



# SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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## An Encounter With Southern Jewish History

by Dr. Berkley Kalin



Dr. Berkley Kalin

The fifteenth national conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society was held in Jackson, November 2-4, 1990. 154 of the organization's 600 members attended. Participants included Jews and non-Jews from California to New York. Among them were Bernard Wax, director of the American Jewish Historical Society; Rachel B. Heimovics, current president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society; Carol B. Hart, incoming president of the society; Dr. Abraham Peck of the American Jewish Archives; Herman Kohlmeyer, Jr., president of the board of the Utica Museum; and Eli Evans, author of Judah P. Benjamin: A Jewish Confederate. Memphians who attended were Gloria Felsenthal, Dr. Berkley Kalin, Fay May, and Harriet and Dr. Tom Stern. Harriet was elected to the board of the organization.

The scholarly papers dealt with a broad range of subjects, such as civil rights, Jewish genealogy, the Civil War, Community history, synagogue architecture, Jewish immigration in 19th century Mississippi, and the history of B'nai B'rith in the South. All sessions were well-attended and followed by much discussion. One of the best insights of the entire conference came from Professor Lee Shai Weissbach of the University of Louisville. An authority on French architecture, Dr. Weissbach

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## Goldsmith's • • • A Memphis Tradition

by Dr. Selma Lewis

*This is the second in a series of biographical sketches of Jewish community leaders included in our forthcoming book, "Chronicles of the Jewish Community of Memphis."*

The first customer of the day has a symbolic function for the Jewish peddler or shopkeeper; if he or she buys, it is a signal that it will be a good day. When Isaac and Jacob Goldsmith first opened the door on their tiny store measuring fifteen feet by sixty feet, a windowless room on Beale Street between Front and Main, their first customer, a little girl named Loretta, bought two spools of thread her mother had sent her out to purchase. It was a favorable portent. So delighted were the young merchants that on the next Christmas they sent Loretta a present. The practice continued until she died in 1921, with the presents increasing in grandeur until the last one was a fur coat.

The background of the store goes back to before the Civil War when a German immigrant, Louis Ottenheimer operated a "last chance" log cabin provisions store on the Military Road at Taylor's Creek, near Forrest City, Arkansas. Like many others, the family lived behind a partition in the back of the store. Ottenheimer was successful enough to move to Memphis and open a dry goods store at 348 Main, between Union and Gayoso, in partnership with Moses Schwartz. In 1867, he returned to his hometown of Haimstadt for a visit. His sister had two sons, Isaac and Jacob, who had little hope for the future. Their uncle brought his nephews to live with him and his family at 123 Pontotoc Street in Memphis, to clerk in the store. They received room and board while learning English.

When their uncle raised their pay to ten dollars a month in addition to room and board, the nephews were able to save five hundred dollars, which they



Jacob Goldsmith

used to embark upon their own business. The store they rented fronted on a street that was unpaved, where ox carts sometimes got stuck in the mud. Small as it was, the store was nevertheless too large for the small amount of stock, which the owners often enhanced visually by placing empty boxes on the shelves. Jacob slept in the rear of the store. The first day yielded gross sales of twenty-five dollars, but it was not long before sales grew and they had to expand to one side and the rear. The address of the store was now 81-83 Beale, with dimensions of seventy-five by one hundred twenty-five feet.

While living in Taylor's Creek Jacob fell in love with his cousin Dora, the daughter of his Uncle Louis. Her father, considering her too young for marriage, sent her to the Philadelphia College for Women. When she reached the age of twenty and Jacob was twenty-five he

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



## President's Message



Gloria Felsenthal

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. ■

## Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South

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Judge Irving M. Strauch, Joseph Liebovitz, Jack Lieberman,  
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## Encounter

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explained why he was drawn to study the synagogue architecture of Kentucky. he said, "You must dig where you are." This could serve as a good motto to encourage Jews to delve into local history and use the rich resources at hand. Repeatedly the conference brought out the fact that there was so much basic research that needed to be done.

