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Baron Hirsch Synagogue

Philip Belz

by Dr. Selma Lewis

To Honor Philip Belz

Businessman - Leader - Musician - Philanthropist

Changing the Face of Memphis

Baron Hirsch Congregation will celebrate Philip Belz's 90th birthday with a National Tribute Dinner to be held at the Peabody Hotel, February 27, 1993. A Philip Belz 90th Year Celebration Book is being published and all proceeds from the book and the dinner will be used to establish the Philip and Sarah Belz Endowment Fund at Baron Hirsch. The Fund will support musical, cultural and youth programs at the synagogue.

Philip Belz has been a friend to thousands and is one of America's best beloved businessmen, philanthropists, and leaders. Few people have accomplished what this man has in one lifetime.

Of the many worthy causes to which Mr. Belz has given so much of himself, his "home away from home" has been and is today, the Baron Hirsch Congregation. He has always been completely involved in synagogue activities. He served as President of Baron Hirsch Synagogue for two concurrent terms from 1950 to 1958 and was a guiding force during the construction of the Vollentine synagogue. And, he has made substantial contributions to the new synagogue on Winter Oak Lane. Andy Groveman, president of Baron Hirsch Congregation said, "Once in his lifetime and ours, friends, family and admirers from everywhere will have the meaningful opportunity to joyously say, 'Thank you, Philip'". ■

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South dedicates this issue of "Southern Jewish Heritage" to Philip Belz
Happy Birthday, Philip !

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

Every day, except Shabbos, Philip Belz has a music lesson either on the flute or the piano. A lifelong musician and singer, at the age of 90, he finally has the leisure time to indulge in one of his greatest talents and interests. In a small way, the study of music helps fill the great gap left by the recent death of his beloved wife, Sarah.

Belz is endowed with a combination of talents. In addition to considerable musical gifts, he is devoted to the practice of Orthodox Judaism, he is a brilliant businessman and is possessed with personal charm and benevolence. He is kind and unassuming, retaining an appealing modesty in spite of his notable achievements. He has never met a stranger.

The circumstances of Belz's early life were typical of the lives of many Eastern European immigrants. In 1904, when Philip was 10 months old, his father left the little town of Lancut in Galicia, a province of Austria-Hungary to avoid serving in an army, which would require him to violate principles of Judaism, such as the prayer requirements and dietary laws. His father immigrated to Memphis to join his brother and the two lived together over The Grand Leader, a store on Beale Street.

Philip's father peddled for five years until 1910 when he earned enough money to send for his wife and six-and-a-half year old Philip. In the beginning, the family lived in a four-bedroom apartment building located near Mosby at 310 Hill street, an area where other Jewish



Philip Belz

immigrants had settled. The Belz family rented the living room to a peddler named Glassberg who played the flute. In exchange for a reduction in rent, Glassberg taught young Philip to play the flute. The instrument was purchased by Philip's father in 1910 for \$50 and paid for at the rate of one dollar per week. Philip still has the flute today. At the age of 12, Belz played in the Tennessee Regimental Band. Later, at 14, he played second or third flute with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra.

In 1912, Philip's father took the money he had saved and borrowed a little more to build some shelves in a small store on the corner of Utah and Pioneer Streets. He was the owner of his first grocery

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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

In our last issue, I stressed the need to involve more members in the work of our society. One important way to get involved is with an article in "Southern Jewish Heritage." We always need early family and business histories and any interesting and unusual stories from the past. And, if you aren't comfortable writing an article, just furnish us the factual information, with pictures where possible. Or, if you prefer, we will be happy to record your story in a taped interview. We have some excellent writers who will then put it all together. Please call me or Leonid Saharovici.

Thanks to Gil Halpern who authored his wonderful memories about one of Memphis' favorite deli's. And, our thanks to Aaron Shankman for putting us in touch with his sister, Bertha Shankman Lutz, who updated an earlier article she had written about her late father, Sam Shankman.

In our next issue, we will begin a new column, "Reminiscing", which I feel is destined to become a favorite feature. Selected guest writers will share with us their memories and many interesting highlights from the past. We look forward to our Spring publication where we will be "Reminiscing" with Paul Schwartz, the first director of the Memphis Jewish Community Center.

