

SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

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Selma Lewis . . . A Distinguished Historian Who Helped Shape Memphis History

The Jewish Historical Society Mourns Her Passing

"Selma Lewis enriched the lives of all she knew" headlined *The Commercial Appeal's* obituary for the beloved Selma Seligman Lewis who died March 2, in an automobile accident in Georgia at age 78.

The lengthy obituary only began to portray the remarkable woman who had called Memphis home for more than 50 years and had made such profound contributions to it. "From helping needy school children get (free) school lunches to chronicling the history of black and Jewish people, (she) touched (so) many lives in Memphis."

Born in 1921 in Nashville, Tennessee, Selma was graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1942, where she was voted "Lady of the Bracelet," the highest accolade for a senior woman. Longtime friend from her college days, Memphis attorney Francis Loring said that "Selma never changed; she was always the most caring, the most capable human being. She only became even more so. I think she was born a wonder." That same year she married her college sweetheart, Memphis-born James Marshall Lewis, soon to see active duty in the navy in the Atlantic theater. They moved to his

hometown soon after the war ended.

Awarded her MA and Ph.D. from (then) Memphis State University in 1976, she wrote her dissertation, "Social Religion and the Memphis Sanitation Strike," as part of an ongoing commitment to civil rights. Abe Kriegel, former chair of the history department at the university, recalled her as an "enormously courageous woman involved in many causes...she possessed grace, charm and intelligence." Longtime friend, traveling companion and widow of her favorite professor, Mary Alice Orr says that Selma had "all the attributes, all the qualities of a saint."

In 1962 Selma was elected the first woman president of the Jewish Family Service. Earlier she had served as vice-president of Family Service of Memphis. In the late 1960's Selma was instrumental in founding the Fund for Needy School Children, which provided lunch and other services for low-income children. She served as its chair from 1972-74.

As a VISTA volunteer for the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association (1972-77) she co-authored *Historic Black Memphians* with Marjean Kremer

IN MEMORIAM



Selma Lewis 1921-2000

for an exhibit at the Memphis Pink palace (1975). From 1977-79, under MIFA's aegis, she served as the first co-coordinator of the Memphis Coalition for the Homeless.

With Mrs. Kremer she also wrote *The Angel of Beale Street: A Biography of Julia Ann Hooks*, published by St. Luke's Press in 1986. Three years earlier, as volunteers, the two edited the first *Directory of Mental Health Services of*

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"The Jews Of Memphis" Film Receives Great Reviews It Brings History To Life

On Sunday, October 17, 1999 an overflow crowd of more than 360 people were present at Longinotti Hall at St. Francis Hospital for the premier showing of the Society's hour long documentary film. The film, "Jews of Memphis", was produced by Rob and Pam Cooper for the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

Sumner Levine, President of the Society stated that the video traces "the evolution of Memphis Jewry."

The film, narrated by Tim Sawyer is a great documentary presenting many historic photographs with voice over commentary along with interviews by over twenty Memphians such as Dr.

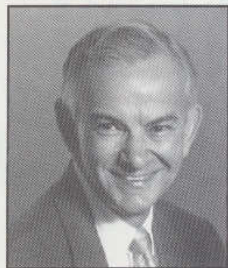
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Save this Date Sunday, April 9th

The Jewish Historical Society is planning a one day trip to Blytheville and Jonesboro, Arkansas. Joel Felt has arranged a visit to these two congregations. Both are few in members but are still active. The trip is limited to 45 people. Don't delay-- send a check for \$10.00 per person to Jewish Historical Society, 33 E. Yates S., Memphis, TN 38120.

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

President's Message



Sumner Levine

Unquestionably, the highlight of the last two years, as your president, has been the opportunity of being in contact with our beloved Selma Lewis. Your Jewish Historical Society has been involved in many worthwhile projects since its inception, but nothing was as rewarding and successful as the publication of A Biblical People In The

Bible Belt and our film, The Jews Of Memphis, (which is scheduled to be shown on WKNO on April 1st).

