



SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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WINTER - SPRING 1996

Rabbi James Wax • • •

by Dr. Selma Lewis

Community Service • Civil Rights Supporter • Mental Health Advocate

A Devoted Servant to His Congregation

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



Rabbi James Wax

The philosophy of Rabbi James Wax is closely allied with that of the sixteenth-seventeenth century poet, John Donne, who said: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. . ."

Wax had been a part of mankind ever since his boyhood in the small town of Herculaneum, Missouri. His father, Morris, an immigrant, was a merchant who, while not well educated himself, became a member of the local Board of Education. He was asked to run for a position in the state legislature but declined, citing his lack of formal education as a handicap. Morris Wax like many other immigrants, regarded the United States as the golden land of opportunity. He taught his children, James and Leon, that service to the community was an obligation. It is a

lesson they never forgot. As the only Jewish family in their town, Rabbi Wax said he "always felt as one with the Christian people. I make no distinction between people by virtue of their religion. That helps explain my involvement in community matters."

Jimmy Wax had intended to be a lawyer until he heard a sermon delivered in St. Louis by Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman, who spoke of the social justice message of Judaism. This message touched such a responsive chord in him that from that moment, he decided to be a rabbi. When he arrived at the Hebrew Union College, he was asked how he thought he would get along there. He replied, "I've never lived among Jews before, but I think I'll like it." His growing-up experience had cast him in a Christian world where he had felt very comfortable. It led him to think always of Jews and Christians together. Much of his ministry promoted that ideal.

When Wax was installed as rabbi of Temple Israel, he said, "This pulpit shall ever be concerned with the problems of life. Whatever affects human beings, children of God, shall be of utmost concern." He adhered to that message, convinced that religion and morality are synonymous. He said, "By that I mean that one lives according to the old virtues and cares about others; tries to help alleviate the conditions of poverty and discrimination that deny individuals the opportunity to live a fuller, richer life."

It was not by words alone, however, but by his example that Wax conveyed his message. His service to the community included significant work for the mentally ill. He was appointed by

Annual Meeting, May 26

The Annual meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South will be held May 26, 2:30 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center. The business portion of the meeting will be the election of officers and directors. The nominating committee chaired by Gloria Felsenthal with Marjean Kremer, Marcia Bicks, and Dessie Sewel will present the following slate of nominees:

Officers

President-Tom Stern
Vice-President-Summer Levine
Vice-President-Lynne Mirvis
Secretary-Marjean Kremer
Treasurer-Mannie Ettingoff
Legal Counsel-Stephen Biller
Historian-Shirley Feibelman
Editor-David Schneider

Directors

Abe Kriegel (1 year remaining)
Emily Baer (1 year remaining)
Marcia Bicks (renominate for 1 year)
Berkley Kalin (renominate for 1 year)

Nominees for Two Year Term

Joe Felt Buck Boshwit
Laurie Scheidt Michael Parker
Rabbi Micah Greenstein

Honorary Officers

Helen Wax
Marx Borod

Our guest speaker for the meeting will be Abe Kriegel, Professor of History at the University of Memphis. His topic will be "A New York Jew in the Land of Elvis"

Please mark your calendars to join us for this important and enlightening meeting.

Sunday • 2:30 • May 26

Refreshments will be served.

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JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986
P.O. BOX 17304, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38187

President's Message • • • •



Steven Biller

In one of my first President's messages, I characterized my Administration as one of transformation. That is to say that our Society was going to grow in its membership, in the number of active participants, and to publish our book about the Jews of Memphis (1840-1960). Thanks to Joel Felt, Marsha Bicks and Sumner Levine, our membership has grown and is more representative of our Jewish population. Our programs and the quality of programming has matured to the delight of all, without exception. Our book is finally ready to go to the publisher or to be otherwise published and made available to the public. Shirley Feibelman continues her fine work as the keeper of the Archives. Sumner and Marsha have made arrangements with the Jewish Community Center for additional housing of and preservation of Memphis Jewish history. Congratulations to all.

The continued viability of our Society and that of our sister societies is more important and necessary as never before. A recent event in New York in December, 1995, involved the killing of seven people at Freddy's Fashion Mart, a Jewish owned business, supports this observation. The rhetoric that preceded this incident involved the use of the word "blood sucker", a favorite buzz word of Louis Farrakhan, to build up his Million Man march. Louis Farrakhan used this word to refer to exploitative merchants, Jewish, Koreans, Vietnamese and Arabs. What is interesting is that this word "blood sucker" was used in the Middle Ages regarding the blood libel.

