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Jewish Historical Society Members Relive Civil War Through Author's Talk

Schneider Elected New Society President

by Barry Markowitz

Following clues like a detective, Melvin A. Young poured over documents and historical records to discover the final resting places of 550 Jewish soldiers who died in the Civil War and to document them in his book "Where They Lie: Someone Should Say Kaddish."

Young, a resident of Chattanooga, discussed his findings last month at a program, sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

Another feature of the program, which was held September 16 at the Memphis Jewish Community Center, was the presentation of a citation to Young in recognition of his work. The presentation was made by the Harry Washer Post #121 of the Jewish War Veterans.

Prior to Young's address, David Schneider, honorary board member of the Jewish Historical Society, was elevated

to the presidency of the organization at a business meeting for the group. Mr. Schneider, who will also continue to serve as editor of the newsletter for the organization, succeeds Gloria Felsenthal, who held the office of president for the past two years. In the new term Ms. Felsenthal, who received a plaque in appreciation of her term, will serve as an honorary officer.

Young, a 1952 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, said that he became interested in the topic of Jews in the Civil War after reading a book written by a lawyer in 1895 which listed nearly 8,000 names of Jews who fought in the war.

Though some of the Germanic sounding names were not Jewish, the list was largely accurate, noted Young, who has spent the past eight years researching the topic.

Names found in books written about the Jews of various states at the turn of the century, gleaned from documents or given to him by Jewish families led Young to search in state archives, National Park Service records, family documents and newspaper obituaries from the 1860s to locate the graves of the dead, he said.

Publishing his book, which is a listing of Jewish war dead, was difficult because few cared how many Jews died in the Civil War, Young said. Non-Jews were more interested than Jews, because most American Jews are of more recent Eastern European extraction, he speculated, noting that most of the Jews from the older families have become assimilated.

Among the things Young discovered during his research were the attempted

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Elias Lowenstein

Pioneer Memphis Merchant

by Dr. Selma Lewis

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

In a book written about the Memphis business community in 1879, author Robert Sigafos called Elias Lowenstein "one of the five prominent business men of the mid-19th century." His obituary is headed "Pioneer Memphis Merchant is Called to His Reward." These descriptions reflect a striking change in circumstances from those of his arrival in the United States in 1854 with, legend has it, thirty-five cents in his pocket.

Elias and his brothers Benedict, Bernard, and Abe all came separately from Hesse Darmstadt, Germany "to seek their fortune in the United States." They arrived in Orleans, and "worked their way up to Memphis, which was a logical destination because at the time, it was an important river town."



Elias Lowenstein

The firm of B. (Benedict) Lowenstein and Brothers began in a small way in 1860, in a little store at 80 Front Street. It

moved to a larger building in the 1880's, at 247 North Main Street. The store remained there until the Lowenstein Brothers built their own building at the corner of main and Monroe. Originally headed by Benedict, when he died Elias assumed the leadership of the store. Under his guidance it became "an important store in the city, known for purveying quality merchandise."

For many years the store maintained a wholesale as well as a retail division, but when the wholesale division burned down in 1910, it was not re-established. Elias then bought out his brothers, and continued to operate the retail store himself. He died in 1919. In 1921, with no immediate family involved, the store

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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



David Schneider

Since its inception, our society has pursued the goals of encouraging historical research and study, creation of educational programs and the establishment of a local archive. As your newly installed President, I welcome this opportunity to continue the great work of my predecessors. We have accomplished much and the completion of our book, "Chronicles of the

Jewish Community of Memphis", scheduled to be printed this year, is the culmination of some of our efforts and the wonderful work of Dr. Selma Lewis. Certainly this is an exciting milestone in the history of our society and the Memphis Jewish Community.

As I look to our future, I would like to involve more of our members in our planned programing, expand our research to other areas of our past history and increase our efforts to create a meaningful archive so future generations will have access to the past as well as the history of our time. To continue our work, I will need your support and active involvement so we can enlarge the scope of our society's work. As I form new committees and set new goals, I will be calling on many of you for your assistance. If you have a particular interest and would like to work in a specific area, please let me know.

Our fascinating and inspiring history deserves preservation for future generations. Together, we can keep the many aspects of Southern Jewish culture alive and preserve this as a legacy for future generations.