I was fortunate enough to be in almost daily contact with Selma and learned what a gracious lady she was. She was always generous with her time in personally autographing her book or sharing her knowledge with everyone who sought information. Phyllis and I were fortunate to have spent a weekend with Selma at the Southern Historical Society Convention in Richmond. Her search for knowledge and interaction with her fellow authors was a joy to behold. We have all been blessed to have had Selma as a part of our life.

Our meeting on March 5, 2000 was dedicated to Selma's memory and it was certainly appropriate that we had an historian, Dr. Stephen Whitfield, Professor of American Studies from Brandeis University, conduct a seminar on Jewish Humor and American Jewish History. It was an outstanding program that was arranged by Marcia Levy, Nation President of Brandeis University National Women's Committee, and Rabbi Micah Greenstein, a longtime friend of Dr. Whitfield. It was one of our best programs.

On April 9th, Joel Felt is planning a one-day trip to Blytheville and Jonesboro, Arkansas. On April 16th, the second part of Jews In The Arts will be presented.

On June 11, 2000, Marjean Kremer is planning our annual

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meeting. Past presidents of Memphis community organizations will relate some of their experiences during their terms in office. Moderator will be Richard Kremer; the panel will consist of Marcia Bicks, Joyce Lazarov, Dr. Joseph Parker, and Dr. Thomas Stern. This should be an outstanding program.

I want to thank everyone for all of your efforts and the outstanding support that we have received as shown by your attendance at our programs and activities this year. ★

Our Past Presidents Remember Selma

When Selma agreed to write our history of the Jews of Memphis, it was an impossible dream come true. Selma had worked for MIFA and for so many efforts in the larger community, and her writing had been about Julia Hooks, the Sanitation Strike, and MIFA, that this seemed an unlikely idea. But it turned out to be something she really wanted to do. She did it with all her heart and wonderful mind, leaving the Jewish community its heritage and giving honor to herself. We are grateful for this and for all her devoted work throughout the community where she lived out her religion. She was a guiding light.

But, of course, it is still the person herself that is so hard to part with. Selma had a glow, inward and outward. You heard it in her warm voice punctuated with little laughs—and felt it in her

attentiveness and kindness. And she had the glow of intelligence and good judgment, all endowed with her radiant personality and lively sense of humor. Having been among her friends is something I will always cherish. Thank you, Selma, for having been all that you were. The harder to lose you.

Harriet Stern



I called her my verbal encyclopedia of Memphis Jewish history. I called on her so often and always received not only answers, but the charm, grace, warmth and inspiration that was Selma. The book is closed, but the memories, like pages special to each of us, remain her legacy forever.

David Schneider



Before I became actively involved in the Jewish Historical Society, I knew of Dr. Lewis, but I did not know her personally.

As President of the Jewish Historical Society, I assumed the daunting task of trying to enhance the process of the publication of our book. This process necessarily involved making some hard decisions and causing both negative and positive criticism of Dr. Lewis' work.

Dr. Lewis, without hesitation, accepted all input, regardless of pride of authorship. She was a real scholar and lady in every sense of the word.

I know she will be sorely missed by the entire Memphis community. I extend all of our heart felt condolences to her family and friends.

Stephen A. Biller

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Lewis

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Memphis and Shelby County. Their last collaboration, again as volunteers, a history of the first 30 years of MIFA, was published in 1998. Mrs. Kremer believes that "anybody who knew her is a better person because of her."

As the historian of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South (JHS), she wrote *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840's-1960's*, published by Mercer Press in 1986. Now in its second printing, the widely acclaimed book became the basis for JHS' 1999 video, produced by Boston-based Rob Cooper, son of Selma's close friends. The video will be shown on WKNO-TV on April 1.

A prodigious volunteer, Selma served on numerous other boards, reflecting both her commitment to the improvement of life in the community and the diversity of her many interests. Some of these were: the Memphis College of Art (secretary); the Memphis Literacy Council (chairman); the Mental Health Society of the Mid-South ("founding mother"); Synergy Foundation, The Symphony League; Concerts International; The Parenting Center; and Theatre Memphis. From 1995-8, she was president of Facing History and Ourselves Memphis Board. She also served on the organization's national board. She was president-elect of the JHS.