Another term which appeared in the rhetoric preceding this December, 1995 event was the word "interloper". In that incident, the accusation suggested that Jewish merchants, among others, have come into Harlem to take advantage of the black population. This term "interloper" also has a long anti-Semitic history. Freud observed that in the psychology of anti-Semitism, Jews are regarded as "foreigners; even though they may well have been the original

inhabitants".

These echoes of medieval anti-Semitism cannot be ignored. While the United States has never had a persistent historical pattern of anti-Semitism, it is only through the preservation of written and oral history can we preserve our contributions to the evolution of civilization. Who else will teach our contemporaries, Jew and non-Jew, and our children and grandchildren? "What is past is prologue." ☆

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
LEGAL COUNSEL	Marx Borod
HISTORIAN	Shirley Feibelman
EDITOR	David Schneider

DIRECTORS

Lynnie Mirvis, Emily Baer, Abe Kriegel, Joel Felt, Berkeley Kalin, Don Levy, Rabbi Micah Greenstein, Rachael Shankman, Harriet Alperin, Allen Israel

HONORARY OFFICERS

Lester, Sewel, Laura Spiegler, Elias Goldsmith, Harry Jaffe, Abe Schwab, Judge Irving Strauch, Harriet Stern, Leonid Saharovici, Gloria Felsenthal, David Schneider

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Gloria Felsenthal, Marjean Kremer, Dessie Sewel

COMMITTEE PORTFOLIO

Membership:	Harriet Stern, Sumner Levine
Programs:	Marcia Bicks, Joel Felt
Publication:	David Schneider

Robert T. Goldsmith Dies

Robert T. Goldsmith, 74, was well known as a Jewish communal leader and a Memphis businessman. He was active on the boards of many civic and Jewish Organizations. He played a large role in the establishment and growth of the Goldsmith Civic Garden Center and was a founder and President of Goldsmith Foundation. He was a past President of the Memphis Jewish Federation and was instrumental in the building of Temple Israel at its present location.

We send our condolences to our members Sylvia Marks, his sister and Elias J. Goldsmith, Jr., his brother and to the entire family.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Fredrica Saharovici, former Secretary of the Jewish Historical Society, as she becomes the newest President of Memphis Hadassah. She was installed at a delightful Luncheon Meeting, Sunday, May 19, at the Memphis College of Art.

William A. Lowenberg Dies at Age 93

In the July, 1991, issue of Southern Jewish Heritage (Vol. 4, No. 2) our biographical sketch of William Lowenberg cast him as one who "set standards for community leadership". From the Jewish Service Agency, the B'nai B'rith Home for the Aged, Temple Israel to St. Frances Hospital, East Memphis YMCA, Riverview Kansas Day Care Center, he was involved and committed to their needs. In 1974, he received the NCCJ Humanitarian Award when only one person was so honored. The selection committee stated "No Memphian had been a more lively force for good in the community. His championing of causes for all people - blacks, youth, the sick and aged - were particularly important in the selection process." (Press Scimitar, 11-16-71). He will be missed by all of us.

A Gift To Vicksburg

by Julius Herscovici

Julius Herscovici, a native of Romania where he received his BS degree in chemistry, moved to Mississippi 22 years ago. He worked as a concrete engineer and superintendent for Grand Gulf Nuclear Station until his retirement from the Bechtel Power Corp.

Herscovici is an amateur historian and has published several articles on religion in the Vicksburg Post, a local newspaper. His hobby is photography.

Vicksburg, Mississippi was incorporated as a city in 1825. However, long before that date, Vicksburg was a place where Jewish people worked and lived. Even before 1817, when Mississippi was admitted into the Union, the site now called Vicksburg had a Jewish presence. Numerous testimonies indicate that the few Jews who lived in the area were active in the life of the community. A charity hospital, Kuhn Hospital, was named after a Jewish philanthropist, and a subdivision in the inner city, Bottom Marcus is known by the name of a Jewish family.

Less known to most is the beautiful ornamental fountain erected in downtown Vicksburg, as a gift from a Jewish benefactor, Louis Bloom. The fountain, still in good condition, continues to function and is located in the original emplacement at the corner of Monroe and Crawford Streets, across from the Municipal Rose Garden.