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Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Gerson
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Mr. & Mrs. Harold Sharpe

Yeshiva University Library

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establishment of a National Jewish War cemetery in 1866 which has no bodies; the discovery of 21 Jewish soldiers from the Civil War buried at the Jewish cemetery in Richmond, Virginia; and a letter written on August 29, 1861, by Robert E. Lee to a rabbi in Richmond denying the rabbi's request that all Jewish soldiers be furloughed during the High Holy Days but suggesting that individuals could make application to their direct superiors.

His research led him to find that the Twelfth Alabama brigade of the Confederacy and the Union's 82nd Illinois both had large Jewish contingents and were both at Gettysburg. A visit there and more study led him to conclude that on July 1, 1863, at about 3 p.m. there were Jewish soldiers shooting at each other.

A Jewish sailor was aboard both the Confederate Monitor and the Union Merrimack when they fought; a Jewish soldier led one of Nathan Bedford Forrest's regiments; and that eight Jewish Union soldiers won the medal of honor,

he added.

There were also stories of families with Jewish soldiers fighting on both sides; of a P.O.W. freed at the Appomattox Court House surrender; and of men killed in action who were highly thought of by their comrades, Young revealed.

Stories also abound of women in the Civil War including one jailed as a spy after spitting on a Union soldier in New Orleans. Another Jewish woman shot a Union soldier who was harassing her. A Union soldier led her away, ostensibly to take her to General Butler, but instead took her to the Confederate lines where he became a prisoner of war.

Young found letters published by a German father after his son's death in the Civil war. The son had come to America at age 16. After running out of money, the youth was recruited into the army. The boy sent a series of letters while lying wounded in a hospital bed; a final letter came from someone at the hospital, noting that there were Jews with him when he died who said the traditional prayers for him, wrapped his

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A Big Thank You To A Special Group Of Young People

Five hundred young givers have joined the ranks of those who think the work of our society is worthy of support. One week's Tzedakah funds from the Temple Israel Religious School were recently donated to the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

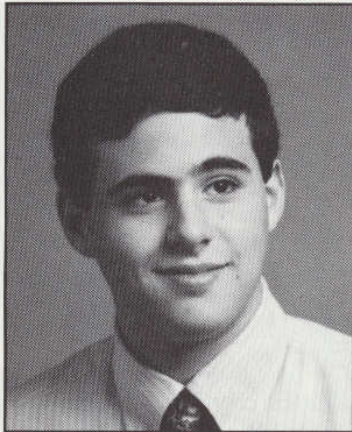
Barbara Mansberg, educator and guiding light at the Temple Israel Religious School, believes that children learn more about giving when they know where their money will be sent and understand the causes which their gifts will support. Thus, each Sunday morning lesson begins with a discussion about the recipient of that week's funds. Students in grades K-8 learned about the importance of recording history. We are happy to record the history made by these young people who so generously support our efforts. ■

by Gloria Felsenthal

From Thriving Life To Abandoned Monuments

The Rise and Fall of Small Southern Jewish Communities

by Zemer Gitai



Zemer Gitai

Zemer Gitai graduated this year from White Station High School, Memphis, TN and will be attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology this fall. Zemer has been greatly involved in research in biochemistry, for which he has won the Memphis Science Fair for the past two years, and this year, took second place at the International Science Fair. Zemer was also selected as a semifinalist in the Westinghouse Science Talent Search, and was selected for USA-Today's All-American High School Academic Team. Zemer is a native Israeli, and has played an active role in Memphis' Jewish community in the three years he has spent here. This paper won the silver medal in the senior historical papers category at the 1992 Memphis History Day.

The improved economic opportunities in the New South planted a seed for the Jewish infiltration into Southern communities. Since the mercantilistic Jewish population depended so heavily on the volatile local economy, this fickle system ultimately brought about the Southern Jewish community's bust as well as its boom. If one were to closely examine several small Southern townships whose rustic mystique is often quite misleading, one would find many Jewish tiles in the elaborate mosaic of southern society. The various means by which Jews arrived in such distant and isolated communities is quite a peculiar phenomenon, and the methods employed by Southern Jews to maintain and preserve their religion and heritage is an extraordinary tale of courage, conviction, and devotion. Unfortu-

nately, however, Southern Jewish communities did not prosper indefinitely, as the number of practicing Jews in the area proceeded to dwindle due to reasons related to both objective considerations and specifically Jewish grounds. Nevertheless, the future of Jewish life in the South is not wholly bleak, as several young and thriving communities have recently been established in the South. Thus, southern Jews toiled diligently to realize their role as a significant part of Southern society, and then proceeded to simply abandon the area, while a new generation of Jews began to found viable communities in several new locations in the South.

