

*The mission of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is to preserve and document the practice, culture and legacy of Judaism in the South. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience operates under the auspices of the Institute.*

## ISJL Hires New Director of Rabbinic Services

This summer the ISJL welcomed Rabbi Batsheva Appel as its new Director of Rabbinic Services. The Rabbinic program started three years ago to serve small congregations without rabbinic leadership throughout the region. Rabbi Appel succeeds Rabbi Debra Kassoff, who after finishing her term at the Institute became an assistant rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Rabbi Appel looks forward to building on the strong foundation which Rabbi Kassoff established for the department.



A native of Seattle, Washington, Batsheva lived all over the country as a child because her father was an engineer with the Boeing Company. The family lived in New Orleans, Florida, and Huntsville, Alabama before moving back to Seattle. She graduated from Wellesley College with a B.A. in Biological Sciences and Economics. After several years of working in the biotechnology field, she decided to change careers. She became active in her synagogue, taking courses, studying Torah, singing in the choir, and serving on the Board of

Trustees. As Batsheva puts it, "The more I was involved, the more I wanted to be involved and the more that I studied, the more I wanted to study, until I wanted to do this as a full-time job."

Batsheva was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1996. She was sabbatical Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Lynbrook, New York and then stayed to become Rabbi-Educator and run a religious school of over 300 students. In 2001 she became the first ever Assistant Rabbi at Congregation Beth Chaim of Princeton Junction, New Jersey and was soon named as Associate Rabbi.

Rabbi Appel believes that "Jewish learning is transformative and that stories are the best way to transmit the values of Judaism; so I am very happy to be part of the ISJL which emphasizes both the importance of learning and the importance of stories."

In her spare time Rabbi Appel is an avid knitter who is very proud of the four blue ribbons she won at the Middletown Grange Fair in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

## ISJL to Collect "Katrina's Jewish Voices"



On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster in American history, struck New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Over a year later, the Jewish communities of the region are still working to get back on their feet. The hurricane will continue to have a dramatic effect on these Jewish communities well into the future. To document this watershed event in the region's Jewish history, the ISJL has formed a partnership with the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA), located in Brookline, Massachusetts, to record 100 oral history interviews with members of the Jewish communities of New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. ISJL historian Stuart Rockoff and JWA's Director of Oral History, Jayne Guberman, originally conceived the oral history project. *(continues on page 12)*

*A Jewish-owned home in New Orleans is covered in mold after the flood's destruction. Photo by Jayne K. Guberman.*

## Message From the Institute Board Chair



The news dominating summer headlines has been distressing to say the least. American soldiers are exposed to mayhem, terrorists plot to murder in the name of a misguided belief, Israel pushes into Lebanon in an attempt to defend its people. What more in the next months, we cannot imagine.

I write today en route from Shanghai to Atlanta. I've been traveling regularly to the "Middle Kingdom" for the last three years, sorting out the opportunities, developing partnerships, and making new friends. It is interesting to see the reaction of a very different people to the events of the world. Of course, access to information in China is still limited, but the internet enables a flow of news and information that is difficult to filter. The Chinese don't seem confused about the news. Their own renewed struggle for success and for independence gives them some clarity in this confrontation between terror and freedom. I am mindful of the connection between Jewish history and the Chinese as I near the conclusion of Marion Cuba's novel, *Shanghai Legacy*. It is the story of Japanese-occupied Shanghai's Jewish refugee ghetto during World War II.

The Jewish people find themselves once again at the fulcrum of world events. We could find ourselves easy targets in the inevitable search for responsibility. We know the blame rests with the aggressor. The blame rests only on those that seek to deny basic human rights. The blame falls on those who would further their "truth" by violence and by murder.

I believe that the scattering of the Jewish people, the creation of the Diaspora, is as important to our security as is the State of Israel. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Israel could not survive without us, nor we without it. The American branch of this Diaspora is its lifeline. It is we who must nurture the whole. It is ours to protect. But

the American Diaspora is not the New York Diaspora, or the Los Angeles Diaspora, or the Philadelphia. The American Diaspora is also in New Orleans, in Little Rock, in Pensacola, and in Macon. It is in Hot Springs, Meridian, and Huntsville.

