

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

VOL. 25, NO. 2

SPRING, 2015

## KREPLACH AND DIM SUM: YES! THERE ARE JEWS IN CHINA!



The Annual Meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South will be on Sunday, May 31, at 2:00 PM at the Memphis Jewish Community Center. The election of officers for 2015-2016 will take place at this meeting. In addition, an outstanding speaker, Robyn Helzner, will present a program titled *Kreplach and Dim Sum*. Through pictures, stories and song Helzner will explore the extraordinary histories of Jewish communities in Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Kaifeng.

Robyn Helzner is luminous on stage. A stunning vocalist and vivid storyteller, Helzner brings a life-long appreciation of the power of folk music to resonate across cultural boundaries.

Helzner has a singular reputation for bringing Jewish music to uncommon locales. She performed underground concerts for Jews and refuseniks in the Soviet Union. During the period of glasnost, Helzner was the only American artist invited to appear in sold-out concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg as part of the Soviet government's first officially sanctioned Jewish cultural tour in over fifty years. The moving story of her experiences was broadcast on the Public Television special, *Chanukah—A Celebration of Freedom*.

Inspired by these historic events, She formed the Robyn Helzner Trio. Two decades later, the Trio continues to perform music that reaches into the hearts and souls of its listeners.

Helzner officiated at the first Bar Mitzvah held in Beijing, China. She served for six years as the Cantor for the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong and has worked with congregations in Shanghai and Tokyo.

Helzner has released five recordings of new and traditional songs. *Signs and Wonders*, *Hearts Awaken* and *A Fire Burns* feature the Robyn Helzner Trio. *Clap Your Hands* and *I Live in The City* are beloved by children.

Helzner also serves as the Cantorial Soloist at Temple Sinai and at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue, both in Washington, D.C.

The Historical Society is delighted to be able to bring Robyn Helzner to Memphis. Make plans to attend this exceptional program.

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986  
6560 POPLAR AVENUE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38138



## President's Message . . . .



**T**hese last two years have seen some excellent programming thanks to our membership vice-president, Joy Wilk, and her committee. They recommended many of our speakers and events.

For our first program in September of 2013 we had George Lapides who filled our room and gave us a detailed history of the effect that many Jews have had in the world of sports both nationally and locally. We began our programming year in 2014 with Ambassador Dennis Ross who spoke about the challenges we face in trying to come up with a peace plan which we all hope to see.

Other prominent speakers have included Baila Miller, Dr. Ralph Nurnberger, Dr. Dan Bahat, Dr. Beverly Tsacoyianis and Dr. Joyce Antler. Judy Ringel again led her popular tour of Jewish Memphis, and we had an evening meeting with a visit to the newly renovated Civil Rights Museum. We have had other wonderful programs led by members in our own Memphis community.

It has also been a time of sorrow with the passing of a staunch supporter of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, Sumner Levine. Having Sumner as such a good friend made this even more difficult. He has given us the impetus to continue with the programming he would expect and be proud of.

These last two years have been a time for me to meet so many new Memphians that I have not had the opportunity to meet in my previous 40 years in Memphis.

We could not have had the success that we have had without the commitment of our officers, program chairs and board. Thank you to all of them.

Thank you to our many members who supported our programs and spread the word about the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Midsouth.

It has been a pleasure and an honor.

Sincerely,

*David Ross*

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

#### OFFICERS 2014-2015

PRESIDENT David Ross  
VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAMMING AND  
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Harry Jaffe; Harvey Reisman; Margie Kerstine

\*Of Blessed Memory

**W**hen you wish to honor or memorialize someone, please consider a donation to the **Sumner Levine Speaker Series Fund**. This fund will provide resources to enable the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South to continue sponsoring quality programming in our community. Send your donations to:

**Jewish Historical Society  
of Memphis and the Mid-South  
6560 Poplar Avenue  
Memphis, TN 38138**

Checks should be made payable to the Jewish Historical Society with a memo indicating that it is a donation to the **Sumner Levine Speaker Series Fund**.





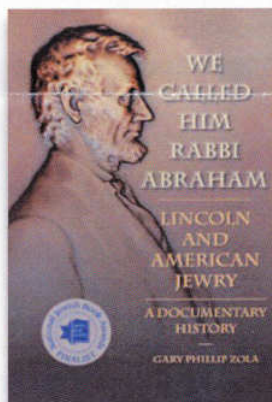
## Nashville to Host SJHS Fortieth Annual Conference



"Jews in the Urban South" will be the theme when the Southern Jewish Historical Society gathers in Nashville, Tennessee, for its 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference from October 30 to November 1, 2015. Conference venues will include the Gordon Jewish Community Center, Vanderbilt University, and the conference hotel, Homewood Suites, located next to the Vanderbilt University campus.

Our traditional Friday morning narrated tour will highlight Nashville Jewish history and culminate at the Gordon Jewish Community Center for lunch and presentations. Friday evening dinner and services will take place at the historic Temple (Congregation Ohabai Shalom), hosted by Rabbi Mark Schifan. During services, Rabbi Dr. Gary P. Zola will speak on Abraham Lincoln and the Jews of the South, based on his award-winning book. Zola, prolific author and chair of the Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History (2004-2005), was the first American Jewish historian appointed to the academic advisory council of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. He is executive director of the American Jewish Archives, Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and editor of the *American Jewish Archives* journal.

Saturday's program will take place at the Vanderbilt University Hillel. Longtime SJHS member Rabbi Stanley Garfein will conduct morning services. We will gather Saturday evening at Congregation Sherith Israel, where the Society's first Helen Stern Cultural Encounter will be a Southern-style concert of



Ira Sheskin

Chassidic, Israeli, folk, jazz, and klezmer music performed by a five-piece band featuring the synagogue's Rabbi Saul Strosberg on keyboard. The rabbi will begin festivities with havdallah, and a dessert reception will follow.

Program committee members Adam Meyer, Patricia Behre, Heather Hammond, Josh Parshall, and Lee Shai Weissbach are designing a fascinating, diverse, and thought-provoking program based on proposals from scholars in a variety of disciplines from across the country. Several proposals break new ground in the history of southern Jewish women and deal with the issue of identity in new ways. We will travel in time throughout the South, stopping in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Dr. Ira Sheskin will give the keynote speech on demographic trends of Jews in southern cities since 1950, bringing his findings up to the Pew study and beyond. Arguably the premier demographer of American Jewry, Sheskin is director of the Jewish Demographic Project of the Miller Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies and professor and chair of the University of Miami geography department. He has completed 42 major Jewish community studies, edits the *American Jewish Yearbook*, and compiles the annual article on Jewish demography for that publication.

Make plans early to greet old friends and new, explore a city rich in history and culture, and gain innovative insights into the study of Jews and Judaism in the South.

— Dan Puckett, Host Committee Chair, and Mark Bauman, Program Committee Chair



Find us on Facebook. Search for "Southern Jewish Historical Society." Visit our website: [jewishsouth.org](http://jewishsouth.org).

1

# **2015-2016 Slate of Officers and Board To Be Presented at Annual Meeting May 31**

## **OFFICERS**

**PRESIDENT** - Joy Wilk

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Madelyne Daneman and Marcia Levy (**PRESIDENT ELECT**)

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**CORRESPONDING SECRETARY** - Lorraine Wolf

**TREASURER** - Jerrold Graber

**MEMBERSHIP CHAIR** - Herb Notowich

**IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT** - David Ross

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Vicki Lazarus, Shaul Bar, Steve Tabachnick

Special thanks to Harry Rubenstein, Barbara Zitron, Sally Wender, Alice Ahart and  
Greg Siskind who have served on our board.

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