We dedicate this issue of "Southern Jewish Heritage" to Philip Belz, truly a man who has created history. The full impact and scope of his personal and business success on Jewish history in Memphis and the Mid-South will be topics for future historians to explore. Having had the pleasure of knowing and singing with this wonderful man for 36 years in

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Welcome To Our New Members

Mr. & Mrs. William Lowenberg Mr. & Mrs. Andy Groveman
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Levy Mr. & Mrs. Edward Goldstein

the Baron Hirsch Choir, I, too, say Happy Birthday, Philip. May you continue to sing for 120 years. ■

SJHS Meets in Montgomery

The Southern Jewish Historical Society's seventeenth annual conference was held in Montgomery, Alabama, October 30-November 1. On Friday, October 30, many delegates took advantage of the pre-conference sight-seeing tour to visit the first synagogue built in Montgomery in 1862 (now a church), view the Alabama State Capitol, the home of Jefferson Davis as well as other restored buildings. A plaque was dedicated commemorating the site of the first cotton gin built in Alabama by Abraham Mordecai, the first Jew to settle in Montgomery County.

After services, Friday evening at Temple Beth Or, Dr. Malcolm Stern conducted a genealogy workshop and gave many insights into genealogical information that is still available and discussed methods to secure information from families, public records and libraries. An oneg shabbat followed the workshop.

Saturday morning began with services, after which, Marcie Cohen, project director of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi, announced two new exhibits that recently opened at the museum: "Images of Southern Jewish Life, Tour II: A Jewish Road Trip Through Arkansas and Mississippi" and "The Jewish Presence in Arkansas". The first session chaired by Dr. Mark Bauman, then examined "Communal Dynamics in the Jewish South". Dr. Lee Shae Weissbach presented a Paper on "Stability and Mobility in Small Jewish Communities: Examples from Kentucky". Kaye Fole, a genealogist from Savannah presented "The Minis Family of Savannah, Georgia" and the morning session was concluded by Juliet George whose topic was "Centennial Converso: Judaism Denied on a Texas Tombstone". At the shabbat luncheon, Jerome (Buddy) Cooper, Esq. spoke about "Southern Ties to Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black". Cooper, as a law student, had

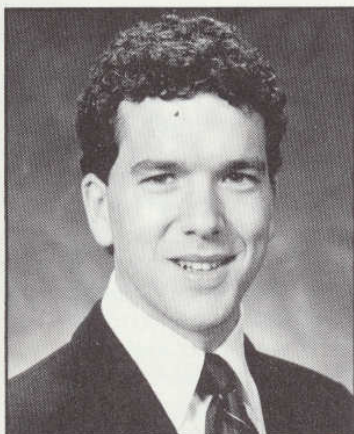
been Black's first law clerk. After lunch, Janice R. Blumberg moderated a session on "Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement". Dr. Berkley Kalin of Memphis presented profiles of two dynamic rabbis of reform Temple Israel in Memphis. Rabbi William H. Fineshriber was an activist and a very outspoken rabbi. Rabbi Harry T. Ettelson, Fineshriber's assistant for a number of years was not as outspoken but very active in the Memphis community. Patricia M. LaPointe of the Memphis Public Library recalled a third Memphis rabbi in her paper, "Rabbi James A. Wax and the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike". Rabbi Wax's great work in behalf of human freedom and social justice is well known in Memphis and the Mid-South.

Saturday evening, a gala reception was hosted by Amb. John L. Loeb, Jr. honoring the dedication of the Alfred Huger Moses Conference Room in the newly restored House of Mayors, the

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IN THE PRESENCE OF GREATNESS

by Rabbi Micah D. Greenstein



Rabbi Greenstein

He has earned the titles "Father of American Jewish History," "Dean of American Jewish historians," "Master Mentsch" and "Litvak par Excellence." This same beloved and greatly admired Professor at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati has taught and counseled nearly one thousand Reform rabbis, including Memphis Rabbis Feinschreiber, Ettelson, Wax, Danziger, and Greenstein. He is the only individual in history ever to be elected Honorary President for life of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. This revered teacher, prolific writer and cherished friend is none other than Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus.

On the weekend of December 4-5, Dr. Marcus traveled to Memphis under the auspices of the Jewish Historical Society and Temple Israel. Dr. Marcus delivered a stirring sermon on Jewish history at Temple Israel on Friday evening, and he met with members of the Jewish Historical Society on Saturday afternoon.