The strength of our people is exposed at its weakest link. The American Jewish community is at risk if it does not support its own "diaspora." Our plan is to ensure that Jewish values, Jewish friends, Jewish neighbors, Jewish leaders, mothers, fathers, teachers, gardeners, bakers .... in sum, all Jewish Americans, thrive across this great land. In our South, Jews are all these things. They are a great source of pride to their communities. One-by-one they protect us all from the madness that has been history's wrath upon us. One-by-one, they strengthen our collective support for Israel's cause. They are not, and will not, be the weakest link.

This Institute is delivering a priceless result. We aren't just educating a few children in small towns. We aren't just offering a congregation a rabbi for a few weekends a year. We are offering those communities a relationship with the Jewish people. And we enable America a relationship with the Jewish people, throughout the continent. Without this, we all lose. As violence rages, sacrifices increase, and the political willpower of those living in safety and security begins to wander, we must stand as a reminder of the result of weakness. We must ask our neighbors and they must help us in protecting the values of the Jewish people. Let us remind all Americans to respect each other, to offer charity to the afflicted, to work and to study diligently to improve ourselves, and to value each individual and his/her relationship with God. And may we do this in the many places that Jews are valued as neighbors.

L'Shalom

## Message from the Institute President



Over the life of the ISJL, I have used my message in *Circa* to discuss major issues that the Institute works to address. When I speak about the Institute, I like to say that a main goal of ours is to help lead the way in changing the status quo of Jewish life in America when it comes to reaching the Jewish community. Let's take it to them instead of continuing to endorse the "if you want it, you have to come get it attitude." Creating a culture change can be like planting trees, where the benefits may not appear for years or even decades.

I continue to travel extensively in search of partnerships, funding, and new staff, and to stimulate new initiatives in communities large and small. When it comes to fundraising, the ISJL is fortunate to have a large grassroots membership of people who believe in our work; we also have wonderful support from a few very large contributors and some wonderful smaller local federations. However, what frustrates me is how difficult it is for young organizations like ours to get support from "community" organizations that raise money in the name of the "community" and then finds ways **not to look** at new projects. When you read our list of contributors, you will notice a relative lack of "community collectors." We have recently been honored by the *Slingshot* publication as one of the 50 most innovative Jewish organizations in the country. And yet, as an example, why are federations in urban areas that are the beneficiaries of migration from smaller communities so hesitant to support our work?

The ISJL is having a visible impact in Jewish education, rabbinic service, and Jewish cultural programming. We have helped isolated and neglected Jews to engage with the broader Jewish world. As you can read in *Circa*, we are now serving 33 Religious schools from very large to very small with our transdenominational, user-friendly curriculum. We are providing a rabbi to over 25 congregations that do not have one and we have begun the process of hiring a second rabbi. As we

raise more money, we will be able to hire more educators and fellows to reach even more communities. We have no problem attracting great candidates for our education fellow positions or our summer internships. Our plan calls for 18 education fellows spread over 12 states under 6 professional educators. The need is obvious. We could be serving many more but getting the attention of funders and "community allocators" is very difficult. All the while, we as a "community" increasingly recognize serious deficiencies in the Jewish "community" culture we have created.

The ISJL and other innovative startups have a real problem in receiving recognition and support from "community" collectors/allocators. It's always easier to fund the "same old, same old" than to support new and innovative approaches. I respectfully request that you as the *reader* translate your voice into activism. I want to urge your "community" to support the ISJL and other meaningful efforts that address the issues Jews face today. If you are not already participating, please do by joining at some level. If you are already one of our supporters, you can help us by recruiting new members and increasing your annual support.

Our progress has been phenomenal. After just six years, we are approaching 20 full time staff members, several part timers, and are poised to expand. Our growth means that we are doing many things right. Your support has enabled us to achieve what many naysayers have said was impossible.

Next issue, I will explain why I keep putting "community" in quotation marks as we undertake yet another challenge to the status quo. We have already begun and you will smile when you realize how simple a solution this one is. Again, in advance and for the past, THANK YOU.

# Jewish Cinema South Ready for its 6th Season

Jewish Cinema South, the ISJL's much-heralded regional film festival, is now in its sixth year of production. This year, Jewish Cinema South will run in Jackson, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; Montgomery, Alabama; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In each city, a variety of outstanding films will be featured over the course of several days. As in previous years, filmmakers or scholars will be on hand for discussions following most showings.

