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Sam Cooper ■ ■ ■

by Dr. Selma Lewis

Fund Raiser Extraordinaire – Businessman – Public Servant

A Leader of Leaders

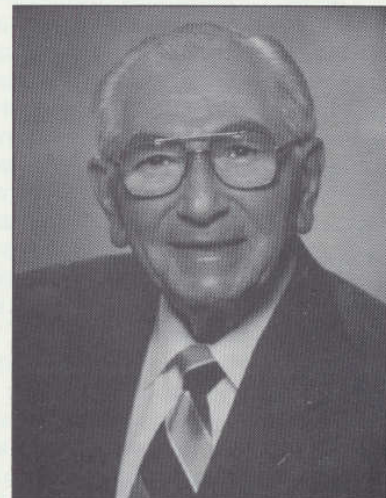
This is the twelfth in a series of biographical sketches of Jewish community leaders included in our forthcoming book, "Chronicles of the Jewish Community of Memphis."

When the Federal Reserve Bank dedicated its new building in Memphis, the President of the Board of Directors was ill, so Vice-President Sam Cooper presided. It was a satisfying moment, he says, when he announced to the assembled distinguished guests that the new structure was on the very site where his father's tailor shop stood. Most of Cooper's speech on that day reflected on his early life, growing up in the district called the Pinch. This incident typifies the life of Sam Cooper. It demonstrates how far he rose from modest beginnings. It also shows that he never forgot his origins, but rather has always emphasized them.

Cooper was born on April 9, 1911, to David and Dora Mintz Cooper in New York City. The family moved to Memphis at the invitation of Cooper's uncle who had a tailor shop in the city. The Coopers settled in the Pinch where, like most of the other residents, they were poor. Cooper went to work as soon as he could, carrying newspapers and selling soda pop at the baseball park.

He attended Christine Elementary School and Humes High School and was graduated in 1930. While in high school he took some business courses.

It was Cooper's knowledge of typing and shorthand that led to his being hired by Humko, which was just getting started when he was finishing high school. He was hired as an office boy and bookkeeper, "at an office boy's salary of \$10 a week. I wasn't worth any more because I didn't know how to keep books. Every day at the end of business, I would go to night school and take all our papers, vouchers, and invoices and sit down with the professor. He would tell me whom to debit and what to credit. This continued until the end of the month, and then the bosses wanted to know how much money we had made. Of course, I couldn't tell them until I talked to the professor. I took inventory and that night the professor showed me how to make a profit and loss statement. This went on for two or three months until I got the swing of it." From his starting position as



Sam Cooper

office boy, Cooper rose to become vice-president; he was president of Humko from 1952-1976. He retired in 1976 and became president of Grafcro, Inc., his present position.

When asked to explain the success of Humko which, despite opening during the Depression, "never had a losing month," Cooper attributes it to the two men who started it, S. L. Kopald, Sr., "the greatest shortening salesman in the world," and Herbert Humphreys, its skillful business manager. On his first sales trip with Kopald, who had

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Memphis To Host Special Conference

Southern Rabbis' Involvement in Black Civil Rights

March 30, 31, April 1, 1995

Radisson Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South has joined the Southern Jewish Historical Society, Bornblum Judaic Studies (University of Memphis), the Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities and the University of Memphis Department of History as a co-sponsor of a special conference entitled "Southern Rabbis' Involvement In Black Civil Rights." The conference will be chaired by Dr. Berkley Kalin of the Department of History at the University of Memphis and will be held Thursday, March 30, through Saturday, April 1, 1995, at the Radisson Hotel in Memphis. The conference sessions will in-

clude panel discussions, interviews, memoirs and papers which will address many issues of this period. Topics to be discussed will include why some Rabbis were more active than others, how Rabbis interacted with other clergy and with African-American leaders and how Rabbis became involved.

The conference will begin Thursday evening, March 30, with dinner at the Peabody Hotel followed by the opening session at 8:00 p.m. across the street at the Radisson

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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

On the National archives building in Washington, D.C., there is carved a famous saying, "What is past is prologue". We can see the meaning of that phrase from those activities which daily surround all of us. All of our respective temples and synagogues feature weekly discussions on contemporary Jewish issues, film series

about our immigration to this country and the Jewish contribution to the building of the United States or one or more of its States. Classes on exploring the teachings and the ideas, the observances and the customs of the Jewish people and the Jewish heritage are widespread and fully attended. One must ask upon what documents or material source are these modern day teachings based? Think about it. It is only through the efforts of societies such as ours that the "past" can be "prologue" to present and future generations.

My dear friend J. Fraser Humphries, Jr. is one who also appreciates the need to preserve and learn from history. He was kind enough to give to Margaret and me a copy of the Supreme Court Historical Society Jewish Justices of the Supreme Court Revisited: Brandeis to Fortas. This is a special edition of the Journal of the Supreme Court History. The preface is by Associate Justice Stephen G. Breyer, and the introduction is by Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In the near future, Margaret and I will donate this special edition to the Society.