Now in his 97th year, Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus has come a long way since early childhood in Wheeling, West Virginia. Jacob Marcus entered the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati at the tender age of 15 to become a Reform rabbi, "crying all the way on the train," as he recalls. Following his undergraduate and rabbinic studies, Marcus served as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army during World

War I. He was appointed to the faculty of the Hebrew Union College in 1920 and obtained his doctorate magna cum laude from the University of Berlin in 1925. Dr. Marcus returned to Cincinnati to launch an illustrious career in the world of Jewish scholarship, and he remains a "working rabbi" to this day.

Dr. Marcus is a voluminous and versatile writer and has published close to three hundred books, essays and reviews. His earliest contribution to the field of history concentrated on Jewish life in the Middle Ages, and his time-honored text, "The Jew in the Medieval World," is still widely used in college history courses. When asked to account for his prodigious output, Marcus replied: "The key to being a good scholar is to use your tuchas." Dr. Marcus lives by his word, sitting from morning until night at his desk. Amazingly, Dr. Marcus has authored four volumes dealing with American Jewish History since age 95, and he is in the process of publishing three more! Among his recent works is a four-volume history of United States Jewry from 1776 to 1985. Dr. Marcus is presently completing a one-volume narrative history of American Jewry.

As a young professor, Dr. Marcus specialized in the history of German Jewry. The events of the Holocaust, however, and the concomitant destruction of European Jewry, led Dr. Marcus to found the American Jewish Archives, in 1949. As founder-director of the



Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus

American Jewish Archives and the American Jewish Periodical Center, Dr. Marcus has literally transformed American Jewish historical scholarship. The American Jewish Archives at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati has been dubbed, "the greatest treasure trove of literature, letters and memorabilia of Jews probably to be found anywhere in the world." Through Marcus' systematic collection of historical documents on virtually every facet of American Jewish life, the Archives have become an indispensable and living record of the American Jewish community.

There is only one privilege greater than being a beneficiary of Dr. Marcus' archives and scholarship. And that is to be his student. To be a student of Dr. Marcus is to learn from every aspect of his personality. Dr. Marcus is among the few academicians admired for his guidance and humanity as well as for his assiduous scholarship and boundless energy.

It is written in the Talmud, "There is nothing more beautiful in a yeshivah, an institute of higher learning, than a sage." Having sat at his feet, I can personally attest that Jacob Rader Marcus is the ideal sage of which the Talmud speaks. He is never too busy to counsel a student or rabbi, either in person or on the telephone. (His long distance phone bills attest to the latter fact!)

Perhaps Dr. Marcus' greatest asset is his sense of humor. His charm and wit are reflected in the annual fundraising letters he sends on behalf of the American Jewish Archives. The famed "schnorer letters" are vintage Marcus and always contain humorous anecdotes, stories and yarns. This year's letter ended with the following paragraph:

"A Jewish Sunday School child when asked where her heart was pointed to her rear end because her grandmother always patted her there and said, 'Bless your little heart.' We here at the Archives will bless your little heart if you send us a generous gift.

Cordially,
Jacob R. Marcus

Occasionally, the "King of the Schnorer's" resorts to biographical humor in his annual update. For instance, last year's letter began with an

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accounting of highlights from the previous twenty five years:

"When I was in my seventieth year, I bought my present car; it is a Checker Cab. Concerned about my future, I asked the dealer how long the engine would last, telling him I drove about 1,000 miles a year. When he gave me a guarantee for 100,00 miles I knew I had it made. When the car was thirteen years of age it decided to become a Jew by choice. I broke a bottle of Israeli wine over the radiator and cut three inches off the tail pipe. This year, after my ninety-fifth birthday, I went shopping for a mattress and did not buy it until I got a twenty-five year guarantee."

There is a serious side to Dr. Marcus beyond his scholarly wisdom. One who has lived close to one hundred years has been through more than a lifetime of trial and tribulation. The wealth of experiences Dr. Marcus has enjoyed and endured serve him well in helping others. Of all my correspondences with Dr. Marcus, the one I shall treasure most was his response to a minor setback I shared with him. "My boy, I want you to know that I fully understand what you have gone through," wrote Marcus. He

went on, "Just remember the slogan that has always maintained me through-out my life: 'This too shall pass.'"" Dr. Marcus then quoted from a letter a distinguished Southern Jew had written to his father when the Revolution was over in 1783. "We have the whole world to begin again," the son declared. Marcus went on, "Micah, you are young, able and have the whole world to begin again, so get off you tuchas and move on." It worked.