In early Colonial America, Jews were not permitted to freely practice their religion. This restriction was largely due to the colonists' fear that if they allowed the Jews to practice their faith, the colonists would have to allow the despised Catholics, Anglicans, or any opposing Christian denomination to freely practice their religion as well, a prospect which utterly disgusted most early American colonists. However, such visionary people as Roger Williams who founded Rhode Island in 1663 included provisions for complete religious freedom in the colony, with Rhode Island thus becoming the first British colony where Jews could freely follow their religion. Much later, in 1740, once the Jews had become a more accepted and integral part of American society, King George II finally issued a proclamation allowing Jews to freely practice their religion and attain citizenship and franchise in all British colonies. In 1724, Jews already held such key positions in Louisiana that they provoked a wave of anti-semitism which eventually caused Governor Jean Baptiste LeMoyne Sieur d'Beinville to include a provision in Louisiana's Black Code restricting further Jewish immigration to the Louisiana Province. Despite such isolated actions, the general sentiment towards Jews in the colonies was quite good, and Jews were ultimately even encouraged to migrate to the American provinces, as a proposal for a Jewish settlement in the "Upper Mississippi and Missouri territory" was advertised and

promoted in London in 1819 by W.D. Robinson, a Christian from Philadelphia. Thus, the Jews in America managed to achieve the rights of citizenship, suffrage, and complete freedom of religion by the middle of the eighteenth century.

The first Jewish immigrants in the United States settled in large cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. These Jews came from countries where anti-semitism prevailed and they were permitted to neither educate nor advance themselves. Thus, these people were predominantly unskilled laborers or craftsmen and dealt in such professions as grocers, shoemakers, or peddlers. As the large cities became more and more crowded, the Jews began to leave the cities for the smaller Southern towns. These Jews were led by the peddlers who carried all their possessions with them, and traveled from small town to small town, often simply stopping and settling in a town that caught their fancy. Most Jews immigrated by themselves, as they sought prosperity in America while leaving their families at home. Once a Jew settled in a place to his liking, he began to bring the rest of his family to America in a piece-meal fashion, eventually settling the entire family in the small Southern town. As more and more Jews settled in such a manner, their friends often followed them, thus ultimately producing viable Jewish communities in several small Southern townships.

The Jews in these small Southern towns faced the dilemma of how to prosperously exist in the town, yet meanwhile maintain their Jewish traditions and heritage. Many of these Jews did, in fact successfully preserve their Jewish culture, as can be seen through the fact that the American Indian communities of the area called the Jewish peddlers "egg-eaters" since they refused to eat the Indians' meat which was not kosher. Wherever they were, Jews always attempted to provide their children with good educations, as well as to teach them the significance of their heritage. Thus, in every small community that had any significant Jewish population, the Jews sought to keep close ties to one another. As a result, through the ancient Jewish rituals and values such as those which pertained to culinary practices, education, and the obser-

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vance of such things as the High Holidays, the Jews in these small Southern towns managed to maintain their heritage and tradition. Most Southern Jews managed to become integral parts of their community's merchants, and sometimes even held such important political positions as the mayors of their respective towns. In addition, the young generation received not only good Jewish educations, but quite adequate general educations as well. This factor enabled many of the younger generation to go on to more professional occupations and pursuits in the future, as well as to become much more assimilated into American society. The scattered Jewish population throughout the South ultimately found the need to establish fixed centers of worship. The Jews could not afford to erect a monument in every small community, yet they were quite successful at establishing thriving synagogues in centralized locations across the South, often along the banks of the Mississippi River.