But this conference was different from others, requiring tremendous energy to keep up with all the events. It included home hospitality and a sabbath dinner, Sabbath Services at Temple Beth Israel with guest speaker Dr. Malcolm H. Stern of New York, Oneg Shabbat, a narrated bus tour to the Museum of Southern Jewish Experience at Utica, the 100-year-old former Gemiluth Chassed Synagogue in Port Gibson (the oldest standing synagogue in Mississippi and the state's only example of Greek Byzantine architecture, which is being restored for use), and sites of interest in

Natchez, including Jewish landmarks that date to the late 18th and early 19th century. Today Natchez has only sixteen Jews. Yet Temple B'nai Israel of Natchez hosted over 150 guests of the historical society at a very bountiful luncheon. There were many photos and artifacts attesting to the vibrancy of the congregation in its heyday. When the magnificent organ was played in this beautiful sanctuary, filled to capacity by the visitors, the effect was stunning. Further evidence of past glory was seen in the walking tour of the Natchez cemetery with tombstones dating back to the 1840's.

Before the banquet session there was a festive reception and cocktail party at the Governor's Mansion. Governor Ray Mabus greeted us and commended us for our interest in history and for choosing Mississippi for the conference. Docents provided tours of the governors's home. The final sessions were held in the historic Old Capitol Museum. They were preceded by a tour of the building, which was completed in 1838 and served as Mississippi's second state

house.

Macy B. Hart of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp, who is president of Temple Beth Israel (host congregation of the conference) and many others provided running commentaries throughout the tour. Their spiels brought in a lot of Civil War history along with the Judaica. The conference was so well-planned that there was hardly a wasted moment. ■

## ARCHIVES ACTIVITY

A copy of the limited edition book, "The Memphis Music of Berl Olswanger" has been donated by Anna Olswanger.

A book, "Jews in Early Mississippi" has been donated by David Schneider.

We now have a home for our archives in Temple Israel. More details to follow.



## THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

by Eric H. Cornell

*The following excerpt from the memoirs of the late Eric H. Cornell picks up his story just prior to his move to Memphis. His gratitude to God, which is apparent from his chosen title, permeates throughout his narration.*



Eric Cornell

It was immediately clear to me that living in Kew Gardens, Long Island, was like living in a German suburb, and my number one determination was to become an American citizen and regain a nationality I had so tragically lost. New York being a fascinating city is rather detrimental to newcomers from other parts of the world as they lived mentally in their old villages and compared everything in the New World with how much better it was in the "Old Country." I had made up my mind not to copy Lot's wife and look back to Sodom and Gomorrah, but to look steadily into the new future, which I did. So the next page in the master plan was getting out of New York quickly, in spite of the fact that I just had been reunited with my family, which really had been the whole idea. It was not to be.

Before I caught on to the idea that I had to go into the country to become Americanized, I went to the Employment Agency of the National Council of Jewish Women, who "secured" a job for me on 92nd Street at a junkshop, which had part of their goods on the outside. I worked there several days including Easter, when I worked past midnight and just caught the last train to Long Island. Well, I did not believe, that for the few dollars I made, that was what I crossed the ocean for; still it was in the line of "EXPERIENCE." I did not return to the establishment, but I did return to

the Council of Jewish Women, then managed by Mr. Kravitz. One time they referred me to a store owner from Chicago, but seemingly I did not make the striking impression I would have liked to make. However, (Deus Disposit) one day as I was just fixing to leave without success, the lady behind the table said, "Wait a minute, I just received a letter from Levy's Ladies Toggery." With my limited amount of English knowledge I had no idea what a "toggery" dispensed, but found out most other New Yorkers did not either. I thought it was something like a place selling accessories for horses etc. Incidentally it was the second depression in 1938 and jobs were scarce. Most newcomers, however did not want to leave New York, which was kind of lucky for me, because I was willing to go any place, being in the enviable position of being single and on a line where things can only get better. I also believed that nobody owed me anything. A good point to start. NEW YORK IS FOR NEW YORKERS and that is a fact.