Dr. Marcus is a phenomenal counselor and an extraordinary orator. His evening address in Memphis was entitled "Jewish Obstetrics: Where We Came From." Marcus captivated the huge crowd for over thirty minutes, recounting the origins of Jewish history from its earliest beginnings to the present. Dr. Marcus shared his conviction that the American Jewish community is the finest, greatest and most cultured Jewish community the world has ever known. In a humorous aside, he added that the nicest aspect of American Jewish communal life is the existence of over 10,000 Jewish organizations, "which means," said Marcus, "that every man and woman here can hope someday to become president of at least one Jewish organization!"

In the Shabbat afternoon session, Dr. Marcus communicated his dream of an American Jewish community which fully understands its historical development and uses that knowledge to guide its present and its future. He demonstrated his remarkable memory by speaking cogently, forcefully, and without a printed text throughout the weekend. All who met this giant in the world of Jewish historical scholarship were deeply touched by his personal warmth and graciousness. Rabbi Harry K. Danziger said it best when he closed his formal introduction of Dr. Marcus with these words: "The Memphis Jewish Community is indeed privileged to welcome the father of American Jewish History, the embodiment of American Reform Judaism, storyteller, sage and passionate Jew, one of those achievements about which God has a lot to be proud - Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus."

Upon returning Dr. Marcus to the airport on Saturday evening, I wished him well and added: "Ad Meah v'esrim (May you live to be 120!)" Dr. Marcus leaned over and replied, "You mean 126 years." "Why not 120?" I asked. As he waved goodbye, Dr. Marcus yelled back, "You forgot six years' interest!!!" ■

Halpern's *continued from page 8*

I thought I saw the "straw" that would break my mothers' spirit - the Health Department. They insisted that the newly developed "Perma-Stone" wall decoration be stripped from the restaurant's interior. They stated: "It is porous and can not be used in an eating establishment". Mom argued and complained to the authority during the day and cried at home at night. She envisioned the walls coming down and the store never opening.

At that time, my father, who was manager of the Perel & Lowenstein jewelry department at Bry's department store stepped in with a simple solution which was immediately accepted by all. Paint the surfaces with clear enamel which would seal it and still allow the stone colors to be part of the decorating scheme. The store opened in December 1946 and began its' 35 year lifetime.

The opening was a huge success. Thelma brought most of the recipes

from the downtown store along with several of the cooks to ensure that the new store had the flavor of the familiar past. Mom had to work six long days a week and tried to alleviate the situation by hiring a manager. Six months and three managers later, Dad again offered a solution; he would leave Perel & Lowenstein and become her partner.

My fathers knowledge of diamonds and jewelry was vast, but what he knew about the restaurant business was limited to how to eat. Fortunately, he was a fast learner and with some guidance from Mom and Poppa, learned one end of a "lox" from the other. Dad had been with Perel & Lowenstein over twenty years, a manager most of that time, but never really had his own business. Well, he did now. He went about organizing every aspect of the business with the skills he had learned while being a manager for others. This proved to be a great asset to the business because my mothers strong suit was not organization. Her's was her personality. Not

only do I remember, but I am reminded almost daily by former customers how almost everyone who came into the store wanted Mom to personally take care of them. Her smiles, good nature, and jokes were probably the greatest lure any business could ever want.

On the other hand, Dad was strictly business, almost. Of course, he too had certain customers who only wanted him to take care of them. These were mostly people who wanted to shop and leave with out small talk. But, he had some very special customers who knew of his voracious reading habits which ranged from world history, his favorite, to cheap detective novels. These customers did want to talk to him. I remember listening to their conversations and arguments on politics, business, jewelry, etc. but mostly history - that he knew.

The business was good for Thelma and Lou. It allowed them to be financially successful and independent. Mom

Please see Halpern, Page 7

store, which he managed for three years before he was able to buy a store on Trigg and Louisiana Streets in 1914. At the end of World War I, a severe influenza epidemic affected both of Philip's parents. He was in the tenth grade at Central High School, but had to quit school to run the business. He never went back to school.