Greenville, Mississippi, is an archetypal example of a small town and the progress its Jewish community has made throughout the years. The first Jew in the area, Morris Weiss, came from Prussia to New York, and gradually peddled his way into the Mississippi Delta. Weiss saw great potential for the dry goods business in Greenville, and decided to settle there in 1864, bringing his wife to the town once his decision was made. Slowly, more and more Jews migrated to Greenville and the surrounding area, and in 1869, Congregation B'nai Israel was founded, which served Jews not only from Greenville, but the entire Mississippi Delta as well. In 1906, the congregation felt the need to expand, and reorganized under the Hebrew Union Congregation, building a new and vastly larger synagogue which had the primary function of a private Jewish school, in addition to its purposes as a sanctuary. The Jews in Greenville eventually became an integral part of society, as they contributed greatly to many community projects, including the building of a public high school. These Jews also served in key positions such as councilmen, and even a few mayors, including Jacob Alexander, the first mayor of Greenville. However, while the Jew-

ish community grew and prospered, the younger generation began to leave the town for greater opportunities in the big cities. Thus, Greenville ultimately went from a thriving community of over two hundred families, to an unstable congregation consisting of less than ninety Jewish families. The Hebrew Union Congregation's original charter contains a provision that if the membership were to dwindle to less than eleven families, the congregation must disband. This prospect is far from inconceivable, and greatly frightens the local Jewish community.

Another typical small Southern Jewish community is Blytheville, Arkansas. In the early 1900's the Blytheville Jewish community, though not large enough to hold regular services, did provide private tutors in order to give the Jews' children a proper Jewish education. In 1947, the community built a synagogue seating 120 people called Temple Israel, and was large enough to maintain a viable congregation. This congregation included a permanent rabbi who conducted services every week, a Sunday School which held weekly classes for the children of local Jews, and various social activities where Jews could freely interact with one another. Today, however, as in other Southern Jewish communities, Blytheville's entire young generation of Jews, as well as most of their parents, have abandoned the town. Only one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Falkoff remain in the town itself, and their children have already left. Presently, the congregation can afford to hold services only once in every four weeks, and with all the Jews they attract from the entire area, an average of only twenty people show up for the monthly services which are conducted by a female Reform rabbi, Constance Golden, from Memphis. The last remaining family in Blytheville, due to their undying devotion to and appreciation of their heritage, are considering willing the Temple Israel synagogue to a local community college which will preserve and maintain the monument's rich legacy.

Port Gibson, Mississippi is a busy port town which attracted many Jewish merchants in the 1830's. The Gemiluth Chessed Congregation was founded in 1849 by twenty-two charter family members to serve the religious and communal needs of the entire Southern

Mississippi Jewish population. This community proceeded to erect a simply magnificent synagogue in 1892, whose astounding architecture is admired until today. The Jews in the area felt it important to establish a Jewish burial ground, and indeed one was established in 1870. The community continued to thrive until the middle of the twentieth century when many of the young Jews simply left Port Gibson for more promising offers in larger cities. This depletion of Jews in Port Gibson ultimately reached a point where the once prosperous community of over a hundred families is presently left with not one Jewish family. Fortunately, the beautiful synagogue was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1991, with a local Presbyterian minister taking care of the synagogue and Jewish burial grounds.

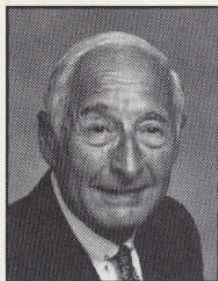
The post-World War II era brought about radical changes in the entire South, leading to the decline of practically all small agriculture-based towns. The causes of this decline centered around the mechanization and electrification of farming techniques, the introduction of chemicals and fertilizers, and more accessible credit, capital, and markets. This new system highly favored the bigger farm owners over the smaller farm owners, and the only farmers who could continue to prosper were those who made the transformation to high-volume and mechanized production. These modern farms succeeded in replacing an entire class of unskilled laborers who were previously needed to work on the farms, with just a few good machines, thus producing the displacement of a strikingly large group of workers in the South. As a result of this post-war agricultural revolution in the South, an entire way of life disappeared in a generation, including many small family farms, their tenants, sharecroppers, and cotton gins. Thus, in the course of one generation, the entire network of small Southern towns, agricultural centers, and many of the area's unskilled laborers, not only faltered, but utterly collapsed, bringing about a mass emigration of people from these small Southern communities.

The decline of the Jewish communities in small Southern towns closely followed the decline of the general population. The Jews often dealt in merchant

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Jewish Judges from Memphis

by Judge Irving Strauch



Judge Irving Strauch

While there have been many Jewish lawyers there have been few Jewish judges in Tennessee.