So the lady said, "would you go to Memphis?" I answered in the positive, not having any idea where Memphis was. She read a letter from Levy's Ladies Toggery, and I translated the first sentence when she was at the third and so on. I sat down right there and penned a resume, being able to write better than understand or speak. Soon the answer came back: come to Memphis forthwith. I did not have a map handy, but I thought Memphis was close to Florida. I also hoped there would be lakes and mountains. I also had the fixed idea that there was a place open for me and the remark to come immediately re-enforced that idea.

I started back home, told my folks that I was going to Memphis, and like all people in New York they thought right after New Rochelle started the Mojave desert. My brother-in-law said: "You won't last three weeks; in Memphis there is a First National Bank, a movie house, and a filling station. I was completely satisfied. Did I not have the money to return if things did not turn out the way I dreamed of?

And so I was willing to tell the Council of Jewish Women I would go anywhere, anytime. If the "Powers" would have been as secure, clearheaded and determined, there would not have been a

World War I or II, you better believe it!

Mr. Leo Levy's LEVY'S LADIES TOGGERY sounded like a shop for saddles and horse accessories. I was willing to go through the valley of death (escape from Germany), so why not Memphis? If Mr. Levy had not been a man of flesh and blood already, I could not have wished to produce a better one.

Mr. Levy's offer for me to come to Memphis was the very opportunity I needed: starting an entirely new life in the heartland of America and to become a "REAL" American citizen, if not with a southern accent, but with love of the South and Southern customs. The Council was delighted not to have to subsidize my travel. (And charity and welfare was not the "Cornell" habit and hopefully never will be.)

The German railway system had one station designated for each direction. So I went to Pennsylvania Station and bought a ticket to Memphis. I did not realize that there were other railroads to choose from to reach a target. The Penn informed me that I would take the train to Washington and change there to the "Sunnyside". The run to Washington now and for a long time has had modern equipment; then, however, it was old and rather dirty and I had the idea George Washington had used these carriages to get around. But never mind, who was I to criticize. I said goodbye to my relatives and arrived in Washington in the early morning hours and looked around in the fresh morning air, what that city looked like. Then I boarded the "Sunnyside" sitting up, not realizing that this country was so vast and large that I would amble along the whole day and another night. When we arrived in Bristol I believed I was about in Memphis; little did I know that I was at the Northeast end of a huge rectangle and that Memphis was at the very Southwest end. The train "um-ta-ta-ed" through Virginia and through territory that at that time was pure wilderness, unpopulated and without major buildings. I am talking about of course that part of Virginia the train "choo-choo-ed" by. A day and a night. No air-conditioning and lots of soot. But who is complaining? Coming from a country where a few hours can take you from one frontier to another, one can hardly imagine the large spaces

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## My Shepherd

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this country covers. And I say again, when the train arrived in Memphis after two nights and a day from New York, I felt Florida must be around the bend. Finally in the early morning hours of the next day the locomotive huffed and puffed into Union Station in Memphis and I had finally reached my destination and the wished for home. Neither the Mississippi River nor Alps came into view walking out of the Station, but the back of decaying row-houses. Not a cheerful welcome. But I was fortified with forward looking optimism and neither rain nor snow nor sleet could deter me from my prescribed route. I had the foresight packing a fresh shirt and change into my handbag-but, alas, I realized I failed to include collar buttons. (My European shirts had a loose collar to be attached to the shirt body.) A junk shop across the street seemed to be a likely target and -presto- I obtained a set of those buttons.

At random I boarded a bus to Main Street assuming Levy's had to be there. We passed the William Len Hotel and -presto- on the next corner was an attractive store called Levy's, many bronze plaques stating its name. I was agreeable surprised. I left the bus, walked back a block to the Hotel, and in the basement washed up, changed clothing, and went back another block and viewed the store and its window. I "killed" Time till nine, when I had a prearranged appointment with Bertrand Cohn, pronounced "Kahn", a lawyer on Madison Avenue. I met the gentleman and he took me forthwith to Mr. Leo Levy, the owner of the store. He in turn took me to the Tennessee Hotel, owned by his brother-in-law, Mr. Adler, and he in turn installed me in a tiny room on the upper floor for \$28 a month. The view was onto the backs of houses on Union Avenue, and I have always proclaimed that once my steamer trunk was put near the door and the sun was shining into the window from the other side with a bed on the wall there was no room for me. No such thoughts occurred to me then; I was what they call "tickled to death" to be situated, far from the base, but situated.