A long time resident of Vicksburg, Louis Bloom, died in new Orleans. However, in his will, he remembered the city of his youth and provided a sum of money for the construction of a decorative fountain. The provision of his will is as follows: **"I direct that my Executors select, purchase and have erected in my name, & memory, an Ornamental Fountain, to be presented under the conditions hereinafter named, to the City of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Should the City have such a Fountain, then I direct my Executors, shell make a substitute gift instead. For this purpose I direct them to spend the sum of (\$6500) sixty-five Hundred Dollars, provided that they the City of Vicksburg give a suitable site within the City for the construction of the gift & agree to maintain it in good repair**

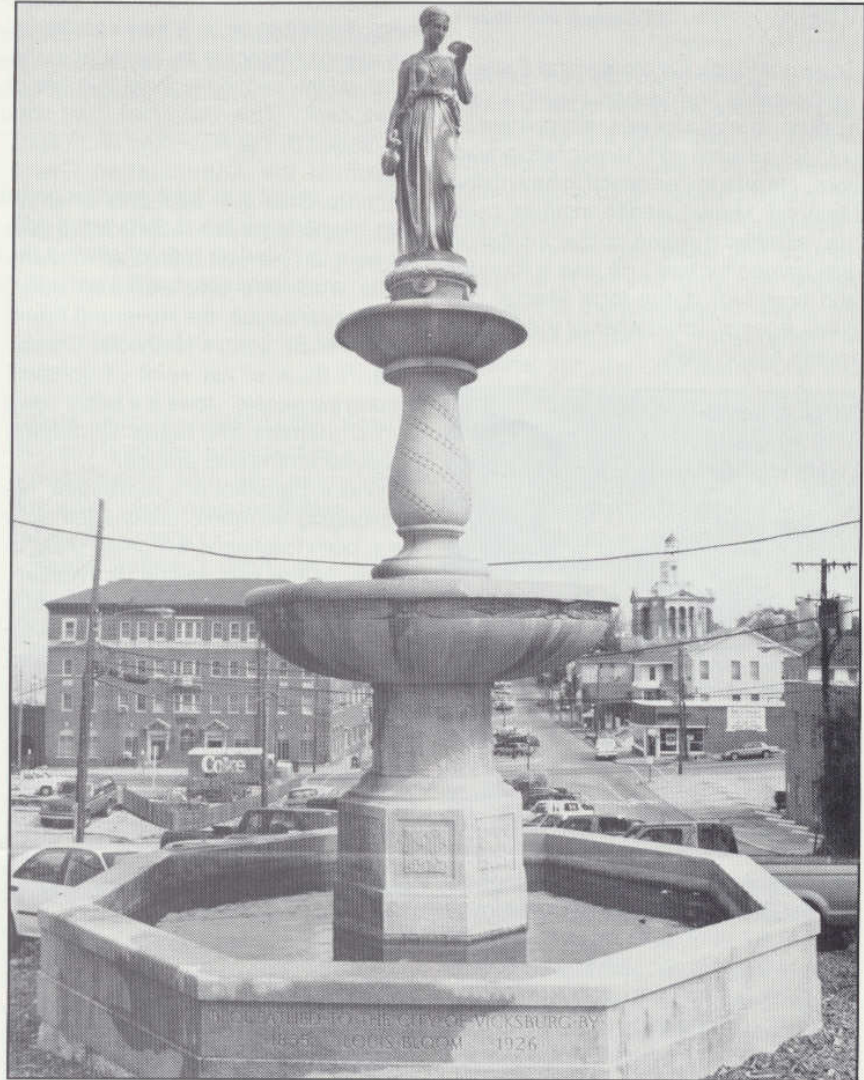


Photo Courtesy of Vicksburg Press

and condition. If the City of Vicksburg is unwilling to comply with either of the conditions named, this gift shall be void."

The amount of money donated was significant for the time in which it was presented. To place the value of the gift in its proper perspective, one may look at prices advertised in the local Vicksburg newspaper in the year 1927. The price of a man's work shirt was 68 cents, a man's dress shirt was priced at 89 cents and a man's flannel shirt could be bought for \$1.15. A pair of oxford shoes for men was \$2.95 and the same style for women was priced at \$1.95.