When he first arrived in Memphis Philip attended Cheder (Hebrew School) where Cantor Benjamin Feibish of the Baron Hirsch Synagogue heard him sing. Philip became soloist of Baron Hirsch's choir in 1912 and continues to sing solos with the choir to this day. After skipping his famous solo, U-Na-Sana Tokef during the High Holy Days of 1991, Philip, in 1992, at age 89, thrilled Baron Hirsch congregants with his heart rendering solo. Each year his beautiful voice in the synagogue brings memories of the past along with tears to the eyes of many at Baron Hirsch who look forward to this special moment in their holiday prayers.

He later studied voice with Cantor Feibish's daughter, Madame Valentina Tumanskaya, former diva of the Moscow Imperial Opera. During the Russian Revolution, she escaped to China and later came to Memphis and opened a studio above Johnson's Flower Shop on Madison Avenue. After much hard work with Tumanskaya, Belz won a scholarship in 1932, affording him the opportunity to study with Emelio Roxas, the coach of opera singers Giovanni Martinelli and Jan Pearce. Knowing that he couldn't be away from his business for the full year, Belz confined his studies to an intense period of two months, two hours a day, five days a week, completing the full year's program.

In 1933, Belz's cousin Sam Belz returned to Memphis from Chicago. Together, Philip and Sam opened a furniture factory on the corner of Main and Auction. Having had some experience in building, Philip also decided to buy a block of real estate across from his grocery store on Thomas Street in 1935. His father-in-law, an apartment builder, assisted him in building apartments at Thomas and Firestone and a group of stores on the corner. At the same time this venture was materializ-



Philip and Sarah Belz

ing, the federal government was looking for inexpensive housing for the poor. Thus, Belz and the government joined forces and built "Thomas and Belz Courts." Each apartment had three rooms including kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. The apartments rented for \$15 a month. With this venture, what has become one of the South's largest multifaceted real estate and development companies was founded.

Other projects followed in rapid succession, including building a group of stores carved out of the North Memphis Driving Park, a surrey driving park on Thomas Street, then constructing a factory.

In 1937, a serious flood caused damage to the latter venture but Philip was still able to complete it. Five years later, his tenant, the Marty Frye Roofing Company, supplier of all the roofing for Sears Roebuck Company, bought the factory. Belz said, at this point, "he was on his way." He later bought the Union Realty Company in 1943.

Included in the property Belz bought as part of the driving company's property, was a fine residential area on Bel Air Drive. Belz decided to build his home there and to pay the mortgage on his new home, he bought 15 houses in North Memphis for \$300 each, later selling them for \$500 to \$600.

By this time, Belz owned a liquor store on Main and Madison, a furniture factory on Carolina Street and a grocery store on Thomas Street, and he sang five or six times a week on the radio. He sang

arias and lyrical classical songs in English, Italian, Hebrew and Yiddish and was a "Radio Star" in Memphis. Overwhelmed by the many demands of all his occupations, he sold the store on Thomas Street to his brother-in-law.

One of Belz's primary concerns has always been the practice of his religion. He has been active in the advancement, support, organization and development of the Baron Hirsch Congregation for many years, serving on its Board of Directors as Vice President and as President over a period of eight years. He has made significant donations to the Synagogue building on Vollenline as well as to the new location on Winter Oak, in the eastern part of the city. Belz also donated the money needed to build the Belz Synagogue in the B'nai B'rith Home for the Aged. He has participated in many other Jewish organizations in the city, contributing time and financial support to them and to the state of Israel. Belz was awarded the title "Man of the Decade" by the State of Israel in 1958, recognizing him for his contributions.

On December 11, 1983, Mr. Belz received an honorary doctorate degree from Yeshiva University in New York. In honor of Philip and his late wife, Sarah, the Music and Cantorial school was renamed The Philip and Sarah Belz School of Music. Thus, his great love of music, especially cantorial music, will be continued into the future.

After Belz's son Jack was graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1948, Belz Enterprises began to grow at an even faster pace. (Belz's two other sons, Leslie and Paul, who were also in the family business, were tragically killed in a small plane crash while on a business trip). The company has continued to remain a family-owned business, with the third generation firmly in place.

