



# SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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SUMMER 1994

## Will Gerber .....

Attorney — Politician — Community Leader

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



Will Gerber

Many adjectives have been applied to Will Gerber, who held important positions in the city of Memphis as a powerful leader in the religious and civic life of the community. He has been called devoted, energetic, hard-nosed, single-minded, tough, loud, strong, compassionate and loyal. All of these terms seem to apply to various aspects of this one complicated man.

Will Gerber was six years old when his family immigrated from Kishniev, Russia in 1904, following the extremely harsh pogroms of 1901 and 1902. His father and mother, Max and Rebecca Gerber, brought with them their 4 children, Morris, the eldest, William, Israel and Esther. The family, like so many other immigrants, came to New York where another son, Joe was born in 1906. Saul, the youngest child, was born in 1907 in Memphis, their next destination. Max Gerber was a merchant, living at 228 Exchange Street in the district known as "The Pinch".

Growing up was not easy for Will Gerber. As a youngster he attended Market Street School and then enrolled in Tech High. At about this same time, his parents returned to New York to live, but he remained in Memphis, residing with his maternal grandparents. For eight years he delivered the Commercial Appeal in the mornings and sold afternoon newspapers on the streets in the evenings. His schooling was interrupted by World War I, but after his service in the Army, he returned and married Fanny Kabakoff of Memphis. He then resumed his schooling and attended law school in the evenings. In 1923 he passed the Tennessee Bar Exam and began the practice of law with the firm of William Tyler McLain and Louis Bejach, two men who held high positions in the E.H. Crump organization.

After about 6 months, Louis Bejach became Chancellor and William McLain became District Attorney General, taking Gerber with him as his assistant. Gerber became a "first rate trial lawyer".

Thus began a career that was to make Will Gerber politically important, much discussed, often admired and often controversial. He was recommended to Crump as a "young man who had come up in the world", a type person Crump particularly liked. In 1934, Gerber became Assistant City Attorney under Walter Chandler and the following year when Chandler went to Congress, Will became City Attorney. He remained in this post for seven years, during which he was a "fulltime, hands on" City Attorney, trying a number of sensational cases. In 1940, Governor Printiss Cooper appointed Will Gerber Shelby County At-

*Please see Gerber, page 6*

## Biller Elected JHS President

Memphis attorney, Stephen H. Biller, was elected President of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South at its annual meeting held Sunday, May 22, in the St. Catherine Room at St. Francis Hospital. Biller, who served as First Vice President succeeds insurance executive David Schneider, who held the office for the past two years. In stepping down as President, Mr. Schneider will continue to serve as Editor of our newsletter, "Southern Jewish Heritage." Our officers are Marsha Bicks, first vice-president; Marjean Kremer, second vice president; Helen Wax, secretary; Jerome Magdovitz, treasurer; Shirley Feibelman, historian; Judy Peiser, consultant; and Marx Borod, legal consultant. Elected to the board of directors for three years were Linnie Mirvis, Emily Baer, and Abe Kriegel. Chosen on the board for two years were Joel Felt, Dr. Berkley Kalin, and Don Levy. Selected for one year were Rabbi Micah Greenstein, Rachel Shankman, Harriet Alperin, and Allen Israel.

Gloria Felsenthal, a past president and chairperson of the nominating committee, presented David Schneider with a plaque in appreciation of his service, both as President for 2 years and as Editor of the Society's newsletter since the founding of the organization in 1986. After the election, David introduced our guest speaker, Marci Cohen, Project Director of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Ms. Cohen, using slides, gave an enlightening and enchanting talk in which she described plans for the long term preservation of historic temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, Mississippi. She described the gala week-end celebrating the synagogue and the Natchez Jewish community, whose history dates back to the

*Please see Biller, page 2*



## President's Message . . . .



Steve Biller

As President of the Jewish Historical Society this coming year, I have high hopes of continuing to create a strong and viable society through the increasing of our membership, publishing our book of the Jews of Memphis (1840's to 1960's), programs of continued interest, preservation of our history (oral and written) and cooperation with all Jewish organizations.

This year may be characterized as a year of transformation. Over the past few years our membership has been stagnant and only a handful of members have carried the laboring oar. It will hopefully begin with the publication of our book and continue with an all-out effort to expand membership and the number of active participants in the society.