Back to Mr. Levy (called Mr. Leo by all) who immediately took me to lunch at

the Gayoso Hotel, then headquarters of the Ridgeway Club, the Jewish country club, also on Main Street. There around a table were all his cronies, who, I imagine looked at me like an escapee from the zoo, and probably thought: "Another Meschugaas from Leo." They asked me, how are you and how do you do and I answered in kind with my best accented English. The lunch was delicious, but it took many years before I had another lunch with Leo and many dinners. I went back to Levy's and faced two executives, Mr. Irving Freudberg and Eugene Lerner, who certainly were less than enchanted seeing me. But Mr. Leo was the man on top and had to be obeyed. I also met Mr. Joe, Mr. Leo's brother. The whole system was patriarchal, and the word of Mr. Leo--"THE BOSS," another word not in my dictionary--was "THE LAW."

The very same night (May 2, 1938) I was invited for dinner at the home of Mr. Bertrand Cohn and his charming wife, Rosalee, on Kenilworth, across the street from the Brooks Museum. (I was never again invited there). That night there was reassembled for dinner the Jewish Jeunesse d'Or. Mrs. Cohn was ne Bensdorf and a Mr. Bensdorf was present and many others well positioned young men. I tried my best to converse, but after the usual polite questions, what could these people say to a complete stranger, just dropped from nowhere. Also present was Walter Bacharach from Germany, I think the Bensdorfs got him over here. He, therefore, spoke a creditable English. The dinner was fabulous. What impression I made, I have no idea. Certainly these privileged boys (men) could not possibly be interested in a newcomer like myself. Not downplaying the kindness of inviting me for such a splendid occasion, it must be considered that I had spent a full night on a sit up train and had not had the possibility of having a night of sleep. Be that as it may, I had arrived; I was in Memphis; I was poised to go into action; my master plan had succeeded far beyond my dreams. The couple who went to Detroit and whom I had envied for their prospect to work at a department store of a relative, was left behind at a distance by my having been installed at the finest store in the area without being related to anyone, without previously having known a single

solitary soul in Memphis. To beat all else: in Germany we used the last names of people in greeting, and one had to be quite intimate to use first names in the address of people. In this free country and especially in the friendly South, people called you by your first name the first time they met you. Even more astounding to me was that the guests of Mr. Cohn, whose first and last names I had forgotten, if I had every really understood them, these guests from the night before when they saw me around Main Street the very next day and long afterward called me by my first name: a very appealing feat, I can hardly emulate, certainly not then. Hi John, Hi... ■

## Baron Hirsch

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East European Jews who came to Memphis in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The people showed their gratitude by naming their holy place for his name.

In future issues, we will answer such questions as: Did other immigrants in other parts of the country also name their institutions after this generous man or was this an isolated case?

Was part of the motivation of naming the synagogue after Hirsch a hope that the benefactor would donate money to the congregation?

Did Baron Hirsch ever find out about the synagogue named for him? ■

## HELP WANTED

Norm Fleiderman of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a collector of Judaica and antique weapons, has recently acquired a handsome Tiffany ceremonial sword engraved to David C. Lowenstine in 1864 by citizens and friends in Memphis. He would like to solicit the help of a historical sleuth, possibly for a fee, to find out the history of the sword, the identity of its owner, and the reason for his recognition. Any takers?





## B'NAI B'RITH HOME

### Turning Dreams into Reality

by Marvin Silver, Executive Director  
assisted by The Hebrew Watchman

And the tradition continues...in keeping with the Fifth Commandment. Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother. B'nai B'rith Home has been a haven for Jewish Elderly since 1927. Although the thrust and care package have changed, B'nai B'rith Home continues to provide for the needs of handicapped and elderly Jews, both from the Memphis community and beyond.