The Society is in need of more active participants. Committees need to be formed, our membership needs to be

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

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expanded. Those few of us who work so diligently to fulfill the mandates of our charter cannot continue to do it alone. Please let us hear from you. Most importantly, please mark your calendars for March 30, 31, and April 1, 1995 to attend at the Southern Jewish Historical Society meeting here in Memphis. ✨

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South dedicates this issue of "Southern Jewish Heritage"

in loving memory of

Carol Kalin

Conference *Continued from page 1*

Hotel. Dr. Stephen D. Benin, Professor, Bornblum Judaic Studies, will introduce the keynote speaker, Dr. Mark Bauman of Atlanta and author of Harry H. Epstein and the Rabbinate as Conduit For Change.

Friday morning's session will begin at 8:30 a.m. with the afternoon session beginning at 1:00 p.m. Saturday morning will begin with a 7:30 a.m. continental breakfast with Shabbat morning service available, followed by 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. sessions. The conference will conclude after this session.

This is a rare opportunity for Memphians and Mid-Southerners to attend what promises to be an outstanding conference presenting many challenging questions with discussions and papers presented by outstanding speakers representing many Southern colleges and universities. Participating from Memphis will be Rabbi Harry K. Danziger, Temple Israel; Dr. Berkley

Kalin, Department of History, University of Memphis; Miss Patricia LaPointe, curator, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis and Shelby County Library; and Dr. David Tucker, Department of History, University of Memphis.

Registration is \$45.00 with banquet, \$24.00 excluding banquet. For

conference information call Dr. Berkley Kalin, (901)678-3388.

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South is pleased to co-sponsor this outstanding conference and we extend our welcome to all who will come to Memphis to share in this experience. ✨

Welcome To Our New Members

Mr./ Mrs. Jeffery Parker (Englewood, NJ)

Mr./ Mrs. Drew Parker (Los Angeles, CA)

A Trip to Remember And Learn the Lessons of the Holocaust

This year the world commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps. A comprehensive and unique trip covering 1,000 years of European Jewish heritage is going to be June 6-June 29, 1995. The tour will take you to Warsaw, Treblinka death camp, Lublin, Majdanek concentration camp, Crakow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Prague, Budapest, and will end with a glorious week in Israel.

The tour leader will be Miriam Rosenberg of the Holocaust Memorial Museum who has put together a detailed and informative brochure with the historic places to be visited and detailed information about the trip.

For information please call Uniglobe Travel, 4530 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, D.C., 1-800-443-5224, or 202-244-5000. The number for Miriam Rosenberg is 301-649-1997. ✨

A Southern Rabbi In Martin Luther King's Court

by Harriet Stern

*"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Whom shall I send, And who will go for us?
Then I said: 'Here am I; send me.'" Isaiah 6:8*



Rabbi Arie Becker

Many national Jewish organizations in the Civil Rights era spoke out in strong resolutions for principles of civil rights and racial justice. At its 63rd annual assembly in early May, 1963, the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism rose beyond words alone. By unanimous resolution, it dispatched nineteen volunteer rabbis to a tense Birmingham, Alabama, "to witness for freedo."

"Resolved, that the Rabbinical Assembly, in convention assembled, enthusiastically endorse the action of members of the Rabbinical Assembly who in its name volunteer to go to Birmingham to speak on behalf of human rights and dignity."

Rabbi Arie Becker, spiritual leader of Memphis Beth Sholom congregation, was one of the nineteen rabbis who came to meet and left to march. Only Becker and Rabbi Moshe Cahana of Brith Sholom Synagogue in Bellaire (Houston), Texas, were then serving pulpits in the South.

Becker considered his role very minor, as historically it was, compared with the activities of his mentor, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, or with the continued involvement and courage of many others. But his experiences illumine the contrasts between noble pronouncements and personal involvement, be-

tween the relative safety and unity of a national convention and the realities of 'down home' reactions for a Southern rabbi from Memphis.

The idea of a mission from the Assembly did not arise in a vacuum. The several hundred rabbis had arrived at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills with more than the usual baggage. With them they had brought sickening newspaper and television images from the previous week. Who among them had not seen in horror, the snarling police dogs and the electric cattle prods used against peacefully demonstrating children and youth, or the crowd running in fear from high pressure fire hoses?

Moved by these recent events, memories of the Holocaust, and the demands of Judaism, the rabbis of the Assembly felt impelled to act. Rabbi Bernard Mandelbaum of the Jewish Theological Seminary voiced the irony of their situation when he rose to ask how they as spiritual leaders could be concerned only with Nazi cruelty when acts of injustice to fellow human beings were taking place in America. A phone call to Birmingham inquiring if there would be any value if a group of rabbis came to submit some sort of testimony drew a reply to the effect, "This is the time to come."

Within a few hours, the Assembly decided upon the mission to Birmingham and in rapid succession sent forth those who volunteered with blessings and prayers as their "shlichim", their representatives, provided funds for them and witnessed their dramatic departure from the midst of the conference.

As the nineteen rabbis flew to Birmingham, they had time to ask themselves truly why they had come. They questioned the purity of their motives, the merits of their mission, and the dangers to themselves and their families.

Arriving in the early morning hours, the rabbis were warmly welcomed by a delegation of SCLC representatives. They shepherded the rabbis to the Gaston Motel, the only integrated

motel in Birmingham and the location of King's headquarters.