In dedicating the March 5 meeting of the historical society to her memory, President Sumner Levine spoke of his "great fortune of spending a lot of time with Selma...to say that she was good company and a joy to be with would be redundant...the officers and board dedicate this meeting to Selma whom we dearly loved." While introducing the meeting's distinguished guest speaker, Brandeis University professor, Stephen Whitfield, Temple Israel's Rabbi Micah Greenstein recalled that "Selma had class, an intellect, a graciousness, a passion for learning, a warm hearted personality and a sense of humor...she taught us to be wiser and better by studying, teaching, and learning from history."

Selma's memorial service was held at Temple Israel where she was a member. It was attended by more than 700 people from all segments of the community as



Dr. Selma Lewis addressing the JHS at Book Signing November 8, 1998

well as a large contingent of family and friends, some of whom had traveled great distances to mourn with the others who also loved her. Rabbi Harry K. Danziger described her as a "jewel in our midst who needed no special lighting or showcase because her innate quality was enough to light up the world around her...ultimately it was her children and grandchildren...who enjoyed the full light that Selma brought to the world."

Speaking on behalf of family and friends, Paul Berz pointed out that "everyone in this sanctuary was blessed to call Selma Lewis a friend...she was an avid birdwatcher and lover of nature's beauty...she made everyone feel special...her husband said she was the only person he knew who could read a book, watch the news, knit, and engage in conversation all at the same time."

On learning that she was to be named the Jewish 1996 National Conference of Christian and Jews Humanitarian of the Year, Selma selected her beloved Marshall as her presenter. Both of their speeches at the NCCJ banquet are forever etched in the hearts of those privileged to hear them. Other awards include: Girl's Club She Knows Where She is Going Award, 1989; Women of Achievement Steadfastness Award, 1993; Memphis Rotary Club Service Award, 1993; and Martin Luther King, Jr. Human Rights Award (University of Memphis), 1994.

Selma is survived by two daughters, Susan Lewis of Nashville and Jane Ross of Memphis; a son, James M Lewis, Jr. of Memphis and three grandchildren. The family requests that any memorials be sent to Facing History and Ourselves, The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, or MIFA. ★

Our Past Presidents Remember Selma

I will think of you on sunny days and when the robins nest outside my kitchen window. I will think of you when I read a good book, listen to a symphony, and open the Torah on Shabbat.

The warm rays of your smile shine upon us still.

Gloria Felsenthal



I was privileged to work closely with Selma during her untiring research effort while writing the History of the Jews of Memphis. I admired her intelligence, grace, elegance, warm smile, her humanity and compassionate personality.

Because she understood Jewish suffering, she was determined to fight injustice and discrimination against others.

By writing the history of the Jews from Memphis, Selma made a remarkable contribution to our community by enabling us to understand "the years of the old generations". She fulfilled one of the major goals of our Jewish Historical Society, to have our own written history, that will help educate and inspire our children and children's children for years to come.

Leonid Saharovici



We have lost a student, a scholar.
We have lost a historian, a writer.
We have lost a worker for the poor, the helpless.
But most of all, we have lost a smile, a friend.

Tom Stern



**God did not create
woman from man's head
that he should command her
Nor from his feet,
that she should be his slave
But rather from his side
that she should
be near his heart.**

The Talmud

*You will always be dear to us
and near to our hearts.*

The Tennessee Commission on Holocaust Education Marks Fifteenth Year

*Tennessee was the Third State in the USA
to form a Governmental Holocaust Commission*

by
Leonid Saharovici



Leonid Saharovici

The last two decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a great interest and awareness in Holocaust education and the creation of a growing number of organizations that have contributed to the Remembering movement of the Holocaust.

The founding of The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, The Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Commemoration of Yom Hashoah at Federal, State and Local level, the active role of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors are some of the most active organizations. These along with the explosion of literature, information, exhibitions and powerful movies, have paved the way for the creation of a large number of institutions that bring their contributions to teaching the lessons of the greatest tragedy in the history of humankind. As the majority of writers and historians agree the term Holocaust has entered the American language and Auschwitz has become a well-known metaphor of World War II. The echo of Santayana's words, "Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it", or Eli Wiesel's remarks, "remembering can instill caution, fortify, restrain and protect against future evil and indifference", had powerful resonance in the conscience of the American people.