As we look back over sixty-four years to October 9, 1927, we recall that the Seventh District of the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith gathered at 131 North Tucker to dedicate the B'nai B'rith "Old Folks" Home for the Aged. We are told that there was a lot of excitement in the tremendous crowd that gathered to see "our dreams come true of a place for our old people. So many had worked so hard to reach this point." Rabbi Max Samfield led a fifteen year effort on behalf of District members to create a retirement home for the Jewish elderly in District Seven. Ground breaking took place in 1926 to build a Spanish-motif, two-story, stucco style facility, which was a forerunner of homes of that day.

Boy Scout Troop 25 from Temple

Israel provided the official flag raisers for the ceremony. Aaron Brenner, who later became President of the Home, served as a member of that Boy Scout troop.

Mr. Charles Haase, a former District President, who served as Chairman of the Building Committee for the B'nai B'rith Home, formally presented the Home to the delegates. He subsequently became the first President of the Board of Directors, and served in that capacity until the 1950's.

Manuel P. Ostrow became the Home's Executive Director in 1935, and described the Home as "one of the most beautiful edifices of its kind." It featured private rooms with individual bathrooms, tall ceilings, dark woodwork, and huge fireplaces. Spacious outdoor verandas offered residents an opportunity to enjoy evening breezes and to see what was going on in the neighborhood. Sitting rooms and wide halls provided space for gatherings, programs and conversation.

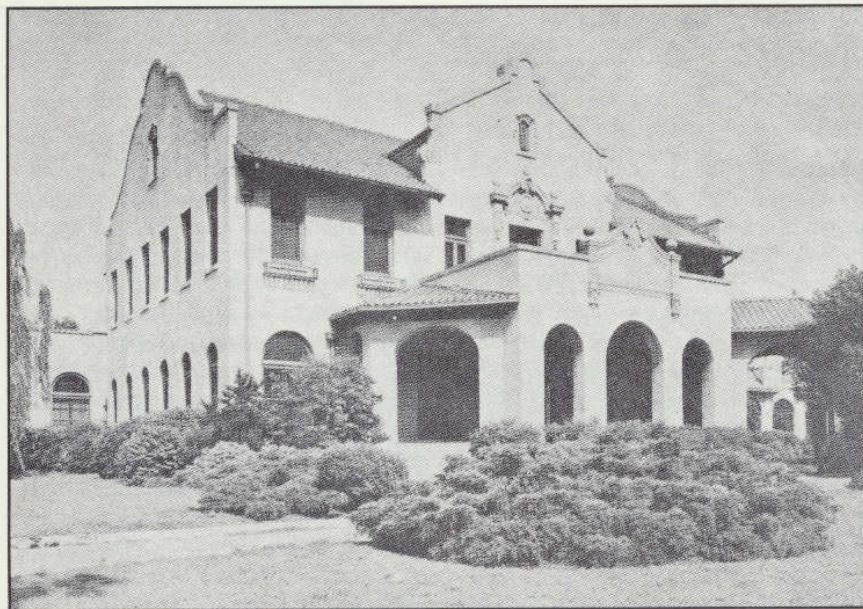
In its first year the Home provided sanctuary for twenty-two people. Each new resident was greeted by Mrs. Harry

Wolff, the Home's matron. She was described as a plump, brown-eyed woman, dedicated to "mothering, loving, and taking care of the men and women who lived at the Home." She and her husband, Dr. Harry S. Wolff, lived in the facility, and were always available when needed. At that time, most residents came to the Home because they had no resources. Many were immigrants who had no relatives in this country to depend upon, and when they became unable to support themselves they sought out B'nai B'rith Home as a haven. A short while later, when the Depression hit this country and added to the financial problems of many families, a number of individuals sought shelter at the Home. At that time residents had to be well enough to carry their bags up the stairs and across the thresholds, as the facility was designed more as a social umbrella of care rather than a skilled health care facility. The average age of the Home's guests was 71, and the majority were men who were widowers or bachelors and who found it difficult to provide for their own needs.

The very first residents to move in were Mr. and Mrs. Sam Olswing. Mr. Olswing had operated a tailor shop on South Main Street. A few years after his retirement, the Olswings became residents at the Home, where the diminutive couple found true contentment. Mr. Olswing became the official tailor of the Home, and a tiny tailor shop was set up for him which was open for a few hours each day. He was able to fit suits and dresses for many of his fellow guests.