Several fearful members of the local rabbinate, which the Assembly had purposely not contacted, also met their plane and personally urged the group to leave, or if they stayed, not to participate and not to be identified as Jews. The Birmingham rabbis feared harassment or worse. They pleaded with the delegation to the effect, "We are a small minority. You will return to the North and our neighbors will focus their anger on us." The Assembly "shlichim" agonized over the situation, but decided they must do what they considered right and must proceed as planned.

During the previous five months, Martin Luther King and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) had organized a campaign in what they considered to be the meanest city in the segregated South, one identified with arch-racist police commissioner T. "Bull" Connor and an active Klan linked to numerous Negro church bombings and a failed attack on the local Beth El synagogue. The campaign was carefully planned to support demands for integration of downtown facilities (lunch counters, dressing rooms, rest rooms and water fountains) and the expansion and upgrading of job opportunities for Negroes in downtown stores. Nightly rallies in the church and intensive training in non-violent protest continually laid the groundwork for public demonstrations. The SCLC intended to fill the jails with peaceful protest marchers for all the world to see and to hit the downtown businesses with a Negro boycott during the lucrative Easter shopping season.

A month before the rabbis arrived, the sit-ins had failed because merchants simply closed their lunch counters. By mid-April there had been 21 consecutive days of protest demonstrations, but the campaign lacked a sufficient number of people who would volunteer to be arrested and lacked as well the support of the local clergy and of the Negro business leaders. Additionally, recent city elections gave promise of positive change and therefore gave weight to those who did not want any activism. Awaiting a judicial ruling on the election, which was contested, Birmingham was, according to one

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Rabbi Becker *Continued from page 3*

pundit, "the only city in America with two mayors, a king and a parade every day".

In the week prior to the Rabbinical Assembly, the campaign seemed to be seriously faltering. Much against the wishes and wisdom of Birmingham's Negro leaders, King and the SCLC leadership made the difficult and historic decision to use their eager children and youth—well schooled in non-violent protest—as marchers in a "D-Day" demonstration. It was during their march that the police used the fire hoses, attack dogs and cattle prods. And it was this police brutality that roused the support in the Negro community which had previously been lacking, repulsed people of good will everywhere, and finally focused media attention on events in Birmingham.

At the time the rabbis arrived, King had declared a day's halt in the demonstrations in order to give a white Council of Seniors the opportunity to make an acceptable agreement with the SCLC. The truce was later extended to a second and third day, when a settlement was reached.

During the two days of their stay, the party of rabbis marched to the rallies in the churches. Greeted with cheers, applause, and outstretched hands, they were deeply touched by the warmth and friendliness, dignity and heroism of the Negro community in protest. The nineteen became "our rabbis." A new verse was added to the freedom song, "We Shall Overcome": "The rabbis are with us; the rabbis are with us..."

Words later written by one of the rabbis bespoke the shared emotions of their group: "The two days in Birmingham were the most significant religious experience of my life...the Negro became real, his problem became real, and religion generally and Judaism specifically assumed a great contemporary role...The fact that the lineal descendants of the people of the Exodus were there meant a great deal...And Judaism had something to say to them and to me. My history was theirs, for now they were marching to freedom and somehow they would negotiate a miraculous passage through a sea of hate and indifference, to a new future."

Upon his return to Memphis, Rabbi Becker would describe the purpose of the mission, "to give moral support to the Negroes of Birmingham "as representatives of 1 1/2 million members of Conservative Jewish synagogues. We tried to show them that this is not just their fight, but for all of America...The Emancipation Proclamation by Lincoln was a continuation of Moses' deliverance of the people to freedom. Freedom is a continuing thing."

In every church, some of the rabbis spoke. "When my turn came to speak," Becker afterwards recalled, "I told the audience that actually it should be in reverse. We came here not to receive applause but to applaud them for the restraint and patience with which they carry on their fight." We rabbis tried "to bring a message of encouragement from people who have a great experience of suffering under oppression."

The *Memphis Press Scimitar* printed a dispatch from Birmingham telling of the presence of the rabbis, whose "black skullcaps started a beanie-wearing fad among Negro youngsters." The yarmulkes were popular, and some rabbis traded theirs for "I believe in dignity" buttons. James Bevel, one of the leaders of the youth, continued to wear a yarmulke because, he said, he felt it gave him some protection to look like a rabbi!

Martin Luther King earned the greatest respect and admiration from the rabbinical delegation. Not the fiery preacher, but a humble, gentle, human being met with them for an hour in a crowded motel room. King gratefully acknowledged their coming and spoke of common ground as he quoted Hebrew Scripture and words of Martin Buber. Because King had been grievously disappointed in the clergy, the visible support of the rabbis was particularly meaningful.

The friendship and fellowship shown by the SCLC supporters thrilled the rabbis but it could not hide the dangers lurking everywhere. In a later newspaper interview, Rabbi Becker said, "...the occupation of Birmingham by scores of state law enforcement officers and their numerous police dogs brought his memory back to that fateful year of 1939, when Germans occupied the city of Warsaw and created within it a sense

of fear, suspicion and animosity." In Birmingham, he felt, "...all was too quiet between disturbances. Everyone was under suspicion."