On March 21, 1927, at the Vicksburg City Hall the City Council held its regular meeting to consider this matter. Present were the Honorable W.J. Hossley, mayor of Vicksburg and the two aldermen,

Hamilton and Biedenharn along with the city clerk, S.S. Patterson. After the city's leaders conducted their routine business, attorney M.D. Landau appeared before the board and presented a resolution to accept the offer to build an ornamental fountain. The text of this resolution reads as follows: **"A resolution accepting an offer by Jack Bloom and S. Walter Stern executors of the last will of Louis Bloom, formerly of the City of Vicksburg, in the State of Mississippi, now deceased, to erect in the said city an ornamental fountain in accordance with the provision of the item fourteen of said will, and authorizing the mayor of the said City of Vicksburg to make and enter into with the said executors, and the city clerk to attest, an**

Please see Gift, Page 7

Governor Frank Clement to the State of Tennessee's first Mental Health Commission, to which he was reappointed by both Republican and Democratic governors. He was instrumental in having the Memphis Mental Health Institute built; the Activities Building of that institution was named for him. He was a founder and president of the local Mental Hygiene Agency, forerunner of the Mental Health Association.



State Mental Health Board honoring Rabbi Wax upon retirement from Commission.

As early as 1956, long before it was popular to be a civil rights advocate, the local black newspaper, the Tri-State Defender honored Rabbi Wax for promoting race relations. County commissioner and longtime civil rights activist Dr. Vasco Smith spoke of him as "one of the very early individuals in the city of Memphis concerned with human relations." Smith considered him a pioneer in "bringing together better relations between blacks and whites in the city of Memphis."

Among other honors which Rabbi Wax received were the Distinguished Citizenship Award given by the Newspaper Guild of Memphis, the Outstanding Citizen's Award given by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Service to Mankind Award given in 1967 by the Sertoma Club, Human Relations Award given him in 1978 by the National Conference of Christians and Jews' The Public Service Award conferred by the Jewish Chautauqua Society in 1978, and the Ministerial Alliance of Memphis and Shelby County's Outstanding Award in 1978. All of these awards for courageous activities in the civil rights area reflect Wax's untiring efforts to improve relations between all peoples, regardless of race or creed.

The integrity of Rabbi Wax was understood and respected by the

community. When twenty-five people were elected to write a new charter for the city of Memphis in the 1960's, he received the second highest number of votes cast. This universal trust was expressed by the Reverend Nicholas I. Vieron of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Memphis when he said, "Rabbi Wax was rabbi to more than his people. He was a teacher to many of us who love and admired him." Another colleague, the Reverend Frank McRae of St. John's Methodist Church said, "I think of his spirit of goodwill among the people. Jews are better Jews and Christians are better Christians because Jimmy was around."

Wax's parishioners remember his challenging sermons, punctuated by a long, bony forefinger, exhorting them to live up to the best ideals of Judaism, encouraging them to make the world a better place for all its people. It is for this definition of religion, that "it has to be related to the issues of life and society. . . with. . . how we treat one another as human beings," that he is often remembered. Accepting this definition as his own personal moral code, Wax led his life according to the strict standards and discipline that such a code demands. Delivering a eulogy at his funeral, his friend Dr. Richard C. Hertz described Wax as "a walking human sermon and a man who personifies the verse, 'Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself'". Some men built in steel, some built in stone, some built in glass, some built in concrete. Rabbi Wax built in human hearts."

Love of learning and respect for history were present when he helped instigate the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South. He was himself the author of History of the Memphis Jews, 1860-1865 and Our First Century, 1854-1954, a history of Temple Israel written



In His Office At Temple Israel

with his wife, Helen Goldstrom Wax. It had been his intention after he retired to write a history of all the religions in Memphis. He felt it would be an appropriate gift for him to make to the city that had been so kind to him. Unfortunately, illness prevented his completing this task.

The confirmation class service of Temple Israel of 1977, was dedicated to Rabbi Wax, was entitled "A Son of the Prophets," and said, "Through the years he has spoken and lived as a man of the prophets, urging and inspiring so many to seek to do the same." The themes the class chose were selected from Wax's sermons from the years 1937-1977. While still a student rabbi in the dark days of 1937, Wax said, "The Jew has a duty, to save civilized values and to hold on to the moral standards now trampled upon. He is fighting for man and for God. . . Out of our rich Jewish heritage, out of its experiences, out of its sorrows and sufferings, out of its triumphs and achievements, we can learn the lesson of Abraham, which made him unafraid and which can give us the vision and courage to face the future, confident that in a universe created by God, man can never be crushed. . . What then shall we do now? Shall we shiver and tremble because we too may soon be led to the slaughter? . . . Let us, though the madness rages about us, though the mobs howl, let us articulate the ideals of our tradition and thus fulfill the mission of our faith. . . Let us hear our fate and our destiny, not like whimpering cowards, but like sons of the prophet."