Belz Enterprises has changed the face of Memphis and altered aspects of other cities as a result of its developments. Philip Belz believes in owning land and in "having the land at the right place where somebody wants it." He says, "you have to have innovative ideas, along with a little Mazel (luck) too, to go with it." A "little mazel" hardly seems sufficient to explain the phenomenal personal and business success of a remarkable man, Philip Belz. ■

Sam Shankman

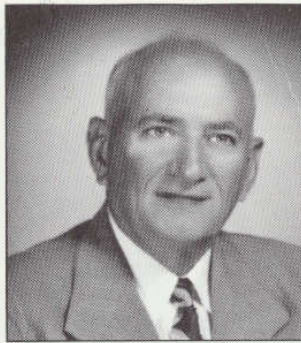
Distinquished Leader

By
Bertha Shankman Lutz

It is difficult for American-born children of Russian Jewish immigrants, with our high living standards, our taken-for-granted conveniences, and our unrestricted liberties, to envision the circumstances and environment into which our parents were born. The stories of their beginnings take their places in our mental files with the unrealistic fairy tales and fables of childhood. Their hair-raising tales of horrible pogroms, of servility and degradation, of a cringing and fawning half-starved generation of Jews, is scarcely credible. Yet, as if by Divine intervention, the faces of the groveling were not ground into the dust and the dispossessed did not become vanquishable. The piercing barbs of a Czar, intent upon their conversion or extermination, became whetstones upon which ambition, devotion to Judaism and national consciousness were sharpened. From the furnace of Czarist tyranny of the late 1800's Jews did not emerge peasants or converts, destined for oblivion, but were forged there into a powerful force, an element destined to become the most creative in Jewish history.

Such a product was my father. The story of his early life reads like thousands of others--born in Russia, fled from Russia, alone in America, friendless, penniless, illiterate.

When Sam Shankman arrived in Memphis at the age of 18, with full heart and empty pockets, his paths and goals were clearly set. Poverty and ignorance were to be overcome first and simultaneously, and ultimately he would devote himself to the then unpopular tenets of Theodore Herzle--Zionism--which he firmly believed would erase the travail and anguish of his people. He worked long hours as a tailor, and with such stringent self-denial that only the very determined could endure, he managed to save a few dollars. He entered night school and was the delight of his teachers, for his eager mind soaked up and retained all they could offer. To his dying day, his thirst for more and more learning was never satiated. None but a professional scholar



Sam Shankman

had as vast a storehouse of knowledge. It can truly be said of him that he was on "speaking terms" with all the great sages--past and present. He surrounded himself with thousands of books, many of which he memorized. The words of Maimonides rolled from his tongue as precisely and as easily as if he were the sage's contemporary. Shakespeare was as familiar to him as a daily prayer. The great wisdom of the Chinese and Japanese was his also; and one of his greatest joys was to discover some ancient philosophy, some enduring truth which was applicable to contemporary times. He had an intimate knowledge of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and all the illustrious of American prose. His mastery of Judaic teaching was rare among laymen. Talmud had been an endless labyrinth, a maze of cultural and spiritual passageways which were to him a source of infinite joy and experience. His was a photographic mind, developed by a vehemence and determination to become saturated with the greatest and noblest contributions of world literature. He filled his mind with the grandeur of literary gems and religious teachings so that there was no room for ignoble thoughts.

There were times when he could not suppress the urge to impart some bit of knowledge or advice to friends or family, some of whom did not hold so dear the value of knowledge. Seldom had his advice, born of a trained and disciplined brain, been wrong, and there are some still alive who now wished that they had listened with a less disdainful ear.

It was in night school that he met his bride-to-be, a girl who had lived only a few miles from his Russian birthplace and whose house he had walked past many times! She became to him a rare

soulmate, of enviable temperament. When there were 3 small children to raise and a growing business to tend, she willingly assumed both duties, while he attended Teachers College and Southwestern University. With no formal educational background, and none of the college entrance requirements, he was admitted with special permission and emerged with the highest of grades.

His college friends were his professors, some of whom felt they were the intellectual gainers through association with him. And though for many years, he lived behind his store in one of the least desirable sections of Memphis, there was very often a professor, a visiting author, or other dignitary in his home.