If shades of the Holocaust were a strong motivation for the rabbis who volunteered to go to Birmingham, they were a supreme motivation for Rabbi Becker. Twenty-eight of his family perished in the Holocaust, including his parents, a sister and a brother. Newly ordained in Warsaw, Becker had escaped from the Nazis in his native Poland and spent the years of his youth not in the pulpit but in war. He fought with the Free Polish Brigade of the Polish Government in Exile until the end of the war and later with the Haganah Brigade in Israel's War of Independence. He went back to Europe to help establish the first schools in the DP camps in Europe after World War II and to aid in smuggling arms to Israel. After residing in Israel, where he pursued further studies and an additional ordination while engaging in youth leadership work, Becker came to the United States. Reunited with a sole surviving brother in Miami, he remained there as rabbi of a congregation for seven years until his move to Memphis in 1959. Thus, danger was far from new; it had been his way of life.

As the truce held, the rabbis left on Friday somewhat reluctantly, but with a sense that they had fulfilled their mission. After pledging to return anytime they should be needed, they arrived back at the Conference in time for a quiet Shabbat.

But Birmingham did not remain quiet. On Saturday evening, 1,000 Klan members rallied in nearby Bessemer. In the early hours of Sunday morning, the home of Martin Luther King's brother, Rev. A.D. King, was bombed. A second bomb destroyed sections of the Gaston Motel, from which the rabbis had departed only a day and a half earlier. They, like many others, had risked their lives.

Fortunately, there were no injuries and the settlement arrived at on Saturday remained in place. King had announced it, saying, "The city of Birmingham has reached an accord with its conscience."

Rabbi Becker returned home to confront upset and angry congregations.

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Portraits of a Three Generation Business

by Marjean Kremer



Arlene Cowles Deni Hirsh
and the Portraits of Founders
Florette and Irwin Hollander

When Deni Hirsh was named president of Hecht's Tall Shop in February, 1992, she was thirty-four years old and the third generation of her family to lead the enterprise founded by her grandparents almost fifty years earlier.

Leadership roles are not new to the dynamic Hirsh, who like her mother and grandmother before her, is active in the Memphis community, home to the family for more than 50 years. Knowing that she would soon be the store's president, she debated accepting the Presidency of the Memphis Section, National Council of Jewish Women in 1992. She decided that she could successfully meet the triple challenge of family, career and community. She continues her commitment to Council and the community, presently serving as both Council section vice-president and commissioner for the national organization and on the Volunteer Center's Advisory Board for schools.

The first Hecht store opened in 1943 in what was then considered "suburban" Memphis, on Cleveland at Overton Park. Florette Hecht Hollander and husband Irwin Robert Hollander and their two young daughters, Arlene and Sheila, had moved to Memphis in

1937. Florette emigrated to St. Louis from Warsaw, Poland, in 1911 and married the Missouri-born Hollander in 1928. For the next decade they lived in various parts of the country while he managed a succession of stores in the Miller-Wohl chain.

Florette Hollander always maintained they opened the first Hecht store to "keep their two teenagers in clothes." A community activist, she was president of Salon Circle and active in Temple Israel's Sisterhood and the Memphis Section of the National Council of Jewish Women.

The business flourished. In 1948, responding to the need for a store catering to tall women, the Hollanders opened their fourth store, in downtown Memphis, shortly after they had expanded to the Park Avenue Center and to "East" Memphis, in (then) Dillard's Square. A fifth store opened in 1958 in Poplar Plaza featuring both "missy" and "tall" clothing.

Arlene and husband Mark Cowles joined the business soon after their marriage in 1961. Arlene and Sheila had worked in the stores from the beginning but the younger daughter's interest in retailing faded. She received her Ph.D. from (then) Memphis State University and now teaches in its philosophy department.

Like her mother, Arlene not only was active in the company but in the community. At age 24 she became the youngest-ever to assume the presidency of Salon Circle, was active in Temple Israel Sisterhood, Regina and Brandeis University Women's Club. A four-time vice-president of the National Council of Jewish Women, she taught in Temple Israel's Sunday School. Active in numerous community organizations (United Way Budget Committee, Orpheum Board) she co-founded Women for Memphis with Lois Heiskell. She claims that her greatest achievements are her children: Steve, Deni, Tracy, and Stuart and her four "precious grandchildren: Steve's Melanie and Burton; Deni's Alyssa and Stephanie.

With the addition of Mark Cowles, Hecht's Tall Shops expanded regionally, with stores in Nashville, Little Rock and New Orleans. When founder Irwin Hollander died in 1976 there were 6 stores with the Hecht name. (Florette severed her official ties to the company

shortly thereafter; she died in 1993.) Two years later Mark became ill with the kidney disease that was to claim his life. In 1990, after a lengthy battle that included a successful transplant from his brother Harold, he succumbed to the illness. His inability to travel prompted the family to consolidate the Hecht operations at Poplar Plaza. With her father ill, and her siblings still in school, Deni decided in 1981 to give up a promising acting career and return to Memphis from Los Angeles to assist her family "temporarily."