In a 1967 sermon Wax said, "We Jews, of all people, should be the very last to harbor prejudices and deny men the right to a full life. . . I would remind you that the phrase 'great society' was not created by a political leader. . . The concept of the great society in which every man can live as befits a human being was first conceived by the prophets of Israel. 'Let justice well up as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream' is not a Madison Avenue slogan, but a moral mandate of our faith."

If Rabbi Wax was "a son of the prophets," he was especially the son of the prophet Amos, quoted in the passage above, whose message of social justice he considered the noblest

Please see Wax, Page 6

This is the response of the Editorial Committee of "Southern Jewish Heritage" to correspondence received from Stephen W. Graffman of Potomac, Maryland. Mr. Graffman's letters addressed an earlier newsletter article.

"Courage consists not in hazarding without fear, but being resolutely minded in a just cause. The brave man is not he who feels no fear, for that were stupid and irrational, but he whose noble soul subdues its fear, and bravely dares the danger nature shrinks from."

Ferrol

The 1995 winter issue of this newsletter (Vol. 8, No. 1) featured an article about Rabbi Arie Becker, spiritual leader of Beth Shalom Synagogue in Memphis (1959-1979). Rabbi Becker and eighteen Conservative rabbinic colleagues elected to fly to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, during the height of the racial turmoil, to make a statement by their physical presence. In the course of a few days' stay, marching to rallies and speaking in churches, the rabbis demonstrated the courage of their convictions in an era of fire bombs, police dogs, and violence.

A letter from the son of Rabbi Milton L. Grafman, leader of Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham for thirty-four years and Rabbi Emeritus for twenty years prior to his death in 1995, points out that there was no shortage of courage in the local Jewish community during those troubled days.

Stephen W. Grafman writes, not to denigrate Rabbi Becker and the other rabbis who came to Birmingham, but to set the record straight about his father and the other members of the Jewish community who met the rabbinic party at the Birmingham airport. He describes the members of the Birmingham delegation as "committed champions of civil rights." While it is true that the delegation objected to the presence of the "outsiders," he points out that this stance should not be confused with a lack of courage. For many years Rabbi Grafman had preached justice and equal rights from his pulpit. In January 1963, he joined with ten members of the Alabama clergy to publicly proclaim in protest of George Wallace's "segregation forever" speech: "No person's freedom is safe unless every person is equally protected. . . Every

human being is created in the image of God and is entitled to respect as a fellow human being with all basic rights, privileges, and responsibilities which belong in humanity."

Rabbi Grafman's efforts on behalf of civil rights have been recognized both in Birmingham and nationally. Birmingham's first black mayor, Richard Arrington, praised Rabbi Grafman's "long record of working to bring about change and a reputation for being concerned about justice." The Birmingham News credited Grafman as a voice for justice in the Birmingham community for half a century. his obituary appeared in newspapers across the nation. The New York Times obituary was headlined, "Milton Grafman, 88 Rabbi Active in Civil Rights Struggle."

In his letter to the Southern Jewish Heritage, Mr. Grafman strongly objects to the use of the word fear in association with the delegation of Birmingham Jews which met the Conservative rabbis at the airport and urged them to leave. Were they fearful? They had every right to be. Among them was Rabbi Grafman who had endured threatening phone calls, including a bomb threat to his synagogue. Yet, he resided in his Birmingham home with his family, as his son says, "24 hours a day, 7 days a week," speaking his convictions publicly and often.

For more information about this giant of Southern rabbis watch for the upcoming publication of The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights From the Late 19th Century to the Modern Era published by the University of Alabama Press. Rabbi Grafman is the subject of a chapter by Terry Barr, Professor at Presbyterian College, Clinton, South Carolina.

Neighborhood House

Continued from Page 8

that she was also tough enough to break up his crap games in the adjacent alley.)

During the Depression, Jewish Neighborhood House was threatened with closure by its funding agent, the Community Fund, which argued that it should no longer have this support because it served only the Jewish segment of the population. Angrily the Jewish Federation threatened to withdraw from the Community Fund, and since that was not acceptable, Jewish Neighborhood House remained in the budget for many years. Miss Goldbaum's salary for that year, however, was reduced; but, as Dr. Selma Lewis adds from her research on the House, members of the board of Jewish neighborhood House reached into their own pockets so that Miss Goldbaum would not have to take a cut in income. While Jewish Neighborhood House did predominately serve the Jewish population, it actually also served an ethnic mix of Irish, Greeks and Italians particularly in language classes, the band and the sportsman's club. What was more, no one remembers any ugly words or feelings of prejudice between the Jewish families and the others in the Pinch.