These described efforts and plans should facilitate the viability of the society and the educating of our Jewish community to value their heritage and to pass it on to their children.

I invite all of you to actively participate in our society. Please let us know what contributions you would like to make. Committees are now being formed, and suggestions for specific committees and appointments to those committees are welcome.

My wife, Margaret and I sincerely wish each of you a very Healthy, Happy and Prosperous New Year. ✨

### JCC and JHS Sponser Jewish Book Month Program

The Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South will co-sponsor a most interesting program during Jewish Book Month. On November 17, 1994 at 7:30 P.M. at the Jewish Community Center, E. Thomas Wood, co-author of KARSKI: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust, (published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.) will speak to the JCC community and our membership and sign his highly acclaimed new book.

Dr. Jan Karski, the heroic and valorous man, witnessed first hand the horrors of the Holocaust at the very beginning of World War II, while working as a courier for the Polish underground. Surviving Soviet captivity and gestapo torture, he escaped occupied Poland in 1942 and at the risk of his young life he embarked on a heroic crusade to tell Allied leaders in London and Washington about the nazi extermination of European Jews. His dramatic mission culminated in a private meeting in the White House with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Dr. Karski, who lives in the U.S.A., was a professor at Georgetown University for over thirty years. He was named by Yad Vashem a Righteous Gentile

and has been made an Honorary Citizen of the state of Israel. Karski's heroic activities have been praised by Nobel Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, by Lech Walesa, the president of Poland, and by many national and international leaders.

E. Thomas Wood is a writer and consulting editor for the Tennessean, an intelligent and charismatic speaker who has a fascinating and moving story to tell about Karski. he wrote the book with Stanislaw M. Jankowski, a Polish journalist.

Leonid Saharovi, former president of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, a friend of Dr. Jan Karski, will share a few personal stories about this great man and will introduce the guest speaker.

Remember - Mark the date, November 17, 1994, on your calendar. Join us and bring a friend with you, to attend this unforgettable program. Refreshments will be served. ✨

We had planned to continue Part II of "The Windows of Temple Adas Israel" from our last issue. However, due to some necessary layout changes, Part II of "Windows" will appear in our next issue. We do apologize. Editor

### Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South OFFICERS 1994-95

PRESIDENT	Steve Biller
1ST VICE PRESIDENT	Marcia Bicks
2ND VICE PRESIDENT	Marjean Kremer
TREASURER	Jerome Magdovitz
SECRETARY	Helen Wax
CONSULTANT	Judy Peiser
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HISTORIAN	Shirley Feibelman
EDITOR	David Schneider

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#### NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Gloria Felsenthal, Marjean Kremer, Dessie Sewel

#### COMMITTEE PORTFOLIO

Membership:	Harriet Alperin
Programs:	Marcia Bicks
Publications:	David Schneider

### Welcome To Our New Members

Mrs. Deborah H. Weinstein, Memphis, TN  
Mrs. Alvin (Tina) Kahn, Memphis, TN  
Mrs. Sara C. Zangwill, Memphis, TN  
Mrs. Josephine (Josie) Burson, Memphis, TN

### SJHS Meets in October

Dr. John Sheldon Reed, Jr., noted southern author will be the Banquet Keynote Speaker at the Southern Jewish Historical Society Conference in Raleigh, NC, October 14-15-16. Dr. Berkley Kalin, president elect of the SJHS has arranged an excellent roster of speakers for the meeting.

The Conference Headquarters will be the prestigious Raleigh Marriott and the special rates are available for those attending. For additional information, call 1994 Chairperson, Retha Jasper, (919)782-2163 or our own Harriet Stern, (901)682-3023. ✨

### Biller *continued from page 1*

late 1700's. The celebrations, entitled, "A Natchez Jewish Homecoming," took place April 29-May 1. Several of our members attended the program and we are delighted to publish Polly Cooper's article (page 8) expressing her thoughts of the delightful week-end she spent at the Homecoming Celebration.