In all, nineteen different films will be featured during the four festivals. Highlights include *Live and Become*, a French film about the mysteries of survival, identity, and the healing force of love. Set in 1985 during the Israeli airlift of thousands of Ethiopian Jewish refugees fleeing oppression in their native country, a Jewish boy, marked for a rescue-flight to Israel, dies as the story begins. A Christian boy secretly takes his place – with the help of both the dead boy's mother and his own. To survive, he must pretend to be what he is not. *Live and Become* won the 2005 Audience Award in Berlin, the 2005 Best Film at the Copenhagen International Film Festival, and the 2005 Best Film honors at Valenciennes Film Festival.

The Baton Rouge and Mobile festivals will both feature Academy Award-nominated *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*. Set in 1943 Germany, this German film profiles a woman who had the courage to stand up to the Nazi authorities: 21-year-old Sophie Scholl, a member of the resistance group The White Rose. In this moving story of a real-life heroine, a riveting Julia Jentsch completely inhabits the role

of the steel-willed activist. Ultimately captured by the Nazis, much of the film centers around Sophie's questioning at the hands of Nazi officer Robert Mohr. What ensues is a verbal cat-and-mouse game between the older bureaucrat who ardently believes in the system that has elevated him to a position of power, and the idealistic young dissident willing to sacrifice herself in the cause of peace, freedom and democracy. *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* has drawn many honors, including 2005 Best Director and Best Actress awards at the Berlin International Film Festival, and a 2005 Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

While there are over 60 Jewish film festivals throughout the country, the ISJL is the first organization to offer a network format that allows individual communities to sponsor their own Jewish Film Festivals in cooperation with the ISJL. These local festivals have drawn audiences in the thousands and continue to energize their communities by presenting programs that are usually limited to larger metropolitan areas. The ISJL has helped launch four other local Jewish film festivals in Austin, Houston, Nashville, and Shreveport that are now operating independently of the Institute.

This year's Jewish Cinema South film festivals promise to be illuminating, thought-provoking, and entertaining. For further information about Jewish Cinema South, including a full schedule, contact the Institute of Southern Jewish Life at (601) 362-6357 or visit [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org).

## JEWISH CINEMA SOUTH 2006 SCHEDULE

**Jackson** – all shows at the Millsaps College Recital Hall

- October 21 – 7:00 PM – **Live and Become**
- October 22 – 2:00 PM – Shorts: **The Tribe, Skylab, America, Backseat Bingo & West Bank Story**
- October 23 – 7:00 PM – **The Tollbooth**
- October 24 – 7:00 PM – **Walk on Water**

**Montgomery** – all shows at the Capri Theatre

- October 28 – 8:00 PM – **The First Time I Was Twenty**
- October 29 – 2:00 PM – **Live and Become**
- October 30 – 7:30 PM – **Usphizin**
- October 30 – 10:00 AM School Screening – **Rene and I**

**Mobile** – all shows at Hollywood Theaters unless otherwise indicated

- October 29 – 7:00 PM – **Live and Become**
- October 30 – 7:00 PM – **Sister Rose's Passion** - Spring Hill College Byrne Hall
- November 1 – 7:00 PM – **Sophie Scholl: The Final Days**
- November 2 – 10:00 AM School Screening- **Nicholas Winton, The Power of Good**
- 7:00 PM – **Wondrous Oblivion**

**Baton Rouge** - all shows at the Manship Theatre

- January 25 – 8:30 AM & 11:30 AM School Screenings - **Paper Clips**
- 7:00 PM – **Sophie Scholl: The Final Days**
- January 27 – 7:00 PM – **All I've Got with West Bank Story**
- January 28 – 3:00 PM & 7:00 PM – **Strange Fruit with The House I Live In**



*Live and Become*



*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*



# Message from ISJL Rabbi Batsheva Appel



At 6:00 AM I walked to the edge of the water, sounded the shofar, and invited those assembled to prayer. On the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina it was inevitable that most of the people present at the Katrina Memorial Sunrise Service in Waveland, Mississippi were either at the water or looking out over the Gulf. The sun wasn't up quite yet, but it was clear that this was going to be a spectacular day, quite unlike what everyone had experienced the year before.

I had the honor of being invited to participate in an interfaith memorial service for survivors, friends, volunteers, clergy, officials and friends that was sponsored by the Steps Coalition held at Gulfside United Methodist Assembly. STEPS is a partnership forged after the hurricane between many different community interfaith and social justice organizations. They are working on five key post-Katrina goals: affordable housing; historic preservation; the environment; equitable economic assistance; and civil rights.