In 1982, in Washington D.C., the largest gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors living in the U.S. took place. During the gathering at a congressional breakfast, the delegation of Holocaust Survivors from Memphis met with Vice President Al Gore, Jr. and Governor Don Sundquist, who at that time were both

U.S. Congressmen from the State of Tennessee. On behalf of the Holocaust Memorial Committee from Memphis I presented them with a plaque entitled "Memphis, Tennessee remembers the Holocaust", which generated great interest among the recipients. The discussion gravitated to the need for Holocaust education in our state. I suggested the creation of a Tennessee Holocaust Commission. The idea was very well received. Both Congressmen Gore and Sundquist enthusiastically supported the idea and committed themselves to the realization of this great project.

Returning to Memphis, and inspired by the enthusiasm generated by the gathering in Washington, D.C., I wrote a proposal that was endorsed by Dr. Harry Moore, Jr., Regional Director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. On September 8, 1983, we sent a written request to Governor Lamar Alexander, asking him to form such a Commission in Tennessee. In a letter

sent to me after the American Gathering, Al Gore, Jr. wrote on July 7, 1983, "I think your idea for a state Holocaust Commission is an excellent one. The emphasis on education and statewide involvement is vital and will invite much introspection, discussions and understanding of the frightening consequences of the Holocaust. I want you to know that you have my unqualified support and my eagerness to help in any way I can. Thank you for the opportunity to get involved. I will look forward to working with you on this important project."

On August, 25, 1983, Congressman Don Sundquist wrote Governor Lamar Alexander a warm letter of support saying, "The proposed Commission, I believe, will perpetuate the valuable lessons the world learned from the Holocaust tragedy, primarily, the importance and need for peace and harmony among the nations and peoples of the world... I hope you will give serious consideration and your final approval of this worthy proposal."

Many people of good will, representative of major universities and colleges, Jewish organizations, and clergymen of different denominations, supported the project.

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Dedication of the Memorial to the Martyrs of the Holocaust on the grounds of the State Capitol Building, Nashville, 1986. Left to right: Rabbi Rafael Grossman, Governor Lamar Alexander, Senator Stephen Cohen, Jack A. Belz and Leonid Saharovici.

State Senator Steve Cohen took the project close to his heart and was instrumental in the 93rd General Assembly of Tennessee for adopting the Joint resolutions No. 217 on April 26, 1984, which created the Commission on the Commemoration of the Holocaust. Senator Cohen has for the last 15 years been an active member of the Commission and a strong supporter of Holocaust education and commemoration of Yom Hashoah in the State of Tennessee. The resolution was signed by John Wilder, speaker of the Senate, Ned R. McWherter, speaker of the House of Representatives and Lamar Alexander, Governor of Tennessee. The State of Tennessee was the third state in the United States to form a governmental Holocaust Commission. Twelve commissioners are appointed by the Governor for a three-year term. Five commissioners serve because they hold specific positions in the legislature or in the state's educational system. In later years, further legislation created the opportunity to form a non-profit corporation, The Tennessee Holocaust Commission, Inc., in which commissioners serve as directors and the by-laws allow election of five additional directors enlarging the participation and contribution of individuals to promote Holocaust education and awareness in our communities.

The longest serving commissioners are Felicia Anchor, Jack A. Belz and myself, who have been appointed since the inception of the Commission and are continuing to serve.

Great achievements have been realized in these fifteen years. Every year, in the State Capitol Building, the Days of Remembering are observed in impressive ceremonies. The three governors who represented the executive branch of our state during the last fifteen years, Lamar Alexander, Ned McWherter and Don Sundquist issued proclamations every year to commemorate Yom Hashoah and have offered their own remarks during those commemorations. Yom Hashoah, the day of remembering the Holocaust is observed in small and large communities in our state.