# "Artists Ascending"

From Baron Hirsch

to Carnegie Hall

and Beyond !

by Marjean Kremer

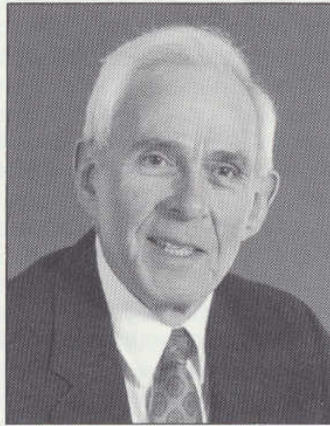
Memphis pediatrician Dr. Joseph Parker plays a vital role in the cultural life of the city, according to Whitney Smith, the highly regarded Commercial Appeal music critic. Smith is convinced that Jewish commitment to the arts, providing both the vision and the funding, has historically made the difference in Memphis and the "Parker exemplifies the best of this tradition."

Dr. Joe, as he is known to a legion of admirers, has practiced medicine in Memphis since completing a pediatric residency at the University of Tennessee in 1953. The Chattanooga native maintains that his love for classical music was absorbed through osmosis; his two older brothers played classical records non-stop while he was growing up!

Despite a large practice and a growing family, Dr. Joe found the time to be an active member of Baron Hirsch Synagogue's Board. Soon after his 1964 appointment as Chairman of the congregation's Social, Educational and Cultural Committee, he began to explore the idea of a Baron Hirsch project showcasing young Jewish Musicians. He felt such a project would serve both to encourage young artists early in their careers and to contribute to "the cultural betterment" of the entire Memphis community.

Contacts in the Memphis Orchestral Society led Dr. Joe to the then pre-eminent Sol Hurok Agency in New York and its top-notch agent Max Gershunoff. Gershunoff was immediately supportive of the idea, providing the Memphis group with an exciting list of performers. "Artists Ascending" was born!

Twenty-four year old Israeli Pianist Daniel Barenboim was the first of the young "Artists Ascending," performing for an enthusiastic audience in the elegant sanctuary of the Baron Hirsch Synagogue, then located on Vollentine, November 28, 1966. As he had promised, Dr. Joe was there to "greet" all who attended as he continued to do "at each of our great concerts." Barenboim was followed by mezzo-soprano Joanna Simon ("Carly's sister) and drawing card Theodore Bikel in February. The fourth and final program of the



Dr. Joe Parker

exciting first year brought twenty-one year old Itzhak Perlman to Memphis; his as-always-seated-performance-because-of-an-earlier-bout-with-polio brought the Baron Hirsch audience to its feet. Dr. Joe had proved accurate when he heralded the season ticket at "the almost unheard of price of \$7.50!" Tickets for individual concerts were \$3.

The second season of Baron Hirsch's "Artists Ascending" concerts brought equally exciting artists to perform at the synagogue for the 1967-68 season: Soprano Roberta Peters, Duo pianists Ferrante and Teicher, and two Moscow Tchaikovsky International Competition winners, violinist Shmuel Ashkenasi and the incomparable pianist Misha Dichter. Certainly Dr. Joe and his committee were justified in raising the season tickets price to \$9.50!

The 1968-69 series was billed "The Greatest Ever," bringing five "superb artists in concert performance at an admission fee totally unmatched anywhere!" The ten dollars entitled subscribers to concerts by tenor Richard Tucker, guitarist Carlos Montoya, soprano Martha Schlamme, pianist Grigory Sokolov and the sensational twenty-two year old Israeli violinist Pinchas Zuckerman.

The 1969-70 season was an encore presentation of the favorites of the first three seasons: Bikel, Ferrante and Teicher, Perlman and Dichter. Season Five brought "Four Nights to Remember" with the fabulous entertainer Victor Borge and pianist Joseph Kalichstein, violinist Guy Lumia and

guitarist Charles Stein. After the sixth season which featured duo pianists Eden and Tamir and the Metropolitan Opera's John Alexander. Dr. Joe and his loyal, hard working committee decided to take a well-deserved sabbatical.