The first Jewish judge in Tennessee was Leopold Lehman who was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in

March, 1842. His father was from Alsace, Lorraine. He graduated law school in 1863 and moved to Memphis with his brother, Irving Lehman, also a lawyer. In 1905, the two brothers formed a law partnership with Elias Gates, called Lehman, Gates and Lehman.

Leopold Lehman was modest, confident and able and very knowledgeable of the law, literature and philosophy and a student of common law. (He was not related to Henry Lehman of 1992.) In 1892, Lehman was appointed to the Supreme Court of Tennessee for a period of 6 months, to take the place of Judge Peter Turney. He wrote many logical, learned opinions before retiring from the bar in 1911. He died February 9, 1918.

The second Jewish judge was Israel Peres who was born in his father's library in Memphis, August 27, 1867. He was the son of Rabbi Jacob Peres of Memphis. Peres received his early education from his father and later went to Yale University. While at Yale, he was elected Vice Chancellor of "Book and Gavel". In 1889, upon his graduation, he received his Master of Arts degree and in 1891 received his L.L.B. In 1917, Governor Tom Rye appointed him Chancellor of Part II of the Chancery. In the following August, he was elected to a full eight year term as Chancellor and almost completed his tenure when an unexpected heart attack brought an end to a well spent life. Two years prior to his death, he had contracted influenza and had never really regained his strength. Israel Peres' primary allegiance was to law and he clung to his profession with tenacity and veracity. Peres loved to explore the depth of legal sci-

ence, was a philosopher of the law and brought to the Bar an analytical mind. He had a large practice and his record on the bench was excellent. He read widely in general literature and was a great public servant. One of the jewels of Memphis, he was a model citizen, active in the Memphis and Shelby County Bar, president of the Y.M.H.A., and advisor to the draft board of Memphis. His speeches on Shakespeare and law were gems of oratory and logic. He served on the bench for six and a half years.

In 1901, he married Rebecca Behm and her death in December of that year was a profound shock to him. Her memory was ever tender to him and he never remarried. Israel Peres died August 1, 1925 and was survived by a brother, Hardwick Peres and one sister, Mrs. Henry Peres Poset. His eulogy was signed by F.M. Heiskell, Lee Bartels, W.P. Armstrong, J.E. Holmes and Walter Chandler.

The third Jewish judge in Memphis was Louis H. Morris, elected to a Justice of the Peace for eight years in the early '20's. He is listed in the city directory of 1929 as a Justice of the Peace and Notary Public. His office was at 70 N. Second Street and his deputy was Abe Kabakoff. At that time, J.P. judges were on a fee basis and were elected to their job. Morris first lived in Memphis at 323 Carroll Ave. where his nephew, Herbert Glazer, was born. The Morris family came here from Poland when Louis was only 5 years old and his sisters were younger than he. For some years the family lived in Nashville, later moving to Jonesboro, Arkansas. Louis Morris never married but took good care of his mother and his younger sisters. He became a partner with Ike Alperin in the tailoring business and always made a good living. In 1927, he ran for Justice of the Peace and was elected. His first office was in a basement on Jefferson near Main in what is now the Rhodes Jennings Building. Later he moved to 70 N. Second Street, next to the Lyceum Theater. Although he had no legal training and only a high school education, he served well in his position. Morris was a friend of Julius Lewis and Ed Crump. He supported many different Jewish organizations and donated the land for "Morris Park" on Poplar at Manassas, which was named for him. During the depression of 1929-30, at Christmas, he would

take his nephew, Herbert Glazer to Oak Hall and buy him clothes. He loved to eat and although he was not religious, never ate pork. Morris always loved to gamble but never drank very much. He played baseball in 1920 at Overton Park and was a catcher who was strong and hit a long ball. He always liked new automobiles and bought one every year. During World War II and before he died, he ran a Budweiser restaurant at Third and Monroe. Morris belonged to both Baron Hirsch Synagogue and Temple Israel and upon his death in 1944, he was buried at the Baron Hirsch Cemetery.