It must have been the imprint of an insecure childhood and the precept and example of his devout and humble parents which developed in him his one motivating and guiding philosophy--the ability to recognize true values and discard the false. This, he believed is the key to happiness, to a full measure of success, yes, even to immortality. He concentrated his energies on teaching his children to distinguish the valuable from the worthless, the wheat from the chaff. He had a faith of steel in the correctness of his opinions. He moved in an orbit of moral conviction out of which he could never be coaxed or tempted. He was hard as iron, yet pliant as clay. I have seen his eyes fill with tears when he sang a song his mother taught him.

In 1909, he helped organize the Memphis Zionist District which consisted of a half-dozen brave men who were endowed with the stamina to withstand the onslaught of unpopularity. One of these fearless men was Hardwig Peres, who became my father's guiding spirit. He was drawn to revere this noble man, not only because they shared a common love for Zion, but because he recognized in Peres an uncommon godliness, and an unfathomable wisdom which he hoped would be permeable to himself.

Some wondered through the years how such a practical man could engage in such a seemingly visionary pursuit as Zionism. They thought him a fanatic when he left his business, took to the road, invaded unfriendly territories, and

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spread the Zionist gospel. But to him Zionism was practical Judaism. The establishment of a Jewish state, no matter how many laborious years stood in the way of its attainment, was a job for his generation. In Zionism he saw answers to Jewish problems which were clear to very few then, but are so evident today. His Zionism was of the synthetic variety, one in which he saw a fusion of politics, economics, religion and culture—a type of Zionism which succeeded in bringing about the ends it has gained today.

In 1938 he bound up his two loves in a biographical volume entitled The Peres Family, a tribute to the MAN and the LAND. This work was an instrument of fund-raising which netted \$50,000 for Jewish National Fund and enabled the purchase of many dunams of land for the resettlement of homeless Jews. It has been hailed throughout the United States as a work of elegant simplicity, worthy of a noble subject.

In his family life he taught his children the dignity of labor, and provided his children with an example to emulate. No task is too menial if it is useful or productive. To him, manual labor is as decorous to an American aristocrat as it is to an Israeli Ribbutnik.

For many years his business took him among the small merchants and farmers of Northern Mississippi, to almost inaccessible places, over almost impassable roads. Among these simple unsophisticated people he was regarded as a demi-god. When he approached a small town, word spread, groups gathered and he was followed from place to place. He was to them reporter, annotator, counselor, and profound philosopher. Here was a unique example of worship at the shrine of illimitable wisdom, in a land where wealth magnetizes and hypnotizes the masses.

In 1954 Philosophical Library, Inc. published his MOULDING FORCES, a true and accurate biographical novel, covering the years from his birth to his marriage to his beloved Rose. Only the names were fictitious to protect those whose weaknesses of character and misdeeds he exposed.

BARON HIRSCH CONGREGATION,

from Ur to Memphis was written in 1957 for the dedication of the new synagogue on Vollintine.

The foreword to his last published work in 1963, MORTIMER MAY, FOOTSOLDIER IN ZION, crystallizes the essence of his philosophy.

"As far back as I can remember, the welfare of my people was of great concern to me. As a child.....Biblical heroes became my inspiration. I rejoiced in their triumphs. I shed bitter tears when they failed.....Throughout the years I was ever saddened by those who forsook my people and grew fond of those who labored in their cause....."

At his death in 1967, he left an unpublished history of Memphis Jewry. many months of research through microfilms of century old newspapers, and countless hours spent in the attics of descendants of early Jewish settlers, netted a treasure trove of hitherto unknown links in the story of Jewish history of the South. Throughout his 60 years in America, as an author, lecturer, and renowned orator, his theme, his consuming passion, was always the same - the beauty, the salvation and perpetuity of his people.

The greatness of a man does not lie in the brilliant utterance of his perceptions, nor in dumb endurance of humiliation and need. It derives from utter devotion to a merited task until its realization. It demands not only a sensitivity and loftiness of purpose but an unyielding devotion despite disappointment, unpopularity and catastrophe. It requires a sixth sense which enables one to see visions beyond the circumference of ordinary man. It commands respect from friend and foe. True greatness is a divinely created mantle, which gracefully draped the figure of my father. ■

Halpern's *continued from page 4*

and Dad were good partners in business, just as they were in their marriage of over 60 years. I never saw them argue or disagree in the store once, and it was not much different at home. The business grew with the early addition of catering. There are picture albums full of magnificent trays, tables, and happy faces at parties mugging with Thelma and Lou. They thrived in this business and they loved their customers as much as their customers loved them. My memories are rich with these visions. ■

BOUND VOLUMES

We have had several requests for bound volumes of our Newsletter. If you have back issues, but are missing some, we can probably complete a set for you.