Her 1978 B.S. in Theatre had opened many doors for the talented young actress who had appeared in cameo roles in the popular daytime series General Hospital and Days of Our Lives as well as in commercials and, as she describes them, easily forgotten movies. While starring as Stella in the Germantown Community Theatre production of Streetcar Named Desire and applying to graduate school, Deni met Steve Hirsh who was playing a minor role in the production but soon became the "star" in her life. They married in 1985.

"It never occurred to me that I would ever stay here; I knew they needed me. Then I met Steve and my life really changed," Deni says happily. Daughter Alyssa was born in 1987. In 1989, Steve was transferred to Dallas where Stephanie was born. Realizing that her family and her family's store needed her when her father died, Deni (with Steve and their daughters) returned to Memphis in 1990. Arlene Cowles began to train her daughter to succeed her in the store.

In June, 1991, the dynamic mother-daughter team moved Hecht's Tall Shop to its present location, 408 South Perkins Ext. and the portraits of founders Florette and Irwin Hollander and their son-in-law Mark Cowles found a new home in the new "suburban" location. In 1994, Arlene's portrait was added when she remarried and moved to Philadelphia leaving the shop and family tradition in Deni's capable hands. ♀

Contribute to JHS Archives

Our Archives Committee would like to know about any material you have relating to early Jewish History in Memphis and the Mid-South., such as pictures, books, synagogue and temple publications, family histories and early documents.

Call Laura Spiegler, 767-5924

been a professional magician and entertainer before he helped found Humko, Cooper recalls that they went to New Orleans where "at that time there were many vendors out on the street. Stopping at a fruit stand, Kopald bought a lemon, cut it in two, pulled a dollar bill from it, wiped off the juice, and put the bill in his pocket. The owner's eyes just popped out. So Kopald bought another lemon, repeated the procedure, but this time, pulled a five dollar bill from it. The third lemon produced a ten dollar bill, from which Kopald wiped the juice and then put it in his pocket along with the other bills. The vendor then refused to sell him any more lemons, so we left to keep our business appointment. When we passed by the fruit stand on our way back to our hotel, there was the vendor, sitting on the curb with a pile of lemons, cut in two, on the curb." While Cooper never acquired Kopald's skills in magic, he obviously did learn his selling techniques. He has used this knowledge not only for the operation of his business, but also for his countless charitable endeavors. Fund raising, he believes, "is not begging, but selling. If you have a good product, the rest is easy."

Cooper's commitment to causes and his fund-raising abilities have made him "a legend in his own time," winning for him, in 1989, President George Bush's "Thousand Points of Light Award," a recognition of outstanding volunteer service. He has received many other awards. He was presented the Civic Award by the Rotary Club in 1972. Junior Achievement chose him for its Master of Free Enterprise Award in the same year. Christian Brothers University granted him an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities in 1976, and he received the Sertoma Service to Mankind Award in 1977. The Jewish National Hospital honored him in 1983. Cooper was named "Memphis Volunteer of the Year" in 1985. He received the Senior Citizen Award of the Council on Aging in 1990, the year in which he was also awarded the National Society of Fundraising Executives Award. Cooper admits that he has "never had a failure in the projects," but credits his success to the generosity of local people who donated the money he raised, and to the fact that "he worked



Standing from left to right: Don Drinkard, Danny Thomas, President Gerald Ford and Sam Cooper. Picture taken at Federal Express ST. Jude Pro-Am Golf Tournament June 8, 1977 in which President Ford scored a hole-in-one on the 5th hole. Danny Thomas shown holding the ball.

for a wonderful organization that gave him the opportunity to serve the community."

Cooper's fund-raising career began in 1960 when the community fund, then called Shelby United Neighbors, now the United Way, asked him to be the head of the Corporate Gifts Division. The following year, he was asked to head the SUN campaign itself, which he agreed to do if SUN would consent to invite blacks to serve on the board of directors. SUN agreed, and, he says, "the campaign went over real big." Cooper is proud of working for and with blacks. He has been co-chairman of the Boys' Club drive during which he successfully enlisted black support to demonstrate black-white cooperation. In 1963, the chairman of the national United Way, recognizing Cooper's remarkable fund-raising ability, asked him to serve as chairman of a national conference on organizing fund-raising drives. It was attended by 600-700 people, and he is pleased that "it brought a lot of favorable publicity to Memphis."

Realizing that it would be impractical to name all his multiple public service ventures, Cooper himself selected what he considered some of the highlights of his career. At the top of his list is his devotion to cancer research. The father of four daughters, he and his wife, Frankie, lost their second-born, Beverly (Mrs. Tom) Howard, to the disease when she was a young mother. Thus, when the University of Tennessee asked him to raise \$2,000,000 for its cancer research project, he agreed. A short time later, Cooper received a phone call from the entertainer, Danny Thomas, asking him to raise the same amount for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis. He knew and admired Tho-

mas who had been the speaker at a banquet when the National Conference of Christians and Jews honored Cooper in 1969. Cooper's dilemma was that he had already made a commitment to the University of Tennessee and was unwilling to have two competing drives for the same cause in the city in the same year, so he conceived the idea of asking the two institutions to join forces to raise the funds. They agreed, and the drive he headed in 1974 raised more than the amount required, yielding \$4,300,000 in ninety days at a cost of less than \$10,000. Cooper believes that the drive also served the function of "getting Memphis to support St. Jude's." Cooper has served on the St. Jude's board of directors for most of its existence. A wing of the hospital was named for him in 1976.