Dr. Joe began this sabbatical by accepting presidency of Baron Hirsch in 1973. The following year he joined the board of the Memphis Orchestra Society; in 1983 he elected its president. The multi-faceted pediatrician also served as President of the Tennessee Pediatric Society from 1980-2 and the Volunteer Placement Program in 1989. He somehow found the time to be an active member of the Board of the Jewish Community Center for more than 10 years. Whitney Smith recalled in a recent interview that when he moved to Memphis in the early 1980's. "Artists Ascending" was still very much alive in the minds and hearts of people." But it was one of the many of the original "Ascenders" who had become internationally acclaimed who provided the telling note to bring the series back. While having dinner with Dr. Joe and his wife after a 1986 performance with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Misha Dichter asked them about the series. When he was told that there had not been one for more than a dozen years, he chided the Parkers, pointing out that it was Baron Hirsch Synagogue's "obligation to make somewhat talented pianists like me world famous," that there was a "whole new generation of artists out there."

The Board of the Baron Hirsch Synagogue enthusiastically encouraged Dr. Joe chair the committee to bring "Artists Ascending: The New Generation" to its exciting newly built sanctuary on East Yates. Max Gurshinoff, the agent for the original series who had remained in contact with Dr. Joe, directed him to a new management concern, Young Concert Artists (YCA). The 1987-88 four-concert series featured Canadian cellist Ofra Harnoy early in her career, Russian violinist Ilya Grubert, pianist Philippe Bianconi and Soprano Kathyne Jennings.

The 1988-89 series showcased,

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among others, Israeli violinist Gil Shaham in March, only a month before he replaced Itzhak Perlman with the London Symphony Orchestra to "wild acclaim." (Perlman's pianist daughter Navah charmed the Memphis Artists Ascending audience in February of that auspicious year.) Shaham returned with the series the next year after Dr. Joe reminded his agent that Memphis had wanted him back before his sensational London appearance. 1990 marked the first of four series appearances of The Memphis Symphony Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Maestro Alan Balter.

Beginning in 1990 and continuing for the next three years, Baron Hirsch and Temple Israel co-sponsored the popular series. "It was Joe Parker's enthusiasm, experience, and organization that enabled such a mutually beneficial union of the two congregations to happen. The series successfully achieved its dual goals: interaction between members of the congregations while bringing outstanding music to the entire community," according to Temple Israel's Linda S. Kaplan who served as Dr. Joe's co-chair during the three years.

The first of the jointly sponsored concerts featured pianist Ory Shihor with the Memphis Symphony Chamber Orchestra, Maestro Alan Balter conducting. The Season's second concert brought Korean violinist Chee-Yun to the Temple Israel sanctuary, which Smith describes as "one of his five most exciting musical experiences in Memphis." She returned to the series in 1991 and has played with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra in concert. American flutist Bart Feller and Gil Shaham's gifted sixteen year old pianist sister Orli also gave memorable performances during this season.

The 1993-94 series brought the sponsorship back to Baron Hirsch in a new format. Re-named The Philip and Sarah Belz Artists Ascending Series, the three concerts had no admission charge, "the Belz gift of music to Memphis." These artists were found through, the New York Association for New Americans, the umbrella group which has helped to re-settle countless Russian Jews in the United States. A committee of well known American artists screen the immigrants and separate

them into performance levels. "Needless to say, we get the best," Dr. Joe adds, citing the season's well-received artists, violinist Anna Rabinova and pianists Arkady Figlin and Irina Morozova. The November 13, 1994 concert features the 14 year old Indiana pianist, Jonathan Biss, son of the violinist Miriam Fried. NYANA violinists Ella and Oleg Rutkovskiy will delight the Baron Hirsch audience in January, 1995.

Smith feels that the new format demonstrates Dr. Joe's flexibility, his keen "sense of what it takes financially, musically and spiritually to find a solution to problems in the 1990's art world." Dr. Joe has promised to continue to give Memphis audiences the best for the "next generation."

Dr. Joe's next generation of Memphians includes the thousands of children whose lives he has touched in his chosen profession as well as his own wonderful family. Shortly before he was graduated from medical school. Dr. Joe and Shirley Margolin were married.

Their five children are Memphian Michael, in real estate development in Memphis in partnership with brother Jeffrey who resides in New Jersey with his wife and three children but commutes every other week to Memphis. Michael is married and the father of two boys. Daughter Julie also lives in Memphis with her husband and three children. Drew, his wife and their two children live in Los Angeles where he, too, is in real estate as the youngest, Keith, who lives in Memphis with his wife. Their marriage ended in 1975. Dr. Joe and Lyda Ginsburg Morrison were married in 1979. Together they share a home filled with music and the happy sounds of their twelve grandchildren.

