-were particularly important in the selection process." (Press Scimitar, 11/16/71.) In making the presentation at the banquet, the chairman of the event, Donald Drinkard, said of Loewenberg: "His vision, understanding, judgment, and dedicated leadership in the community, religious, government, and business affairs has advanced the cause of brotherhood and championed the common good of his fellow citizens of all religious beliefs, and all racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds." (*Ibid.*, 3/1/74.) Representative Dan Kuykendall joined in praise of the honoree: "I know of no other man in this city who does more invisible, good work than Willie Loewenberg." (*Ibid.*)

In the same year, 1974, Loewenberg received the Governor of Tennessee's Outstanding Tennessean Award and the Hadassah Humanitarian Award, and, in 1974 the Boy Scouts named him a Guardian member. A year earlier the Mason Y.M.C.A. presented him with a plaque for services to youth while another from Project Pull in 1975 credits his services to inner-city youth. He was instrumental in developing the Metro Memphis Shopping Center for black entrepreneurs and was honored by the Booker T. Washington Minority Economic Development Corporation in 1977-78.

The ecumenical quality of Loewenberg's contributions is demonstrated by his gift of a large part of the land on which St. Francis Hospital is built. This donation was made after Dr. Henry Rudner, Sr. urged him and Lichterman not to instigate a Jewish hospital. Rudner and other Jewish doctors felt that such a hospital was not needed, because the Jewish medical community was well accepted at the existing hospitals. St. Francis Hospital, on whose Board of Directors Loewenberg serves, has named a building for him, Christian Brothers College awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities.

A story is told of an out of town fishing trip on which Loewenberg was going with some of his friends. They usually went in a private plane, he was traditionally late. On the day in question he arrived at the airport so early that he had to wait for everyone else. His expla-

nation was that he had just donated half of his property to St. Francis Hospital, and "had to leave town before his Jewish friends demanded equal treatment." (Interview with Bob Barney.) Loewenberg also worked for many years as a contributor and fund raiser for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. (Commercial Appeal, 11/27/83.)

Loewenberg's formal education stopped when he was graduated from Central High School at the age of sixteen, too young to be admitted to Wharton, which he had hoped to attend. He began work, which he liked so well he never returned to school. (Interview with Loewenberg.) He has, however, strongly supported higher education in Memphis. He serves on the President's Council of Christian Brothers University and Rhodes College. He serves as a trustee for the Herbert Herff Foundation, which provides assistance to Memphis State. Recently his children, Fredrika (Mrs. Joel) Felt, Joan Markell, and William S. Loewenberg have endowed a Chair of Excellence at Memphis State University in his honor, designating the School of Nursing as the recipient.

In the 1960's Loewenberg founded the Riverviewe-Kansas Day Care Center with Mura (Mrs. Fred) Dreifus and Frances (Mrs. Benjamin) Hooks. He and his wife, Ruth helped establish Dogwood Village, a home for troubled children. He helped to organize Run-away House which provides a temporary home for youth of all races and creeds. (Commercial Appeal, 11/27/83.)

The Lichterman Nature Center is a continuing interest. As a memorial to Ira Lichterman who died in 1963, his wife Lottie and Loewenberg donated 12.4 acres of the estate on which the family had lived to the Memphis Park Commission. This donation included a historic log home and lake. An additional 11.48 acres were donated to the Park commission in 1978. The rest of the land that would become the Lichterman Nature Center was bought by the City of Memphis through a grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in the early 1970's. The Lichterman Nature Center was officially opened to the public on April 14, 1983. ("Lichterman Nature Celebrates Five Years.")

The center is one of the few accredited nature centers in the United States, and "the only one in the heart of a city." (Interview with Loewenberg.) Loewenberg wanted the children of the city "to be able to enjoy nature as he has been able to do." (*Ibid.*) Money for renovation was donated later. "Uncle Willie drops in periodically and speaks to all the people, to be certain they are having a good time, as if he were the host." (Interview with Bob Barney, Director of Lichterman Nature Center.) Whenever anything is needed in the center, Barney adds, Loewenberg provides it. The basement, which had been used for pre-school children, was unsatisfactory. Loewenberg gave the center the funds needed to refurbish and equip a room on the ground floor. (*Ibid.*)

In 1983 Loewenberg was named as the honoree of the Merry Christmas Memphis parade because, according to parade chairman Madge Harrison, "he has done so much for Memphis, for its children, for its parks, and for its people." (Commercial Appeal, 11/27/83.) Many opportunities for service have come William Loewenberg's way. He has accepted them all, at times creating his own, all for the benefit of the city of which he has been such an important part. In partial explanation, he says that "when you do for people, it just makes you feel good." (Loewenberg interview on WMCT, 11/15/90.) Willie Loewenberg ought to feel just fine. ■

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its annual conference in Alexandria, VA on October 26-28, 1991. All proposals for presenting papers, panel discussions and workshops on any aspect of the Southern Jewish Experience should be sent to Dr. Sheldon Hanft, Department of History, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608 by May 1, 1991. Individual papers should not exceed 10 pages typed double space (18-20 minute reading time). Full session proposals, workshops and panel discussions should not exceed 90 minutes and should include at least 30 minutes for audience questions and discussion. To discuss your ideas or to get more information do not hesitate to call Dr. Hanft at (704) 262-2854 or (704) 264-4576 (evening).

Geneology Workshop a Success

On a cold, rainy afternoon in January, over a dozen members of our society met at the Memphis Public Library and Information Center for a workshop in genealogy. Dr. Jim Johnson of the library's history and travel department joined with our treasurer, Abe Schwab, in sharing with us their knowledge of both the methodology and the delights in rewards of family research. The trail often takes surprising turns, Dr. Johnson reported with a twinkle in his eye, as he told of an Arkansan who unexpectedly turned up a murderer in his background and wanted to delete him from the family tree. A more frequent surprise encountered by people

of all ethnic, racial and religious groups, he said, is a name change somewhere along the path.

In a broad sense our historical society is engaged in a large scale genealogy of the ancestors of Jewish Mid-Southerners. Who were the people who chose to settle in this area? What were their hopes and dreams and accomplishments? What were their pitfalls, disappointments, despairs? You, the members of the society, can help us by contributing to our newsletter and to our archive. We can help you by sharing the research we have uncovered and by continuing the search. ■

Our Thanks to the
Memphis Jewish Federation
for their continued support
of our forthcoming book

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

With the High Holidays only a few weeks away

*Your President, Officers and Directors
of the*

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH
extend

Rosh Hashana Greetings

To Our Entire Membership and Friends

With Best Wishes for a Year of Health and Happiness



SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

163 Beale Street • Memphis, TN 38103



Address Correction Requested