Louis D. Begach became the fourth Jewish judge in Memphis and Shelby County. He was born in Brownsville, Tennessee, reared in Moscow, Tennessee and moved to Memphis in 1900. He graduated from Harvard in 1911. Later, he became a great friend of Mr. Crump and in 1914 was considered one of the three best lawyers in Memphis, along with Abe Waldower and Walter Chandler. In 1924, Mr. Crump appointed Lewis Begach as County Attorney. During 1924-1954 he was a Chancellor, having been appointed by Governor McAlister. In 1954, he was appointed to the court of Appeals by Governor Frank Clement and served until 1968.

The fifth Jewish judge in Memphis and Shelby County was Abe Fortas. He was born in Memphis, a product of the city school system and a graduate of South Side High School. He graduated from Southwestern as an Honor Student. He and Granville Farrow were in competition for an Israel Peres law scholarship at Yale University. Leo Bearman, Sr. was on the committee and tapped Abe Fortas for the job over Granville Farrow. It is interesting to note that Granville Farrow later became a great lawyer and became a lawyer's lawyer. He was legally brilliant at Yale where he was a professor and William O. Douglas brought him to Washington as an attorney for Harold Ickes. From then on, he was a part of the history of America.

Legally brilliant through Yale and a New Deal apprenticeship, Fortas formed an early friendship with Lyndon Johnson during Johnson's race for the Senate. He became Lyndon Johnson's lawyer and did a lot of work for him. He had

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tough battles against wartime relocations of Japanese and Americans and was against the witch hunt hysteria of the Joe McCarthy era. His eminence as a counsel to some of the nation's largest corporations, such as Philip Morris and Federated Department Stores made his law firm, Arnold, Porter and Fortas a household word in the legal community. President Johnson virtually embarrassed him into the nomination to the Supreme Court. Fortas was in Memphis for a dinner given by his uncle, Sam Fortas. We were invited. He was like a drafted soldier, he said, hardly able to live on what the Justices are paid. He was an ally of Warren, Douglas and Brennan, liberals on the court. Fortas lavished in culture and social life in the musical world of Issac Stern. Being a violinist himself, he played chamber music with Stern.

When Fortas went to the Supreme Court, he divorced himself from his law firm. Later, he was nominated for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court by Lyndon Johnson. Richard Nixon and John Mitchell later forced his resignation, bringing to an end, the emotional fighting against the Warren court. Fortas came to Memphis to speak at Memphis State University Law School. At that time, he said he wanted to resign. The last time I saw him he said, "I have no criticism, I harbor no animosity just as if an automobile hit me as I stepped from the curb."

The sixth Jewish judge in Memphis and Shelby County was Irving M. Strauch. He was the first Jewish judge elected by the Bar Association; then elected by popular election in 1966 and 1974, always against opposition. Judge Strauch was born in Memphis and graduated with honors from Maury and Humes High School. He received his law degree from the University of Tennessee where he was the associate editor of the University of Tennessee Law Review. In 1937, he became associated with the law firm of Dixon, Williams and Edmondson and in 1946 through 1965 practiced law as head of the law firm, Strauch and Jones. Judge Strauch served on many other committees for various legal and technical committees and conferences. He was a trustee of Baron Hirsch Synagogue, Ridgeway Country Club and a Board member at Temple Israel. And,

Judge Strauch has been recognized by the Jewish community of Memphis, the city of Memphis, Shelby County as one of their leading citizens.

The seventh Jewish judge, Judge Bernie Weinman was born April 24, 1934. He is truly a product of the Memphis educational system having attended public school in Memphis, Memphis State University where he graduated with a BS degree in marketing and Southern Law University (now Memphis State University Law School) where he received his LLD degree in June 1960. From 1961 through 1965, Weinman practiced law in Memphis and in August 1965 became City Court Judge and retained this position until September 1974. From the seventies through the eighties, Judge Weinman served in many different positions from City Court Judge to Special Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals. He also served as an instructor at Memphis State University, Department of Criminal Justice. Judge Weinman was active in all phases of the legal and judicial system serving as Chairman of the Education Committee of the Tennessee Judicial Conference from 1985 to the present time. He has been active in the Memphis Jewish community and served on the Board of Directors of Baron Hirsch Synagogue.

A highly respected member of the legal community Judge Weinman continued to set an example for others to follow. He has remained active in both the civic and Jewish community where his work and counsel is highly recognized and respected. ■

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was sold to Maison Blanche, which later joined the City Stores chain. The store is no longer in business.