Most of the residents of the Home worked to help run the operation, as well as to earn small amounts of money to help with expenses. Four were involved in overseeing the food preparation. Joseph Fox took care of heavy work in the kitchen, which included weighing the meats, preparing the fish, and a number of other jobs which required a strong arm. Mrs. Theresa Epstein, Mrs. Rosa Lazerowitz, and Mrs. Rebecca Rosenbaum prepared other dishes, got the vegetables ready for the

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*B'nai B'rith Home of Memphis 1927*



## B'nai B'rith Home

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cooks, and kept watch over the work to make sure that it met kashereth standards. Charles Wolf (no relation to Dr. and Mrs. Wolff), declared that he just couldn't be happy unless he "got to clip or shave folks every now and then." Mr. Wolf was a retired barber who became a guest of the Home in the 1930's, and promptly opened a one-chair barber shop. He felt that this was an ideal arrangement; if customers didn't come to him, he would go to them. He considered it his business to "keep the old fellows neat." A mending and darning society made up of the lady tenants met three mornings a week. Their nimble fingers made short work of piles of mending and baskets of socks.

The B'nai B'rith Home of this era was a lively place. Orthodox and reform services were held three times a day in the Home's Synagogue. Monthly birthday parties featured readings, dance recitals and musical presentations by members of the Beethoven Club. Amalia Ritterband, an early guest of the Home, held regular operatic concerts. "Grossmutter" Goldstein came every Saturday with \$5 worth of pennies to be used for the weekly Keno game. Groups could be found in the hall, called "Peacock Alley", or in the front parlor talking, playing cards or listening to the radio. A poker game was usually going on at the round table on the porch.



*The Early Kitchen*

The women of the community were very active in helping the Home. They would often sponsor picnics in the park. Two or three would come by when the weather was nice and take the ladies and gentlemen for rides in their automobiles. Many of them also visited residents on a regular basis.

The B'nai B'rith Women, Memphis Chapter, under the leadership of Mrs. Ida Lipman, focused her interests on activities at the Home. Every fall the ladies sponsored a canned goods shower for the Home. This was a major event on the Memphis scene, and provided much of the residents' food for the winter. A day-long open house was held for the community to bring their donations, with entertainment provided. Montesi's grocery store made special arrangements so that anyone buying food for the shower could leave it at the store. Delivery to the Home was arranged for the day of the shower.



*The Tailor Shop*

To epitomize the residents' satisfaction and happiness at being in the B'nai B'rith Home, perhaps the words of Joseph Fox upon celebrating his 81st birthday at the Home in 1931, say it best. "As I stand before you today, I have nothing but gratitude in my heart for everything that has been done for me in this wonderful Home." He added, "The good Lord blessed us with such a wonderful Home as we have here, to comfort us during the years in which we are not able to take up the tasks which we left in business, commerce, and various crafts. I must also pay tribute to members of this benevolent organization, who in the past three years, due to the worldwide depression, have managed to sustain this Home. It has been a great sacrifice to them, and I know I speak for each of you when I say we are all extremely grateful to them."

*(More pictures on page 7)*

*To be continued in next issue*

## Baron Hirsch at 120

*by Rabbi Mark Mandel Assistant Rabbi Baron Hirsch Congregation*

This year Baron Hirsch Congregation marks its 120th year of service to the Memphis Jewish community. Despite the fact that the congregation recently decided to postpone its celebration of this milestone due to the Persian Gulf hostilities, this review will honor the congregation for the next few issues by examining some of the history surrounding this unique institution.

When the congregation was formed 120 years ago, why did its members name the congregation Baron Hirsch? Just who was Baron Hirsch that he merited having a synagogue named for him? Did he have any connection to the Jews in Memphis?