Dr. Joe feels "tremendously gratified that the series has, in some small way, contributed to the incredible success so many of the artists have achieved." He adds that he is "both challenged and excited by the opportunities of the new format provided by generosity of the Belz family." ✱



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### Our Contribution to Community Culture



DANIEL BARENBOIM  
Pianist  
November 28, 1966



JOANNA SIMON  
Mezzo-Soprano  
January 19, 1967



THEODORE BIKEL  
February 20, 1967



ITZHAK PERLMAN  
Violinist  
April 6, 1967

"ARTISTS ASCENDING" SERIES



## Yesterdays Letter - - - A Lesson for Today

*In our last issue of "Southern Jewish Heritage" (Winter-Spring) we published Joanne Brod's talk about her grandfather, Dr. Max Goltman, given at our program, "Our Fathers-The Doctors." So many of those in attendance wanted copies of the letter we promised to print it. Below is the paragraph from the article referring to the letter and the letter in its entirety.*

"He was a religious man and quoted from the Bible in many of his medical addresses. He blasted the editor of the Commercial Appeal for not explaining religious intolerance and persecution. He criticized the churches for teaching false doctrines. My uncles and some of their friends had been going to a summer camp in N.C. After 6 years of camping experience, the director wrote to say, and I quote, 'Because of their peculiar differences in beliefs and customs and unavoidable friction, they were no longer welcome at the camp which would be Gentile from then on.' I have the letter that Grandpa wrote back to him. It is a masterpiece, and I will read it to you now." ☆

March 6, 1919.

Mr. W. McK. Fetzer,  
Camp Sapphire,  
Brevard, N.C.

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of your communication of the 22nd utl. which please permit me to reply to. Silence might be the proper manner with which to treat such a missive were it not for the reminder that the world is just emerging from a cataclysm that threatened civilization the result of which, it seems, has not yet quite permeated the understanding of some whose desire it is to wave the bloody shirt of intolerance - the same intolerance that drove the Mayflower to the shores of America thus making possible the part this country played in making the world safe for democracy.

You thank me for sending you nice boys. Thanks. I, however, never applied to you or to any one connected with your camp for admission for my boys. To the contrary, the shoe is on the

other foot. Your representative here was always very assiduous in his efforts to get me to patronize your camp, and you know in your inmost heart that no child of mine would have gone to your camp this summer unless he had been asked to do so. Nevertheless, your letter of (advertisement) would lead one to the belief that these Jewish boys have been thrust upon you without knowledge or consent and that in this Year of Grace 1919 you have resolved, after mature deliberation, to put a stop to it.

What sort of an educator are you, anyway? But being an educator and talking about tradition like you do in your "pogrom" of the 22nd, I am constrained to remind you of some traditional facts which evidently have slipped your comprehension. Let me most reverently ask you what would you do with the application were Christ to seek admission to your camp? Is the question unfair?

Trampling a people that have done more for religion and therefore for civilization than any other people, past or present, under the iron heel of religious intolerance may do for a time, but just nihilism and finally social disintegration for "Justice pierceth even a mountain". But you have the answer when you think of ancient Rome and how it crumbled, of Egypt and how it decayed, of Greece and how it fell and of Spain that was and Spain that is. And bringing the issues right down to the present think of Germany, Austria, Russia, Roumania and Turkey.

When God gave us life he gave us liberty. Not Fourth of July oratorical liberty but sure enough religious liberty the first notes of which reverberated from the foot of Sinai when it was proclaimed that the whole world and worlds to come might hear it. "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage". What an inspiration, what an incentive to people oppressed, what a demand for justice and from Sinai it reverberated down the avenues of time to be reincarnated in the blood of the American Revolution when the stars and stripes were born, reincarnated again in the blood of the French Revolution which was a cleansing fire and out of which there rose a new France made safe for democracy.

An educator should know these things and teach them diligently instead of flaunting the red flag of religious intolerance. It is because you are an educator that I am taking so much of my valuable time, not with the idea of seeking reinstatement for me or mine - that would be impossible - but with the hope, faint though it be, of enlarging your vision.

Remember, sir, the Jew's mission is peace. My Bible does not teach me that because I am a Jew I have cornered the heavenly hereafter. No, not at all. To the contrary it teaches me that "the righteous ones among the Gentiles shall have a portion in the world to come." What can you expect, sowing, as you are, the worst seeds of unrighteousness?