Elias Lowenstein was closely associated with Temple Israel, which he served as President for fifteen years, from 1870-1874 and again from 1883-1893. Sometimes he lent the Temple money, when it was in need. One section of the land of the Temple Israel Cemetery was given by him, and bears the name "Babette and Elias Lowenstein Section."

Lowenstein was also intimately associated with the welfare of the city of Memphis. He was a prompt and liberal contributor to the restoration of the city after the disastrous epidemics of yellow fever of the 1870's. He was appointed a

member of the Committee of Fifteen charged with finding ways and means to build the sewers that were essential to prevent recurrence of the disease.

In January, 1900, a committee of twenty Memphis citizens went to Washington in a special Pullman car to invite Admiral George Dewey, the hero of Manila Bay during the Spanish American War, and his bride to come to Memphis for a visit. Dewey accepted, arrived on May 5, and was met by a reception committee composed of Mayor J.J. Williams, and "department store magnate" Elias Lowenstein. In 1890, Lowenstein built an elaborate home at Jefferson and Manassas, in which he lived with his large family, wife Babette Wold from Cincinnati, and nine children. One of his daughters, Sarah, married Dr. Sol Siman, the founder of the Jewish Hospital of Denver, for which Lowenstein contributed generous seed money. Another daughter, Celia, married Ike Samelson, who developed a successful tobacco business in Memphis. She was a Life Member of the Nineteenth Century, which recognized the need to provide decent, safe housing for young women who came into Memphis to work. She arranged for the house to be donated to the club for that purpose. Later it became a half-way house for former patients of mental institutions who were returning to the community.

A picture of Elias Lowenstein is included among other Memphians, illustrating an article in Time Magazine, which is captioned: "What handful of citizens could mobilize Memphis today?": It referred to a small group of citizens who worked to save Memphis after the Yellow Fever epidemics. His obituary concludes that Lowenstein was "identified with best interests of the city." ■

SJHS Meets Oct. 30-Nov. 1

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will meet in Montgomery, Alabama Oct. 30-Nov. 1, for its 17th Annual Conference. A great program includes excellent speakers, tours, Shabbat services and a gala banquet. The banquet keynote speaker will be Dr. Kenneth Libo, curator of American Jewish History at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. Harriet Stern, our past President will become Treasurer for the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

professions such as grocers and clothiers, and did a great deal of their business with the poor, unskilled laborers of the area. When the general decline and displacement of these simple workers became a reality, a considerable number of Jews lost a large proportion of their consumers, and could no longer truly prosper in the small town. Not only was the number of potential consumers dwindling for the Jewish merchant, the establishment of large chains such as Walmart, which was located in centralized areas, readily accessible to the common workers, diminished a great deal of the profitability of the small Jewish-operated store in the South. In addition, while most Jewish merchants had the desire to establish a good business so that their children would take over the business and follow in their parents' footsteps, the majority of the younger generation wanted to go to college in the big city and thus better their economic and social stature. After having gone to school and becoming professionals, it was usually unrealistic to expect the younger generation to return to the small town. As a result of the gradual depletion of Jews from the area, a few of the younger Jews in the small town who sought to preserve their Jewish culture and heritage, often moved to the big cities, where they could be with more Jews and conduct a more traditionally Jewish life. Thus, due to factors based on the general population, their own ambitions, and their religious backgrounds, many Jews of the new generation in small Southern communities began to abandon the towns in favor of such metropolises as Memphis, New Orleans, and Atlanta.

The Jewish community in small Southern towns has undergone a tremendous amount of change throughout the years. Through an extensive process of immigration and migration Jews succeeded in founding several strong communities in small rural towns across the South. In the course of time, not only did the small towns change, but the Jews themselves changed a great deal as well. The Jews in this new environment became much more open, accepting, and active in the general, non-Jewish activities of their communities, an Americanization process which

distinguished the Southern Jews from those who isolated themselves in ghetto-like environments in large cities such as New York. As times and conditions changed, Jews of the younger generations began to slowly leave the small towns. When the United States declared that those who studied in college would be exempt from serving in the military during the Vietnam War, many Jews took this outlet, obtained a higher education, and never came back to the small towns. Despite the majority of the Jews' gradual abandonment of the small rural communities, a resurgence of Jewish presence in the small Southern communities has recently been noticed. New Jewish congregations have been founded within the past few years in such places as Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Cleveland, Mississippi, by professionals who came to these towns as professors at the local universities, doctors, or lawyers. The rise of these new Jewish communities indicates that there is indeed hope for the continuing of Jewish life in small Southern townships. Thus, the presence of Jews in the South has had an extraordinary impact on the various places where they resided and congregated, as well as on both their neighbors, and themselves.