A remarkable achievement of the



American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Washington D.C., April 1982. Congressmen Don Sundquist and Al Gore, Jr. receiving from Leonid Saharovici the plaque "Memphis, TN remembers the Holocaust."

commission was the establishment in 1986 of a permanent Memorial to the Martyrs of the Holocaust on the grounds of the State Capitol Building in Nashville. The Memorial consists of six cedar trees native to the state of Tennessee, along with a metal plaque anchored in a stone base with the following inscription: "WE MUST NEVER FORGET!"

The people of Tennessee dedicate these six trees as a living Memorial to the six million innocent Jewish victims of Nazi Holocaust (1939-1945). Let all generations remember...so that a Holocaust shall never again occur."

Under the leadership of its first three chairperson, Bernard Bernstein of Nashville, Dr. Beverly Asbury and Felicia Anchor of Nashville, the Commission has concentrated its activities on education and commemoration. The Commission has completed a formal holocaust teaching unit in Social Studies, making Tennessee one of the first eight states in the United States to put such a curriculum in its public secondary schools.

In collaboration with universities and colleges, with the contribution of Holocaust scholars, the Commission has sponsored conferences on teaching the Holocaust, educational outreach programs open to teachers and

students, Holocaust in-service for continuing education for teachers, training seminars, exhibitions, movies, plays, etc. (The Ann Frank exhibition in Nashville has attracted over 80,000 people).

In the last six years, through the generosity of two prominent Memphis business and civic leaders, Jack A. Belz and Ira Lipman, the Commission established the annual Belz-Lipman Holocaust educator of the year award. The selection of the winners is made in a statewide competition. Since its inception, the award was presented to 22 teachers from the state's three grand divisions. The award has recognized excellence in the development of a Holocaust course study and teaching the unit to students in Middle or High Schools. The winners received a cash award of \$1000 and the runner-up, \$500.

Recently, the Commission has embarked on a timely, ambitious and promising project. A distinguished group of scholars and teachers have accepted the invitation of the Commission to participate in a yearlong colloquium entitled, "The Holocaust, Genocide and the teaching of ethical values". The project, founded by the Zimmerman Foundation and the Tennessee

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Commission *Continued from Page 3*

Commission on Holocaust Education, in collaboration with the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities from Vanderbilt University, will develop guidelines for teaching Holocaust and other forms of Genocide at the secondary and post secondary level, as well as the teaching of ethical values that will help prevent similar inhuman acts in the future.

Recognizing the role of the Commission in providing educational opportunities to teachers, students and the general public, Felicia Anchor, chair of the Tennessee Commission was invited, as a member of the United States delegation, and participated in the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. (21-24 Jan., 2000). The Forum was attended by Prime Ministers, Presidents of States and prominent leaders from many countries. ★

Film

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Selma Lewis, Jack Belz, Josie Burson, Sam Cooper, Nina Katz, Shirley Parker, Rabbi Rafael Grossman and Rabbi Harry Danziger, along with others.

As stated in the opening of the film, Jews came to Memphis because "they found a place where they could live and worship in freedom. They worked and prospered; they built temples and synagogues, social halls and educational buildings. They opened stores and started businesses, practiced medicine and law. They become part of the fiber of the city that needed their skills and energy. And again and again contributed to events that changed the face of the city. They are the Jews of Memphis". The film is divided into segments beginning with the "Early Years". Dr. Selma Lewis furnished historical background describing how many Jews began as peddlers backpacking along the Mississippi countryside. Later, some of these developed into merchants and became an integral part of Memphis. Stores such as Lowenstein's Department Store, founded in 1855, Seessels, founded in 1858, Oak Hall in 1859, were followed by Goldsmith's Department Store and a number of other businesses still in existence today.

There was a growing Jewish community in Memphis prior to the Civil

Through the great work of the Tennessee Commission on Holocaust Education and the creative efforts of our Holocaust educators, the message of

remembering the lessons of the Holocaust are resonating in public and private schools, colleges and universities in the State of Tennessee.