Gulfside Assembly was acquired in 1923 by Bishop Robert E. Jones in 1923, the first black general superintendent of the Methodist Church. At one time it was the only place along the Gulf Coast where African Americans could go to the beach and a place where an interracial group could meet to work for civil rights. At one time there was a school, a retreat center, a church and other facilities. A new dormitory was dedicated the week before Katrina. On the morning that I was there, there were only a few temporary buildings, the remnants of the dormitory, a pile of tree limbs, and a view of the Gulf. Like the rest of the beachfront in Waveland, the storm surge wiped everything away.

You can also see the Gulf from Congregation Beth Israel in Biloxi, which lost its synagogue in the storm as well. The decision to build a new synagogue was

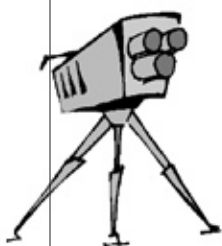
difficult for the congregation, but their building had been severely damaged by Katrina's wind and rain. Like many others on the Gulf Coast, they have had to accept loss, and work to build a new home. They have received support from Jews across the country. Two b'nai mitzvah students, one from Mobile, Alabama and one from Chevy Chase, Maryland, are gathering funds and Judaic items for the new synagogue and its congregants. A Jewish federation in New Jersey has made a major contribution to the building fund. In the meantime, the congregation has also relied on its Christian friends, meeting at Beauvoir Methodist Church each Shabbat.

This interfaith bond between Jews and Christians on the Coast resonated in my mind as I participated in the dawn service that touched on remembrance, strength for survival, and thanksgiving. I was privileged to participate with Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, Bishop Duncan Gray of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, Imam Tariq Abdul-Mu'min of the Islamic Center of Gulfport, Bishop James Black of the Faith Tabernacle of Praise and others. We sang together and listened to music from the Pearlinton Community Choir and the Peoples Mission Baptist Church Choir. I was invited to read a selection from the Book of Genesis about the flood, which I read in Hebrew and in English. Later someone came up to me and said how they had never heard the Bible in Hebrew before and that they found it very moving. At the end of the service, I sounded the shofar again. We then walked back to the Gulf of Mexico carrying flowers. As we cast the flowers into the waters Bishop Ward offered the benediction. By now the sun was up and there was hope for a new day and a new year.

## Get a Taste of Torah

*"May the words of Your Torah be sweet to us . . ." from the morning liturgy*

When we begin the study of Torah, the hope is that the words that we learn will be sweet and that we will always crave more. With Taste of Torah, once a week, ISJL Rabbi Batsheva Appel offers a brief email message tied to the Torah portion. In some of our communities, Taste of Torah is used as a *d'var Torah* at Friday night services. To sign up and see how sweet it is, please go to: [www.isjl.org/rabbinic/taste\\_of\\_torah.htm](http://www.isjl.org/rabbinic/taste_of_torah.htm)



**Need an anniversary or birthday gift for the family member who has everything? Why not give the gift that will last forever? The ISJL can help.**

## Preserve your Family's History

What better gift than to arrange for an *oral history* of your beloved family member(s). We can set up a video oral history interview and present your family with a VHS copy and a beautifully engraved bound transcript. You will be preserving the cherished stories of

your ancestors for your family and helping the Institute to continue to capture the history of our southern Jewish heritage before it is lost forever. For more information, contact us at 601-362-6357 or [information@msje.org](mailto:information@msje.org)

# Education Conference Reaches New Height

The 2006 ISJL Education Conference was the largest yet, and marked the kickoff of year four of the ISJL Education Program. With 87 religious school teachers and principals taking part, along with 27 faculty and staff members, the group filled the conference rooms at the Golden Moon Resort to their capacity. The number of participating congregations has also grown, to 36. Thanks to everyone for another successful conference, and we look forward to seeing you on our travels and at next year's conference, July 8-10, 2007 at Pearl River Resort.