As time went on, many of the programs, including such health related ones as immunizations and a clinic for babies, were assumed by public agencies. By 1948, the Jewish population had moved out, a poor black population had moved in and Federation ended its sponsorship. For the Jews, the Jewish Neighborhood House had accomplished its purpose as a bridge between the old and the new, providing acculturation and socialization, and enabling the Jews of the Pinch to reaffirm their identity in a new land.

Neighborhood House continued to serve the neighborhood children and some of the volunteers continued to work in programs which focused on the population in Lauderdale Courts. In 1971 the first licensed day care center in the city was set up there. Neighborhood House faced its demise only when the building, a second location next door to the original building, fell to urban renewal. Without a permanent location, the programs soon ended.

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Devotion To Members -- His Primary Focus

by Helen G. Wax

sentiment of Judaism. When he died in October, 1989, an editorial in The Commercial Appeal quoted an earlier editorial published on the occasion of his 1977 Brotherhood Award of the Memphis Round Table of the national Conference of Christians and Jews, when they said that Wax had been "in the forefront of every community effort to bring tolerance, understanding, and problem-solving into the maelstrom of intolerance, division, and misunderstanding. He has never been afraid to take the risks that such leadership demands. . . Nobody is more a part of the fabric of the community than James was." With his death, a tear appeared in that fabric. ☆



As Grandfather
One of His Greatest Joys

Although he is known by the public as a "Social Justice Rabbi," I know that the primary focus of Rabbi James A. Wax's life was on his role as Rabbi of Temple Israel and its members.

From the first day he came to Memphis in 1946, he was proud of and respected the history and traditions of the Temple, and one of the high-lights of his early years in Memphis was the Temple's 100th Anniversary Celebration. During the year 1954-55, he, with others of course, planned monthly programs with nationally known speakers and other events to recognize the past and inspire the future of the congregation. For this Anniversary he steeped himself in research and wrote Our First Century to be given to the members.

What I think he would have considered another highlight of his rabbinate was the dedication, years later, of the new home of Temple Israel on Massey Road. With pins on a city map, he had for years followed the move eastward of the members, and he realized that the religious future necessitated more adequate facilities closer to the people. He encouraged the lay leaders and general membership to undertake the formidable task that ultimately culminated in the present magnificent place of worship, study and gathering.

Basically he was dedicated to the preservation of Judaism through enriching the Jewish life of his members; thus he added the Kiddish service and reading of the Torah on Friday evening services. He vehemently encouraged home observance of Chanuka and Passover rituals. He provided lectures on Judaism for adults, but since he thought he could influence 16 year olds even more effectively than adults, his favorite duty was teaching confirmation classes.

Rabbi Wax's devotion to the members was boundless. Regardless of other activities, the members came first; seven days a week were devoted to hospital and home visiting and personal service to individuals. On vacations, while "on the road" he called the Temple Director every evening to check on events at home, and many times I recall he left the family where ever they were to take a train or plane to serve a member of his Temple family.

In his lifetime he knew the low roads of disappointment and failures as well as the mountain tops of achievement and happiness; but I know he did his best to carry out all the facets of the role to which he had dedicated his life — to be a rabbi in every sense of that word. ☆

Neighborhood House

Continued from Page 5

In 1986, the three trustees of the Jewish Neighborhood House, Doris Kiersky, Larry Adler and Jean Waxman decided to use the accrued funds to establish a scholarship program for the children of recent Russian Jewish immigrants. Concluding her talk, Dr. Baer rhetorically asked, "Who would have suspected that nearly 100 years after the first European Jewish immigrant looked for the Goldina Medina in a small neighborhood on the Mississippi River, the spirit of the Neighborhood House would be continuing to aid the fulfillment of the American dream by helping to provide an education for the children of a whole new generation of Jewish 'greeners' in Memphis, Tennessee?" ☆