Tennessee Commission on Holocaust Education, Tennessee Holocaust Commission, Inc., Nashville, 24 September, 1998. First Row sitting (left to right): Ruth K. Tanner, Executive Director, Leonid Saharovici, Felicia F. Anchor, Beverly A. Asbury, Jack A. Belz, Gilya G. Schmidt, Peter Consacro. Second Row standing (left to right): Allen Exelbierd, Ernest G. Freudenthal, Stephen Hayes, Gene L. Davenport, E. Thomas Wood, Robert Levy, Priscilla F. Siskin, Lon Nuell.

War and most families were largely assimilated into mainstream Memphis society. Many of the Jews fought for the Confederacy and the anti-Semitism of General Ulysses S. Grant increased their loyalty to Memphis.

After the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1874, the Jewish community of approximately 1200 was reduced to 300, but new immigrants from Europe boosted the population and filled the area known as the "Pinch". Most of the new immigrants of this period were Orthodox Jews whose largest handicap was language difficulty. The Jewish Neighborhood House came into being to help the immigrants learn language and customs of their new home.

Memphis grew, as did the Jewish community. With the advent of Mayor E.H. Crump the Jewish community became more involved in politics. Will Gerber became District Attorney and Boss Crump's right hand man.

Another "small but significant influx" of Jews arrived in Memphis after World War II. The horror of the Holocaust

helped unite the local Jewish community and ended much of the squabbling between Reform and Orthodox Jews. As Herschel Feibelman points out in the film, such distinctions were irrelevant to the Nazis." No one said, 'Are you a Reform Jew, are you a Conservative Jew?' They were Jews, and despised and destroyed."

The film—in the segment "Practicing What We Preach"—chronicles the Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. That involvement was inspired to a large extent by the fearless example of Rabbis Wax and Becker (the latter spoke with the hard-to-dispute moral authority of a Holocaust survivor).

Another example of progressiveness occurred when Malco, in collaboration with the NAACP, quietly began integrating its movie houses at a time when race mixing was against the law.

In addition to establishing many of the city's most significant businesses and contributing to its growing medical community, the Jewish population

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Rabbi Lau

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him and that with a child on each knee he taught them the Hamotzi and other ways to be Jewish. The old man explained that his daughter was married to a non-Jew and neither the mother nor the father would teach their sons how to be Jewish. The old man said that his grandsons would not be Jewish if he left Russia for Israel.

In 1999, Rabbi Lau met with the Dalai Lama and in March he plans to meet with Pope John Paul, II and the Islamic leader in Jerusalem. He met the Pope in 1993, and realized they had something in common since both men were born in Poland. The Pope had known Rabbi Lau's grandfather, who was a Rabbi. The Pope told Rabbi Lau, "I remember your grandfather walking to the synagogue surrounded by children". How many grandchildren did he have? Lau's grandfather had 47 grandchildren. The Pope asked how many survived the Holocaust. Rabbi Lau replied, "Only five".

The Chief Rabbi and his Rebbetzin were then honored at a luncheon at the

Baron Hirsch Marsi Moss Social Hall hosted by Bornblum Judaic Studies at the University of Memphis.

The conference on Medical Ethics followed with Dr. David Patterson, holder of the Bornblum Chair of Excellence in Judaic studies at the University of Memphis and Rabbi Grossman making presentations as Cardiologist Dr. Ellis Reef moderated the session.

The visit of Israel's Chief Rabbi to Baron Hirsch Congregation was an exciting and inspirational experience for the Memphis Jewish community. ✧

Film

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provided the South with "a viable middle class," according to the film. And, as Rabbi Rafael Grossman points out, Memphis was "not hostile to tradition."

Much of the historical information in the film is provided through interviews with Dr. Selma Lewis, author of *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee,*

1840's-1950's, which was published last year by Mercer University Press.

The film is a kind of complement to the book, which also was commissioned by the Jewish Historical Society.

"A movie obviously gives you another means of presenting the story, and we hope it will be used and seen by young people, and people of all ages," said Harriet Stern, past president of the society.

Stern said the society hopes the movie will be shown on public television and possibly at libraries, community meetings and other forums.

The film, in fact, would be a welcome addition to any classroom discussion of local history and diversity.