Sam Cooper has been a close friend of Lamar Alexander dating from Alexander's campaign for governor of Tennessee during which Cooper served as Shelby County Chairman. He agreed to work in that capacity on the condition that Alexander, when elected, would pay attention to the needs of Memphis. This friendship enabled Cooper to facilitate passage of a law important to the welfare of St. Jude's, providing that no insurance company could be licensed in Tennessee without first agreeing to honor legitimate bills from St. Jude's. Again, when St. Jude's was invited to move to St. Louis, Cooper persuaded Alexander to obtain \$25,000,000 of public revenue to upgrade research facilities at the University of Tennessee Medical School. Cooper then headed a drive called "Mission for Memphis," in 1986, whose goal was to raise \$10,000,000, but instead raised \$18,000,000. With

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Entrance wing for children receiving treatment at ST. Jude Children's Research Hospital named in honor of Sam Cooper who is looking at the plaque with Danny Thomas.

Plaque Reads:

"This wing dedicated to Sam Cooper. A great humanitarian and friend to the children of ST. Jude Children's Research Hospital."



Cooper *Continued from page 6*

these incentives, Cooper was able to plead successfully with the St. Jude's board of directors for the institution to remain in Memphis. When Lamar Alexander became President of the University of Tennessee, he asked Cooper to serve on the board of trustees, which he did from 1981-1990, the only one of the twenty members who was not a college graduate.

Cooper says that the construction of a new building for Temple Israel was another of his pet projects. Since its completion, he has worked to create an endowment fund to secure the future of the temple. He was president of Temple Israel from 1967-1972, has served on its board of trustees from 1961 until the present, and was made Honorary President for Life in 1993.

Typical of Cooper's broad range of fund raising activities was his work for the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. He felt about it as he did about the Memphis Arts Council when the council asked him to raise \$105,000. He had been to only one concert and was not a patron of the arts. But he knew it was good for the city so he involved business leaders in a Business Cabinet for the Arts, which he formed. To qualify, his chosen fifty had to agree to serve on the board of one of the city's cultural organizations, if asked to do so, and to raise money. "I made fifty calls myself," Cooper says. Hme served as campaign chairman of the Memphis Arts Council in 1966 and also served on the board of the Tennessee Arts Commission in 1968-1969.

When the Memphis Food Bank, which provides food for the needy, needed a larger warehouse and had to go into debt to acquire one, the directors called Sam Cooper. They required

\$700,000 to pay for the new building. Cooper arranged meetings for them with the mayor of the city who was able to get a federal grant for \$300,000. The mayor of the county gave \$250,000 and the governor gave them the rest. In all, they raised over \$1,000,000, which does not surprise Cooper at all because, in his opinion, people want to alleviate hunger if given the opportunity.

Cooper's personal philosophy is "The Good Lord has blessed me with good health, so what greater blessing have I had than to help others who cannot help themselves?" The people of Memphis, in 1986, gave him the signal honor of naming one of their ten expressways Sam Cooper Boulevard. Because of his efforts, many people in Memphis have been given opportunities to help those in need, and many others have been the recipients of this help. They and the city are better for having the leadership of Sam Cooper.



Rabbi Becker *Continued from page 4*

gants. The Executive Committee and key board members--some of whom knew nothing of his mission to Birmingham until an article appeared in the local newspaper--chastised him for failing to inform them of his plans and 'took him to task' for exposing his congregants as well as himself to possible retaliation. In 'heated discussion' they pointed out that he had appeared to represent the congregation when he had not been authorized to do so. Some pressed him to make a statement that he represented himself alone, not the Jewish community.

Becker stood his ground. He

apologized for not informing them, but he did not apologize for what he had done. Where people are persecuted, he affirmed, he understood what they were going through. And, as a survivor, he had a sense of mission, that he had been saved to perform such acts as this on behalf of the oppressed.

Within the congregation, while many people did not agree with the civil rights movement and were very displeased that he had gone to Birmingham, others felt that the rabbi should have the freedom to act on his beliefs. A strong core of loyal supporters earned in the four years of his rabbinate at Beth Sholom stood behind him, and the few who sought his dismissal could not summon sufficient support. After a while, the congregation "simmered down."

Ultimately, Becker continued with increasing honor and affection in this congregation, which grew and thrived under the 20 years of his leadership. He was recognized as well, for leadership in Conservative Judaism and in the support of the State of Israel; was greatly respected for his scholarship, and widely beloved, with a special relationship with the young. When Becker died at age 59 of cancer, his courageous role in Birmingham was spoken of in the memorial service.

But at the time, publicity spawned a number of weeks of fear and harassment for Rabbi Becker and his family. They were subjected not only to calls from angry congregants, but to hate calls from nameless callers, some plainly anti-Semitic. Even Jewish merchants from Birmingham and nearby Mississippi towns accused him of putting them in jeopardy of losing their white customers.