SJHS Plans 21st Conference

October 25-26, 1996 will find the Southern Jewish Historical Society Conference in Miami Beach, Florida. The headquarters hotel will be the beautifully refurbished Shore Club Hotel conveniently located at 1901 Collins Avenue. After a Welcome Reception at 2:30 p.m., a bus will take the delegates to the Sanford Ziff Jewish Museum of Florida hosts for the Conference. The Museum is the home of THE MOSAIC EXHIBIT. The three day meeting will include a number of speakers and activities of historical interest to all. Complete details and a program will be available in June. For advance reservations call 1-800-327-8330 or 305-672-0303 or fax 305-672-6287. ☆

Big Mistreatin' Bittersweet'n Blues

Anna Olswanger has written a children's story to accompany a piece of music written by her father, Beryl Olswanger. The serial rights have been sold to Cricket, a children's magazine with a circulation of 100,000. The story introduces Beryl Olswanger and an old Jewish neighborhood of Memphis to all of these children. She sent the artist photographs for reference, and she ended up using the actual photographs in her illustrations. Pictures on the wall shown on two pages of the story are actually Ms. Olswanger's father's siblings and parents. The magazine is available from Cricket Magazine Group at 1-800-827-0227 or 815-223-1500. It is a delightful story and Ms. Olswanger has sent a copy for the JHS Archives. ☆

Dr. Selma Lewis Honored by NCCJ

Our own Dr. Selma Lewis received the Humanitarian Award at the 35th Annual Awards Dinner of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Dr. Lewis, known best to our Historical Society members as a tireless worker, writer and regular contributor to "Southern Jewish Heritage", was honored along with William S. "Bill" Crawford, Bishop William Graves and Edward W. Reed, M.D., April 25, 1996 at the Peabody Hotel. Selma joins a growing list of Jewish leaders who have been honored with this prestigious award. We are proud to reprint the following presentation from the Humanitarian Awards Program.

Selma Lewis is a quiet modest woman who has spent her adult years making life better for our fellow citizens. Always concerned with the quality of life for children, Selma helped start a fund that allowed the Memphis Board of Education to feed needy school children. This did not happen easily, but with patience and determination, Selma and others were able to overcome a lengthy legal battle. This program proved to be extremely successful, and today the Federal School Lunch Program continues to accomplish the goals of providing lunches for children who otherwise would go hungry. Selma served as the first female President of the Jewish Family Service; she championed the Memphis Coalition for the

Homeless and has co-founded the Mental Health Society of Memphis and Shelby County. She organized the Community Family Conference and was co-editor of the "Directory of Mental Health Services of Memphis and Shelby County." She has co-authored "Historic Black Memphians," and "The Angel of Beale Street: A Biography of Julia Ann Hooks." She is also working on a History of the Memphis Jewish Community. Selma has also served diligently for the literacy Council as Board Chair, helping to insure positive growth and leadership. In 1994, she was the recipient of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Human Rights Award at the University of Memphis; and in 1993, she was awarded the Memphis Rotary Club Service Award. Selma is not done yet; she is serving currently as Board Chair for Facing History and Ourselves and is a member of the Synergy Foundation. Selma has always led with grace, charm and compassion, a simple smile and the heart of a Lioness. ✨

In our last issue we printed the names of the 21 previous Jewish leaders who have received this award. Also, we explained that the JHS would like to acquire National Conference Programs for each of the years honoring these fine people so we can build a complete set for our archives. If you can contribute a copy of any of these programs, please contact Harriet Stern, David Schneider or Leonid Saharovici.

Gift

Continued from Page 3

agreement with the reference to the said fountain."

At the same meeting, the City Council designated a plot on Monroe Street as the location to erect the proposed fountain, which in the minutes of the meeting is called "memorial". A sketch of the approved location was attached to the minutes of the meeting and the City of Vicksburg agreed to underwrite all the cost associated with preparation of the site. The groundwork needed was indicated in detail, including the filling, grading and sodding of the terrace. Also, it was agreed that the City of Vicksburg would pay the cost and expenses for the material and installation of the system of pipes needed to supply water and for the drainage of the water resulting from functioning of the fountain. The City also agreed to pay in perpetuity the cost of electricity to run and light the fountain from sunset to 11PM. The minutes of the same meeting contained the plans, drawings and specifications for the ornamental fountain which was to be constructed by Albert Weiblan & Granite Company of New Orleans. After its completion, the fountain was to become the property of the City of Vicksburg. The fountain consists of three distinct parts: the catch basin, the pedestal and a statue. The statue is cast tin bronze,

but all other parts are made of granite. An octagonal basin with a diameter of about 10 feet and a depth of 3 feet serves to catch the water flowing from the statue. The length of each side of the octagon is fifty-two inches. On the side of the basin in engraved capital letters: "BEQUEATHED TO THE CITY OF VICKSBURG, BY • 1855 • LOUIS BLOOM • 1926 •". The pedestal consists of six parts, each distinct in shape and height. The statue, about 5 feet tall, represents Hebe the Greek goddess. Her right arm fully extended down the side of her body and her hand holding a pitcher, Hebe stands looking to the west. Her left arm, bent upright, holds a cup from which water flows.