Baron Maurice De Hirsch was born

in Germany in 1831. His mother, Karoline Wertheimer, ensured that he received the best instruction in Hebrew and religion. In 1851, Hirsch, already a member of a banking firm, pursued his own business interests, mainly the Oriental Railway plan, linking Constantinople to Europe. Hirsch was granted control of the railway by the Turkish government, and by personal supervision and skillful engineering he ensured the success of the venture. The railway project and pioneer enterprises in the sugar and copper industries brought Hirsch's fortune to an estimated \$100,000,000 by 1890, and gained for him a reputation as an outstanding industrialist and financier. During this

period, Hirsch became acquainted with the plight of oriental Jewry and helped create trade schools. Hirsch established several foundations that helped many people. One of Hirsch's greatest achievements was helping poor Jews emigrate from Russia and Europe to the United States and South America. Hirsch hoped that many of the immigrants would work in agriculture but instead many later drifted into the towns and cities, thus the Memphis connection. A number of Russian, Roumanian and Galician Jews were sent by Hirsch's organization to Galveston, Texas, and from there many of them went to Memphis. He was also a benefactor to many of the

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## Goldsmith's

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gave his consent, and they were married in 1875.

The decade of the 1870's in Memphis was marked by three epidemics of Yellow Fever, which decimated the city's population and resources. During the 1878 epidemic many businessmen left Memphis, never to return. But the Goldsmiths opened the store for three hours every day.

By 1881, the brothers bought the store owned by their uncle Louis Ottenheimer and his partner. The store was renamed I. Goldsmith and Brother. For a few months the brothers operated both stores, but they closed the one on Beale as the Main Street store prospered. Isaac died in 1884, and Jacob bought out his widow, but kept the name until he formed J. Goldsmith and Sons in 1904.

From the beginning, the motto of the store had been: "the customer is always right." Anything could be returned at any time, even years after its original purchase. Every effort was made to supply any desire a customer expressed, even if it meant hurriedly going down the street to arch-competitor Lowenstein's to buy something at retail.

Jacob Goldsmith's optimism was infectious, and his sales force was trained to be the same way. The store moved in 1902 to a large building on a corner which had formerly been occupied by Menken's Department Store until it was destroyed by fire in 1899. A large, expensive advertisement was placed in the newspaper announcing the expansion and move. As the opening of the

new store approached a rainstorm began to drench the area. One of the salesmen went to commiserate about the unfortunate weather with "Mr. Jacob," as he was called. The response was, "Don't worry, Son. I have enough trouble competing with the man down the street (Meaning Elias Lowenstein) without competing with The Man Upstairs. Besides, we'll sell a lot of raincoats and umbrellas.

Another story told of "Mr. Jacob" is that he occasionally like to leave the store early and go home, but did not wish his employees to do likewise. To prevent their following his lead, he kept two hats. When he put one on his head in preparation for leaving for the day, the extra hat was left hanging on a hook outside his office. Who would not believe that he, himself, was right inside?

In building the largest department store business in the city, Goldsmith employed many new ideas. In the early 1900's he began going to the train depot to welcome Santa Claus to the city, and escort him to Goldsmith's. This soon led to a parade, which other merchants later joined. This parade preceded by more than a decade the famous Macey's annual event. Christmas was also celebrated by Goldsmith's with The Enchanted Forest in the mid-1960's, modeled after the Disney Small World exhibit at the New York World's Fair. It became so popular that it kept three Santa Clauses busy dealing with the large number of children who came to be delighted.

Goldsmith's inaugurated the era of the "department store" in 1902 when in 1902 it was the first store in the South to

arrange merchandise by departments. It was the first store in Memphis to have air-conditioning, escalators, a bargain basement, and mechanical credit system, called Charga-Plate.

When Elias Lowenstein died in 1919 Jacob Goldsmith lost his last competitor for the title of the leading merchant in the city. He was also a participant in the religious and civic life of the city. Among other activities, he was a member of Odd Fellows for over forty years; belonged to the City Club, the Rex Club, B'Nai B'Rith, was a charter member of Progressive Lodge, Knights of Pythias; Vice-President of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce; member of the board of Directors of several Memphis banks; for many years member of the Board of Trustees and an officer of Temple Israel. A few years before his death, while he was Warden of the Temple, the congregation created the office of Honorary President and elected him to fill it.