The ordeal heightened as Becker received threatening phone calls and ominous night riders slowed by his house on the synagogue property. Bricks and rocks were thrown at the house. The synagogue received a bomb threat. Becker sent his wife and sons, age 5 and 2, to be with relatives in Philadelphia, the children only in later years realizing this had not simply been the summer vacation trip they had protectively been led to believe. Becker, for the next couple of traumatic weeks, worked at the synagogue in the daytime, but stayed with one or the other of two close congregational friends after hours.

Please see Rabbi Becker, Page 9

You are invited to attend a special conference entitled
“Southern Rabbis’ Involvement in Black Civil Rights”

Thursday, March 30 through Saturday April 1, 1995
at the Radisson Hotel, adjacent to the historic Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee.

co-sponsored by
The Southern Jewish Historical Society
Bornblum Judaic Studies
The Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities
The University of Memphis Department of History
The Jewish Historical Society Of Memphis And The Mid-South

Sessions will include panel discussions, memoirs, interviews, and papers which will address many issues, including---

- Why were some rabbis more active than others?***
- How did rabbis interact with other clergy?***
- How did rabbis interact with African American leaders?***
- What were the circumstances which led to involvement?***
- What were the philosophical and religious bases for their activities?***
- How did Southern rabbis compare with their northern counterparts on civil rights issues?***
- How early did rabbis get involved?***
- What motivated some rabbis to take strong stands?***
- What dangers did they face?***
- Who were the most “visible” spokesmen of rights?***
- Who were the rabbis whose roles in the movement have not been recognized?***
- What additional research needs to be done?***

Scholars from throughout the country will grapple with these and other questions.
The conference will include an opening banquet at the historic Peabody and evening entertainment on Beale.

**For more information contact Dr. Berkley Kalin, (901)678-3388/2515 Department of History,
The University of Memphis.**

Registration \$45.00 with banquet, \$25.00 excluding banquet.
Radisson Hotel rooms - \$70.00 single/double call 1-800-333-3333 and mention the conference name to reserve rooms.

Becker had returned to a congregation fearful for his welfare and their own, concerned about their position as Jews in a Christian community, and with varying sympathies or lack of them on civil rights issues. "Jews did not get involved..this is the way it was..because there was a lot of anti-Semitism," one congregant explained.

Becker, though known for a lively sense of humor, was, it is recalled, a quiet person whose nature was not to put himself too far ahead of his congregation. To them, however his sympathies were nonetheless clear. He educated his congregation in an advocacy of justice which came through in sermons on many topics, whether he did or did not deliver civil rights sermons as such. One of his sons states that after what his father had lived through, he did not tolerate hate or bigotry. In his home, it was not so much spoken about as taken for granted.

Father Nicholas Vieron, a liberal Catholic cleric and contemporary, easily identified Rabbi Becker with the leading liberal clergy in Memphis. After Birmingham, Becker did not leave town to participate in any other civil rights marches or demonstrations, nor did he make public appearances for civil rights. However, Becker marched with Rabbi James Wax, Vieron, and other members of the Memphis Ministerial Asso-

ciation to Mayor Loeb's office at the time of the garbage strike in the tense days before Martin Luther King was killed here. It was his only other public demonstration.

What, then, was the importance of Rabbi Becker and the other rabbis who went to Birmingham? Precisely because they could come and then leave, the rabbis from the Assembly were able to separate themselves from the dilemma and the "tragic predicament" of the local Birmingham rabbinate who feared to speak their consciences. The "freedom flyers" from the Assembly exercised their freedom from localism to courageously represent "the articulate conscience of American Conservative concern."

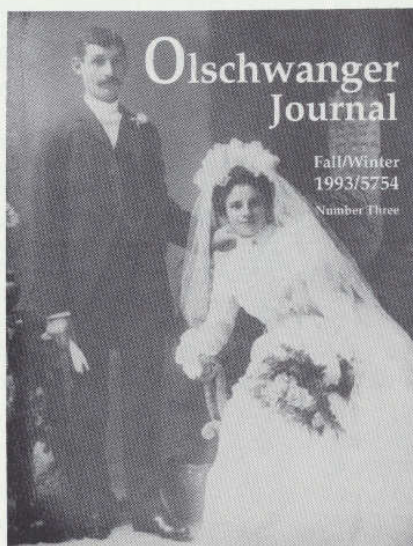
For those who went, it proved to be a deeply spiritual experience, a journey that illuminated their lives. And to the Birmingham Negro community, the rabbis brought meaningful moral support and public attention which increased pressure for settlement that was tenuously holding.

As *The Reporter* magazine commented, "...the prospect of a phalanx of nineteen rabbis marching into the Birmingham jail in what much of the press has so far continually and exaggeratedly described as "race riots" was adjudged to be more than the country's international reputation could bear. Their presence helped to tip the scales toward justice. ☆

Book Donated to Society Library

Anna Olschwanger, former Memphian, has just published the third (and final) issue of the "Olschwanger Journal," the culmination of her last ten years of research into her family's history. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the journal was a year in the publication process, hence the 1993 date on the cover.