These will be professionally bound and the cost will be \$35.00.

If interested, please call

David Schneider
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new home of Montgomery Area United Way. The restoration was assisted by a generous gift from the Loeb family and Amb. Loeb. Later in the evening, Amb. Loeb was given a key to the city of Montgomery and a proclamation by Alabama Governor Guy Hunt declaring October 31, 1992, as "Loeb Family Day in Alabama". At the conference banquet Kenneth Libo presented an excellent history of the Moses family of Charleston, SC, titled "In Quest of the Promised Land".

Sunday's business meeting was followed by Session III, chaired by Sol Viner titled "Symbolism and Community Service". Margaret Armbristed spoke about "Samuel Ulman: A Southern Progressive". Ulman, a Confederate soldier and early resident of Port Gibson and Natchez, Mississippi moved to Birmingham in 1884, where he became a leader in the reform movement. Upon retirement, he wrote more than 50 poems.

The life of Moses Jacob Ezekiel, one of the foremost sculptors of the late 19th and early 20th century was the topic of a presentation by Guy R. Swanson, director of the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond. And, at the closing luncheon, Sam Proctor spoke of "The Jewish World in the Time of Columbus", describing conditions prior to and during the Inquisition.

Those in attendance were very enthusiastic and thought the Montgomery conference was very successful. ■

Halpern's ■ A Deli Delite ! by Gil Halpern

In the spring of 1946, when the awful secrets of World War II, began to be spoken of out loud, instead of in whispers around my grandfathers table in the darkness of air raids, there was a new hope in the world from which optimism could be felt everywhere. Justice was being brought to the evil axis powers, our military heroes were coming home, rationing was ending, and the term "Atomic" was the new household word of the day. The optimism was wonderful and it was contagious in all areas of our lives. We bragged about the victorious Allied forces, the return of consumer goods such as womens' "nylons", automobile gasoline and tires, and especially sugar and butter. Nothing could stop us now. Even children stopped playing cowboys and Indians and started playing GI Jce army games. Yes, that spring was a green, beautiful and promising time.

For me, at age 9, it was the first time that I remember our family talking about the future and not having to wait for the end of the war. Even my grandfather, Reverend E.I.Segal, known to me as "Poppa", decided to retire from "Segals", his Kosher restaurant, delicatessen and butcher shop in the Beale Street area, and devote his time to his real estate activities. One of those activities was to construct a building for a beauty supply wholesaler. Realizing the vacuum left by the closing of his own restaurant, he decided to include a room for a new "East Memphis" deli in his new Cleveland Street building. (I must explain here that the eastern city limit at that time was approximately Highland Ave., therefore Cleveland street was considered "east".)

Poppa had negotiated with my uncle Jack Halpern to operate the new establishment since uncle Jack had been one of his former employees at the Beale and Second street establishment. But uncle Jack had married, moved to Kansas City, and decided not to move



Thelma and Lou Halpern

back and open the store. My mother, Thelma, had also worked for years with Poppa at the downtown store and knew the deli business. She had helped with the plans and made most of the arrangements for the new store while waiting for uncle Jack to arrive. Once Mom knew that he was not coming to operate the new store, she made up her mind that it was to be hers. She convinced my dad that no one was better suited then she to operate a Kosher Restaurant/Delicatessen in Memphis, that my brother Herbert and I were old enough not to need her full time, and that this was the best time in years to open a new business. Dad finally agreed, Poppa was happy, and "Halpern's Snack Shop" was founded.

But lingering problems from the war time economy were still evident in the building business. Construction of the building was coming to a close and it was time for the interior to be outfitted. Materials such as stainless steel, used for the building of store fixtures, were still in short supply. The new store was designed to be "air conditioned", a first for a Memphis deli, but equipment was difficult to obtain. Then,

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SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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Address Correction Requested