The Man of Sorrow - the Great Christ - was a Jew. Jesus taught the religion of love. Jesus proclaimed the ancient Levitical doctrine "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", but the massacres and the "pogroms" go on. And as if in mockery of the heart rending of a persecuted people the organ peals out its tidings of "Peace and good will to men". But the joy and the peace and the good will is only in the cadences of the organ. It has not yet found a resting place in the conscience of those that falsely teach and preach the brotherhood of man. Verily do we say with Jesus, "Have mercy on them, Father, for they know not what they do."

The immortal Lincoln said, "A nation half free and half slave cannot endure". If history means anything this is true. The Jew has a mission to perform and with God's help he will perform it in spite of inquisitions, "pogroms" and red shirt unAmericanism. The Jew's mission is peace. An educator ought to know that and knowing it, if any conscience is left in him, he should hie himself away in spirit, at least, to Jerusalem - the cradle of liberty - and there among the dead held sacred in the memory of Jew and Gentile - "Among the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods" learn the true meaning of the keystone words of the Great Christ - the Levitical teaching as found in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", and having learned this you will have become a true Christian - humanized. ☆

Sincerely yours,  
(s) M. Goltman



**Gerber** *continued from page 1*  
 torney General.

Gerber's connection with Crump began in 1935 when Crump chose him to be City Attorney. This was an unusual appointment because at that time there were no other Jews in public office either as commissioners or as judges. Gerber began to go to Nashville regularly with the Shelby County delegation to the state legislature and he met with Crump at least weekly. All members of the Crump organization did not share the Bosses vehement opposition to anti-semitism. Some, in fact, thought there had been too much of Will Gerber in the affairs of the organization and could not understand Crump's loyalty to him. But Gerber fought for the organization with a fierceness equaled only by Crump himself. When Turner Catledge of the New York Times came to Memphis to investigate local voting practices and procedures, Gerber attacked him at the voting precincts, destroying his camera. When Catledge protested to Crump he was advised that, since Crump certainly did not wish "to see any of his friends get hurt" he should in the future stay away from dangerous places.

Most people who knew Will Gerber considered him to be shrewd with strong opinions and little tolerance for

opposing points of view. As a prosecutor, he had a bullying, boaring way of prosecuting a case. He would roar and then whisper, crescendo and diminuendo. He always had the unwavering support of Crump and Watkins Overton said of him, publically "No one ever dared to question the integrity of Will Gerber. There was no back door to the Attorney General's office and many resent him because as Attorney General, he steadfastly fought the forces of crime and evil without fear or favor".

Politically, Gerber served Crump well. He brought into the fold "the Main Street Jews and their financial support". He also served as a visible reminder to the community at large that anti-Semitism was discouraged by the Crump administration.

When Estes Kefauver won election as candidate for the United States Senate over the opposition of Crump, in 1948, Gerber announced his intention to retire and enter private law practice. The official biographer of Mr. Crump, William Miller, wrote that "although Gerber left the bruised sensibilities of those scaled by his invective, he also left a city completely clear of racketeering and loan sharks, ethical quacks and soothsayers. His objective was a clean city and he worked indefatigably to get

it. The gamblers and confidence men who fixed an eye on Memphis always found Gerber way ahead of them. He had a genuine devotion to Crump and when it appeared that he became a political liability he stepped down.

Will Gerber served his religious community as president of Baron Hirsch congregation from 1941 to 1949.

He was 26 years old when he was elected to the Board of Baron Hirsch in 1925. He dominated the Baron Hirsch scene for almost a third of a century. According to Sam Shankman's history of Baron Hirsch Cong., "Will Gerber brought the idea of a new and great synagogue before the congregation." He worked tirelessly and during a surprise dinner in his honor, Jan. 2, 1950, he announced that they were ready to build and said, "However, I think a professional builder should now take charge. Philip Belz, our Vice President, qualifies for that position. He should build the Holy House. He will be your President, but I shall be working by his side."