Members who attended the Fourth National Seminar in Jewish Genealogy in 1984 may remember Anna Olschwanger's workshop on publishing a family history magazine. Interested individuals can purchase their own copy of the journal by sending a check for \$40 (which includes postage and handling) to Anna Olschwanger, 7117 Harps Mill Road, Raleigh, NC 27615-5323. ☆



Rabbi Arie Becker Young Leadership Award

In 1980, the Memphis Jewish Federation established the Rabbi Arie Becker Young Leadership award which is presented annually to two outstanding young leaders in our community. This award is part of the ongoing commitment to leadership development on the part of the Memphis Jewish Federation. Recipients of the award represent Memphis either at the Council of Jewish Federation's General Assembly or on a Young Leadership Mission to Israel. Past recipients of the award are:

- 1980-Kay Usdan
Sam Chafetz
- 1981-Diane Mendelson
Michael Usdan
- 1982-Rose Ostrow
Norris Marcus
- 1983-Marlene Gerson
Irvin Skopp
- 1984-Henrie Marcus
Warren Wurzburg, Jr.
- 1985-Linda Ellen Sklar
Andrew Groveman
- 1986-Fran Winstock
Barry Lichterman
- 1987-Peggy Goodman
Richard Wolf
- 1988-Jan Groveman
Robert Pinstein
- 1989-Barbara Wolf
Ronald Sklar
- 1990-Andrea Bienstock
Mark Bernsen
- 1991-Eileen Siegal
Morris Gavant
- 1992-Jill Steinberg
Joel Katz
- 1993-Michelle Harkavy
Seth Kaufman
- 1994-Karen Moss
Jonathan Frisch

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In our Winter-Spring 1994 issue, we were privileged to publish the first part of Mr. Brook's article covering his description of the first 8 Temple windows. In Part II, we cover the remaining windows, 9-16.

This paper was prepared for Tours of Temple Adas Israel, Brownsville, Tennessee by Donald E. Brooks, Vicar of the Episcopal Church in Brownsville, and regular attendant at Temple Adas Israel. Mr. Brooks has also updated and rewritten a history of Temple Adas Israel which is presented as a tour guide to those visiting the Temple.

9. The window above the Ark, in which the Torahs are kept, has a circle in which a great eye is shown. This is the All Seeing Eye of God, recalling to mind the prophet's declaration that "He who keepeth watch over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." It is dedicated to the Middle Ages, a time of darkness when the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the world as refugees and prisoners. Yet, throughout the times of trials and tribulations, they never ceased in their worship of God, nor in their belief in the common family of Faithful Israel.

The center circle evokes the recollection of the Maccabean War for religious freedom, and God's providential care over Israel in earlier times as well with the lighted Menorah standing on broken rocks of hardship. Beneath this is the Hebrew Creed, recited each time Jewish people gather to worship: Sh'ema, Yisroel, Adonoi Eloheinu, Adonoi Echod. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. This creed has been the binder for the people for the long centuries. Flanking the Creed on the right, we see the three great scrolls of the Torah, the hafTorah, and the Talmud surmounted by the lamp of Wisdom. On the left, we see a road leading through a hole in the rock, suggesting the promise of God that He would lead the people through the rough places to safety. ✨

The border contains gold disks and Tefillin, or leather boxes that the Hasidim of very Orthodox Jews wear bound to their foreheads and arms. The boxes contain the heart of the law which was to be kept near at all times.

The window is in memory of Emil and Hannah Tamm.

10. The Doors of the Ark exhibit Stars of David and the Lamp of Wisdom. This recalls the admonition that the study and respect of God are the beginning of wisdom.

11. Circular windows at the roof line on the rear wall on each side show the Star of David.

12. The Center Diamond shape window shows a white dove hovering over an open book. The book represents the Holy Word of God. The Dove has been an emblem of the Spirit of God for thousands of years.

13. There are two windows in the north or "Choir Vesting classroom." On the north wall, the upper circular device is a representation of the Ark of the Covenant, and is inscribed "The Priesthood." The lower depiction is of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness or the Tent of Meeting. It is inscribed "Ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Contrary to the idea of some very conservative Christian groups, the idea of "priesthood of the believer" was not new to the New or Christian Testa-

ment times. God called all of Israel to be priests to the whole world, and to teach the love and redemption of God to all nations. They were called to practice their understanding of the love and worship of God. They were also called to enlighten and encourage all people to call upon the name of the One True God, no matter by what Name they knew him. The border has pomegranates and gongs. The window is given in memory of Dr. W.G. Sternberger.

14. The front or east window in the choir room exhibits a scroll inscribed "My God is He in whom I trust," a great belief of the Hebrew people.

The window is in memory of Milton A. Sternberger.

15. There are two windows in the south classroom. In the south wall, the window depicts the promised Jerusalem with light from the domed central building, the House of God. Flowing from the city is the River of Life. All the area is lush with growth. It is inscribed "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The window is given in memory of Leopold and Emelia Levy.

16. The east or front window in the south classroom exhibits a scroll inscribed "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel," the words sounded out each Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, and a good admonition for all of us. The window is dedicated to the memory of Jonas B. and Clara B. Felsenthal.



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