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South has presented copies of the book and the film to the Memphis Public Library and all university and college libraries in the area. ✧

With the permission of reporter, John Beifuss, parts of this article were taken from his story in The Memphis Commercial Appeal.

Then

and

Now



Memphis Jewish Community Center - 1951



Memphis Jewish Community Center - 1999

It's Time for Passover Cleaning

Remember, as you clean for Passover, watch for your family's mementos that you can share with others of the Jewish community. Contribute to the Jewish Historical Society archives and be a part of the history of the Jews of Memphis of the last century.

Perpetuate your family's history in a meaningful way with records, letters, pictures, business documents, etc. which we will gladly copy.

The Jewish Historical Society has committees working to weave a beautiful detailed record. Call Marcia Bicks (324-3739), May Lynn Mansbach (767-0638), or Shirley Feibelman (685-7390) to include your family in this vital project.

Making Jewish History Today

On January 8th and 9th, 2000 Baron Hirsch Congregation and Memphis Jewry were honored by the visit of His Eminence Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel who came directly from Israel to Memphis to visit his friend, Rabbi Rafael Grossman of Baron Hirsch Congregation, and to speak at the 2nd Annual International Symposium and Conference on Medical Ethics being held at Baron Hirsch Synagogue on this week-end. This was Rabbi Lau's first trip to Memphis and as he arrived at the Memphis International Airport, he remarked, "I am told it is a wonderful place". Rabbi Lau was greeted at Shabbat services by Governor Don Sunquist on behalf of the State of Tennessee and by Memphis Mayor, Dr. W.W. Herenton, who presented the chief Rabbi with a gold key to the City of Memphis. Rabbi Lau, who is recognized as one of the worlds foremost religious leaders, was introduced by Rabbi Rafael Grossman and addressed the congregation and visitors. Rabbi Lau then proceeded to spellbind the congregation in a mesmerizing tale of his survival of the Holocaust, a true inspiration to others.



Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau

Rabbi Lau, who is very fluent in English, is known as a great scholar and orator and considered to be one of the most gifted speakers in Israel. The Chief Rabbis is a Scion of one of the world's great rabbinic families and served as Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and Natanyah before he was elected as Israel's Chief Rabbi. He is the author of major torah and rabbinic works and also serves as the Chief Justice of Israel's highest rabbinic tribunal. Rabbi Lau is one of 150 children rescued from Buchenwald in 1945.

An American Army chaplain entering the ghastly Buchenwald concentration camp at the end of World War II saw a boy's body moving as he was hiding from the Nazis among a heap of bodies. That boy was Yisroel Meir Lau. Today, as the Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Rabbi Lau is a living symbol of Jewish survival. In his address to the congregation, Rabbi Lau told of several experiences of his life. One was his visit to the home of a seven-year-old boy whose mother and father had just been killed in a Jerusalem bus bombing. As the dead mother's sister introduced Rabbi Lau to her nephew, she explained that the Rabbi too was once a seven-year-old orphan himself and that he not only survived, but had become the Chief Rabbi of Israel.

His stories showed his great warmth, love, compassion and great wisdom and were elegantly interwoven into an interpretation of an Aggada from the Gomorrah about a traveler who meets an Arab merchant. The merchant tells the traveler of a wonderful spot where heaven meets earth and takes him there. The traveler is enraptured but becomes very distressed when he loses his bag containing his most treasured possessions. An Arab tells the traveler not to worry, that the bag will return with the passage of time. Likewise, Rabbi Lau explained, the Jewish people have fled places like Europe with but few possessions such as menorahs in their bag. Of all the places where Jews have resided over the centuries, only Israel is the perfect place where heaven meets earth and where the lost bag is recovered.

Another experience related by Rabbi Lau included a conversation with an old man in Russia who desperately wanted to immigrate to Israel. When Rabbi Lau told him that his travel to, and care in Israel would be arranged, the old man tearfully explained that he could not leave. He told the Rabbi that once a month his daughter brought his two young grandsons to

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SOUTHERN
JEWISH
HERITAGE

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Address Correction Requested