Will Gerber was seriously injured on Sept. 6, 1959, when his car was hit by a train on the Rozelle St. crossing adjacent to the Baron Hirsch Cemetery en route to the funeral of his friend, George Abraham. He never fully recovered from the accident and died July 12, 1965. ✪

*In 1941, a Memphis merchant, Z.H. Blumenfeld published in Yiddish, a book of poetry titled, "Garlands of Thought." Several of the poems were translated into English and comprise a portion of the book. This poem, translated by Rabbi Morris N. Taxon, appears on page 38 and 39 of this most interesting book of verse.*

#### A Bouquet — By H. Blumenfeld

*To Our Beloved William Gerber, To His Appointment Attorney General of Shelby County*

A gift I send you from my heart, dear Will,  
 A gift bouquet of tender sweetest bloom.  
 Your aura! how profuse its rays do fill!  
 Your dignity! the rarest rich perfume!

You built, progressing step by step, career  
 From childhood--glorious in manhood now--  
 As beacon ray from sun, luminous, clear,  
 With honor and respect--the friendship vow.

The name of Jew was part of your defense  
 With strength of character you now possess,  
 Against your people's doubters you waged tense  
 Protective battle with wholesome success.

In Synagogue, a Jew; in Court, a man  
 With principles that root in nature's Earth;  
 With us in Synagogue; in Court, a man  
 Who strove attaining what has been most worth.

Today you are my friend, and very near,  
 Who aches with pain, and shows the hurt of heart,  
 In whom there flames impassioned love so dear  
 The blood drops dripping deep from soul pierced dart.

And when you see your folk in their travail  
 In every foreign land in trials dire,  
 All sacrifice and what it would entail  
 You rush to make with blood ordeal through fire.

Like Ulysses willingly was lashed  
 To mast against the sirens' lure, you stand  
 Fast rooted to your people unabashed  
 Encysted by the hate producing gland.

Your rising star, as true eternal light,  
 Will guide your path upon the living ways  
 To glory in the laurel crown of Right  
 Enjoyed in happiness, through sunny days.

You love your people, love your native land  
 America the blessed and blessed remain,  
 Defending them against the Nazi band  
 That streams the world with blood and horror's pain.

You WILL is steeled to strengthen all your zest  
 For our America, by God's blessed dew,  
 Where there's no place for any Hitler-pest,  
 No boundary twist Christian and the Jew.



The temple would be doomed to the abandonment suffered by so many of its sisters in small Southern towns, but for the foresight of its twelve remaining members and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. A preservation agreement between the Museum and the congregation will preserve the building and its history. Area congregations will be invited to services and the building will be available for special events and community activities.

Next morning the services are again notable for their beauty of prayer and music. We are privileged this morning to have the sermon delivered by Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Typical of the blend of Southernness and Jewishness is the Cantor. His glorious voice singing the ancient music dampens many an eye. But he is a Cantor only by avocation. By vocation is a recognized Faulknerian scholar on the faculty of the University of Mississippi.

The skills of the weekend's planners are demonstrated immediately after the Saturday morning services. All morning thunder and rain hammering on the temple roof have punctuated the music and prayers. Now we are told from bimah that instead of fighting our way back to our cars in the rain and finding our way to Monmouth Plantation where a picnic lunch was planned, shuttle busses are to meet us outside the temple and take to an indoor shelter of The Cock of the Walk Restaurant--and a lively-adapted-for-inside treat of hearing the New Orleans Klezmer All Stars, a seven piece band incorporating traditional Yiddish-American music into classic jazz and ragtime. Wonderful!

Saturday afternoon presents too rich of a richness, and it is hard to decide which of three fascinating activities to select. An Introduction to Jewish Natchez and tour of Natchez Jewish Homes; A panel discussion on Natchez, Alsation Jewish Roots and the Southern Jewish Experience; or the slide show of a unique collection of Jewish historic photographs.

No matter which we choose, we can enjoy the Natchez Jewish Homes on a self-guided tour. With the flair and imagination which were hallmarks of the weekend planners, Homes which had been lived in by prominent Jewish families in the last part of the 1800's and first part of this century have been marked with colorful helium-filled balloons staked into the front yards with highly visible banners bearing the name of the family. We can drive ourselves easily around the old

part of town and find the ones we are interested in.