In Greek mythology Hebe served as cup bearer for the gods until one day she tripped and fell. After her accident she was replaced by another goddess. Hebe also personified the goodness of youth and of spring.

It is not known whether this statue was selected by Louis Bloom the donor or by his executors. It is also not known why this particular figure of Greek mythology was selected.

The fountain was very well constructed and maintenance by the city has assured that the fountain will be kept in good condition. In 1982, an unexpected cold spell caused a water line going toward



Courtesy of The Vicksburg Post

the top of the statue to burst. However, once the line was repaired the fountain was put back in service. Consequently, some of the original pipes have been replaced with copper lines.

In Judaism, giving is not only a moral duty but also a religious commitment. Giving fosters moral and religious feelings. According to the Kabbalah, by giving, a person enters into a relation with the world of the divine. Regardless whether the donor acts for love or fear of God, he achieves the unity with God. In the long Jewish history, generosity is viewed as one of the best ways to express the Jewishness of a person. In Pirke Avot 2:5, Hillel wrote: "Do not separate yourself from the community." The generosity of Louis Bloom's gift, speaks not only of his Jewish roots and traditions but also of his love for Vicksburg. ✨

Reminiscing about

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

Notes From Our 1996 February Meeting

Reminiscence was the order of the day and Jewish Neighborhood House the topic, as the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South met on Sunday, February 18, at the Jewish Community Center for a talk by Dr. Emily Angel Baer, followed by personal anecdotes from individuals with roots in the Pinch.

Jewish neighborhood House was established in 1912 at 291 market Street in the heart of the Pinch to serve the educational and social needs of the poor and emigrant Jewish community which lived within its 8-10 square block area. Through a variety of programs and activities for all ages, the House provided a setting in which these Jews, primarily from Russia and Galicia, could become Americanized without losing their Orthodox religious identity.

Initially, H.P. Oppenheimer, chairperson of the philanthropic division of the Salon Circle, had suggested that all local charities consider Neighborhood House their permanent home. The Reform Jews of Temple Israel, earlier arrivals and now well established citizens, gave their support financially through the Federation and personally through volunteerism to make the programs a success. English classes, citizenship, and even such basic hygiene as brushing teeth were offered along with games, handicrafts, Scouts, dance, music, crochet and embroidery, manicure and later dressmaking.

The educational emphasis was strong. A full kindergarten program was set up, story hours for children were well attended, and the library in 1917 could boast of an average daily checkout of 90 books.

Programs continually changed somewhat with the times, and numerous clubs were organized. the year 1923 found nutritious

lunches being made at the House and delivered to neighborhood elementary children at the nearby Christine School. During World War II, the Jewish Neighborhood House had war gardens, sold war bonds and stamps, contributed to the War Sufferers Fund, and collected clothing for the needy overseas.

But for many, including several who spoke at the meeting, Jewish Neighborhood House was most loved and valued as their social center. "It was my entertainment center," stated Rosalee Abraham, who never felt poor but only knew the pleasures of growing up in the Pinch. In the safe confines of Jewish Neighborhood House, the teens from the neighborhood and others who came from elsewhere in Memphis and the outlying areas socialized and learned to dance at the Saturday night canteens. many a romance took place there, according to the form Hebrew Watchman editor, Leo Goldberger; and wedding receptions there often followed.

Entertainment for the entire family was designed to keep all members within the fold of the community. For this purpose there were regularly and within the memories of several present at the meeting, a fall theatrical, family picnics, a Hanukkah minstrel, and a Buster Brown party for the smaller children.

Particular tribute was repeatedly and affectionately given to Miss Miriam Goldbaum, a trained settlement worker hired in 1916 after initial problems with the running of the House. For many years she was the guiding spirit of Jewish Neighborhood House. Characterized by Dr. Norman Shapiro as quiet, unassuming and dynamic, Miss Goldbaum was lovingly credited with making the House the warm, encouraging environment that it was. (Dr. Shapiro also attested to the fact

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