"Mr. Jacob" died in 1933, followed a year later by his wife. Their home at 696 Vance was given by the family to St. Agnes Academy, which was directly across the street, to be used as a library, named the Goldsmith Memorial Library. When his descendants wanted to honor his memory, they chose to create the Goldsmith Civic Garden Center, which is located in Audubon Park, where it provides an educational facility and an adornment to the city. (Goldsmith Civic Garden Center opening program.)

In tribute to "Mr. Jacob" his co-workers presented a bronze plaque to the family which reads, "The Crown of a Good Name Excels Them All." Jacob Goldsmith, 1850-1933. ■

### Early Scenes From B'nai B'rith Home



*Relaxing on the porch.*



*Mending and Darning Society.*



*Linen and Clothing Storage*



## A Nostalgic Look at Passover of the Past

by Nate Goler

Seder night and Pesach week is a wonderful, beautiful time of the year that holds so much joy and anticipation for every Jewish home. And, my house was the norm.

About a month before Passover, my parents would start planning the Pesach grocery and meat list, always trying to work in candy, cookies and other sweets.

Our first job (my brother and I) was to drag all the rugs to the clothes lines in our back yard. Using brooms and broom handles, we beat and beat them until my mother came out to inspect and check to see if we had done a good job. Then, back into the house we'd schlep the rugs. Next was window washing time - which presented a problem. All the windows were about 20 feet off the ground because we had a full daylight basement. So, to clean the outside, I sat in the window with my feet and body facing inside. My brother washed the inside. This took a week after getting home from school and Hebrew school.

About two weeks before Pesach, my mother shifted into high gear. She started her general cleaning, in earnest. We always called this the "Basic Training Time." Practically everything not nailed down was taken down, scrubbed and washed, even to a few heirlooms, vases, and a gold rimmed candy bowl, which always was sitting on the coffee table in the living room.

All the closets were cleaned and their contents were hung on the clothes line to air out. When I was small, I thought this was done to stretch our pants after a long winter rest.

Our kitchen got the brunt of the basic training attack. The stove, which burned coal, was the hardest and took the most time to clean. There were four openings on top of the stove and a warmer. The sink area was an all day assault, using brushes (new) and kosher soap, and clean rags, usually flour and sugar sacks which had been washed. We saved the ends of apple boxes to put on the drain board and inside the sink itself. Every inch was covered. My father always had a new wooden meat kashruth board made. The afternoon before seder night, whoever was home helped bring up all the Pesach dishes, pots, pans, and silverware. They were kept in an old telephone booth that my father had gotten somewhere.

In those days, most of the meals during Pesach were meat because there were very few dairy meals you could make. But, we did have milk. We drove to Mr. Passes Dairy, who was the only Jewish milkman in town. We took our own two gallon milk cans that we had used for years and we milked fresh milk right into the cans. Thus, we had milk with our breakfast which usually consisted of bananas and milk, fried matzah, and fruit. School lunches were another problem. We usually took matzah and salami and fruit, hard boiled eggs, etc. Sponge cake was on the table at

every meal all week long.

The seders were big, big nights. As hard as my mother worked during the basic training weeks, she always looked rested and radiant on seder nights. The seders always seemed long and drawn out because my father, my brother, and I read the Haggadah together in Hebrew. My three sisters just sat and waited. The four questions were a highlight for my brother and me. We said them in unison, chanting the translation of the Hebrew into Yiddish. This always brought a special smile to my mother and father's faces.

The Pesach meals were done with all the culinary art of a real Yiddisha Mama. Everything in those days was made at home. The gefilte fish was from scratch, of course. The horseradish root was bought by my father a few months before and planted in the back yard. At Pesach time, he would dig it up and grate it by hand. And, this was real horseradish-hot-the original Jewish nose drops.

Maybe this nostalgic look at a Passover week of the past will bring back memories of how deep and caring our heritage can be. When you look at the extra work and energy it took 65 years ago, and the ease in which it is done today, it is wonderful to realize that in those bygone days it was a privilege, a joy and a tradition. It was beautiful to be a part of this glorious holiday. ■



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