Saturday evening's banquet, again at Stanton Hall, is festive and elegant and marked by fine speakers. There is also a splendid film about the history of Natchez Jews. Next morning's tour of the cemetery is especially enriching for those seeking ancestors, and informative for anyone. With the merging of Jew and Gentile which seems to be part of the Natchez's mystique, there is a "Jewish Hill" in the general town cemetery, but also a few Jewish graves are mixed into the Christian area of older parts.

Nowhere is this merger of Jew and Southerner better expressed than by a statement written by Vicki Reikes Fox, Marcie Cohen's predecessor as Project Director at The Museum for the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi--our last stop of the weekend. Displayed in the Museum exhibit entitled "Images of Southern Life," it reads: "Jews have lived, worked and died here since the earliest days of this country, and here we remain today--distinct among Jews because we are Southerners and distinct among Southerners because we are Jews."

Throughout the Natchez weekend, this duality has been an underlying theme. Now at the museum there are concrete examples of it with photographs and placards. Where else but in the south would you find a Sukkah made of cotton and soybeans and cornshucks such as in Helena? Where else would you find a recipe for Big Mama's Kreplach but in Greenwood?

The Natchez weekend was made possible by many people in many organizations. Thanks go to Macy B. Hart and Marcie A. Cohen of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, and also to the people on the Natchez Jewish Homecoming Committee; the City of Natchez; the Historic Natchez Foundation; and the Natchez Convention and Visitors Bureau.

To them all I extend my personal thanks for an enriching and humbling experience. Although I had always known intellectually that I didn't just appear as a Southern Jew by the wave of magic wand, it took the Natchez weekend and the visit to the Museum to fill me with a wave of appreciation for and gratitude to those frightened, brave young men and women who were my ancestors and who left whatever was familiar and beloved to them in their oppressed European homelands to face whatever risks and dangers awaited them, along with the opportunities, in the goldeneh medina so I could be born a Southern Jew. ☆

## JHS Receives Book for Archives

Judy Peiser, Leonid Saharovici and David Schneider accepted a gift copy of the Philip Belz biography, "Life on a High Note", autographed by Mr. Belz and author, Margaret Sacks. The book was signed and presented during a special tribute program and book signing for Mr. Belz, held Sunday, August 28, 1994, at Baron Hirsch Synagogue. The program was highlighted by guest artist Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, the world renowned Hasidic folk singer from Israel. And, as part of the music celebration, Mr. Belz joined fellow flutist, Edwin Hubbard, in a flute duet. Over 700 people attended this unique affair. ☆





## Natchez Jewish Homecoming . . 1994

by Polly Cooper

The swell of the organ and the soaring notes of the flute signal that it is time for the service to begin. 250 voices become suddenly quiet. On most Friday nights there would be no organ, no flue, and a maximum crowd of six people led by a lay reader would comprise the congregation of Natchez's Temple B'nai Israel. But this is Friday night, April 29, the beginning of the memorable weekend of the Natchez Jewish homecoming.

The people sitting here this evening have come from as far away as Massachusetts, and California, but most are Southerners with Natchez connections--feeling the unique blend of Southernness and Jewishness that gives us all a sense of belonging. We have come to the temple directly from a cocktail buffet, replete with Southern hospitality, held at historic Stanton Hall, and we are anticipating a weekend full of history, sociability and learning. We are not to be disappointed.

The organizational skills and thoughtful planning that have gone into this weekend are apparent from the very beginning. The service for Friday evening is beautiful--simultaneously inspiring reverence, tears and laughter as it blends carefully selected prayers, beautiful music, and a fine sermon with the informality of announcements about activities delivered with charm and humor.

The temple itself is a little gem. Freshly painted in a soft shade of grey, it has handsome stained glass windows, by gentle lighting with fixtures that preserve the 19th century images of gas and candle light--AND an efficient air condi-



Photo courtesy of The Museum of The Southern Jewish Experience

tioning system! It has an air of having been loved for many years. Which, indeed, it has been--since it was rebuilt (with contributions from the non-Jewish community as well as its members) in 1905 after the original structure burned in 1903.

The congregation itself started as a Burial Society in 1845, became a congregation in 1861, and its first temple was dedicated in 1872. Downstairs is a large social hall where, after the services, we are treated to an exhibition of photographs and historical notes as well as an Oneg Shabbat that could only be produced by a Southern Jewish Sisterhood. ✨

Please see Natchez, page 7



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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