Appendix

A. Letter of Morris H. Witcowsky, a Jewish peddler in the South:

"For the first four years I peddled with a pack on my back...You learned early how to remove the pack, lay it neatly on the ground, open it, and choose exactly the merchandise ordered or what you wanted to show..."

On the road I ate eggs, vegetables, and fruits. later on, when I had a horse and wagon, I even carried my own dishes...I made friends on all these routes...Jewish peddlers who couldn't even speak the language well had a special status with the Protestant-Christians in the South. I was reminded of this feeling for the Hebrew religion wherever I went. I read such names as Pisgah, Ceders of Lebanon, Mount Olive, Mount Gilead, Mount Hebron, Nebo, Ararat. This familiarity with the Torah was good for both the Jewish peddler and the people to whom we sold..."

...I think I was in a valuable profession. I do not know how many others, in different trades and professions, can say,

"With each customer I left not only the joy of a new possession but perhaps a bit of information, some news maybe or even an interpretation of a biblical text..."

Cited in: How, Irving and Libo, Kenneth. How We Lived. New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1979, pp. 327-328.

B. Original charter of the Hebrew Union Congregation of Greenville, Mississippi, 1881:

"Article I

This association shall be known as the Hebrew Union of Greenville, Miss., its business to be transacted in the English Language, and is organized for the purpose of establishing divine service in conformity with the Jewish faith, and for the further purpose of establishing good schools for the education of children.

Article VII

The Hebrew Union shall not be dissolved so long as eleven members thereof contribute to its maintenance."

Mr. Gitai's article was complete with bibliography and footnotes which we could not print due to space limitations. We will be happy to furnish this information upon request.

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body and saw that he was buried in a Jewish cemetery.

There were an estimated 150,000 Jews in the U.S. in 1860 and about 8,000 served in the army, Young said, noting that losses were higher among Southern Jewish soldiers.

Serving with Schneider and Ms. Felsenthal will be Stephen Biller, first vice-president; Marjean Kremer, second vice-president; Jerome Magdovitz, treasurer; Frederica Saharovici, secretary; Judy Peiser, consultant; Marx Borod, legal counsel; and Shirley Feibelman, historian.

Other honorary officers are Lester Sewel, Laura Spiegler, Elias Goldsmith, Harry Jaffe, Abe Schwab, Harriet Stern, Leonid Saharovici, and Judge Irving Strauch.

Directors are Rabbi Micah Greenstein, Rachel Shankman, Harriet Alperin, Berkeley Kalin, Marcia Bicks, Helen Wax, Nate Goler, Jack Lieberman, and Jean Pierce. ■

An Open Letter from Cele Eliezer ■ ■ ■ ■

In quest of preservation and continuity for posterity, I decided to turn over the Hadassah records of my administration to the Archives of the Jewish Historical Society. These three volumes, each containing the annual records of Hadassah's activities for the years 1987, '88. and '89. There are Bulletins, publicity articles, invitations, everything pertaining to Hadassah's operations for each year.

In a land of 253 million people, we are a minute speck of 5 million. Each of us carries a tremendous responsibility - not only in counteracting that proportion, but in reinforcing our existence. Past records can and may influence the future, hopefully charter a positive direction for those who follow us, help explain the historical developments of the times and occurrences. A valuable statement that we made a difference, we cared, and took great pride in our Heritage.

Records left in individual hands are very often destroyed and obliterated. I would like to urge other leaders of Jewish Organizations to follow suit so that posterity may have "hands on" access as to what happened in the Jewish Community in Memphis in concert with the occurrences of our times.

I commend the Jewish Historical Society for rendering this invaluable service to the community. ■



Cele Eliezer

Our thanks to Cele for this challenge to other community organizations. You too can start an archive. Call Shirley Fiebleman at 685-7390 for more information.



*Your President, Officers and Directors
of the
JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH
extends*

Rosh Hashana Greetings To Our Entire Membership and Friends

*May the coming year bring to you and yours
all the blessings of peace, health, joy and happiness.*



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