*Russel Neiss uses "Shmuley the Sukkot Skeleton" to illustrate how to use "shtick" in the classroom. Photo by Dan Margolis.*



*Beth Kander and the ISJL's team of Education Fellows show the crowd how to get down. Photo by Dan Margolis.*



*ISJL conference-goers discuss what makes their community unique. Photo by Bethany Zwick.*

*Dr. Kerry Olitzky discusses the work of the Jewish Outreach Institute. Photo by Dan Margolis.*



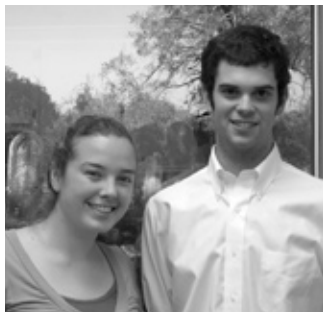
*ISJL Board Chair Jay Tanenbaum greets Rabbi Batsheva Appel. Photo by Dan Margolis.*



# History Files Go Online with New Digital Archive

Since its inception, the ISJL History Department has been trying to collect information about every southern Jewish community that has ever existed. Until now, this information has rested in the department's large filing cabinets. Under the direction of historian Stuart Rockoff, the ISJL is pleased to announce the creation of an online southern Jewish history archive, starting with Mississippi. Using the documents in their history files as well as its oral history collection, the ISJL History Department staff has written short histories of every Jewish community and congregation in the history of Mississippi. ISJL history interns Amy DiBiase and Dan Margolis spent much of their summer doing research and writing these capsule histories, which can be accessed on the history department page on the ISJL website.

*Summer history interns Amy DiBiase and Dan Margolis. Photo by Neola Young.*



This is merely the first step in a larger project that will eventually encompass the entire 12-state region of the South. We will gradually expand the site, state by state, until we cover the entire South. In the future, we hope to include lists of cemetery burials as well as video clips from our extensive oral history collection. Please visit the ISJL Digital History Archive, and learn about the important legacy of Jewish life in Mississippi. To view the archive, go to: [www.isjl.org/history](http://www.isjl.org/history).

*Below is a reprint of the Digital Archive entry on Woodville, Mississippi.*

## Woodville, Mississippi

During its heyday, Woodville was known as "Little Jerusalem" due to the prevalence of Jews in this small town in the southwest corner of Mississippi. Woodville was founded in 1809, and grew after the West Feliciana Railroad came through town in 1831. It became a regional cotton processing and marketing town. Jews began to arrive in Woodville once it began to flourish economically. According to some reports, Jewish peddlers stopped in Woodville as early as 1810.

During its early years, some soon-to-be prominent Jews spent time in Woodville. In 1828, Charles Lewis Levin arrived from Charleston, South Carolina to teach in a local school. Though he only managed to stay in Woodville a short time, Levin was wounded in a duel, in which his second was the future president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. Later, Levin represented Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the U.S. Congress. Two brothers, Theodore and Edwin Moise, also from Charleston, came to Woodville in 1836. A few years later, they moved to

New Orleans, where they became prominent local citizens. Edwin later served as speaker of the house in Louisiana while Theodore became a well-known portrait painter.

During the antebellum period, several Jewish merchants settled in Woodville, though most stayed in Woodville less than ten years, moving on to better opportunities in larger towns in the region, usually New Orleans. As Elliott Ashkenazi has written, "the Jewish residents of Woodville found not so much a place to live as a place to make money while searching for a better place to live." This high rate of turnover explains why a stable Jewish community took so long to form. The first Jewish congregation in Woodville was not founded until after the Civil War.

Woodville's Jewish merchants were closely tied economically to Jewish-owned New Orleans wholesale houses. Woodville Jews sold goods to small local farmers as well as large plantation owners. A few of these early Jewish merchants had non-Jewish partners, often from the local planter class, which reflects a significant degree of economic integration with the local community.

The first sign of a permanent Jewish presence occurred when two Jewish traveling peddlers, Jacob Schwartz and Jacob Cohen, purchased a small plot of land to bury a colleague who had died unexpectedly. Schwartz and Cohen eventually settled in Woodville after their peddling careers, both becoming successful merchants in town. Both Schwartz and Cohen were part of a new wave of Jewish merchants who sunk deeper roots in Woodville than their predecessors had. Both lived in Woodville until their deaths in early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the late 1860s, Woodville's Jews began to build Jewish community institutions, beginning with the Woodville Hebrew Education Association, which was succeeded by Congregation Beth Israel, which served the community throughout the remainder of its lifespan. There was also a local chapter of B'nai B'rith, a national Jewish fraternal organization.

Several local Jews became civic leaders in Woodville. In 1904, the local newspaper put out a special edition with biographical sketches of 56 of the town's business and civic leaders; twelve of them were Jewish. These included: Leon Schwartz, the son of Jacob Schwartz, who served as city clerk and on the board of aldermen for many years; Morris Rothschild, a German immigrant who came to Woodville in 1880, who owned a dry goods store and cotton warehouse, and became vice-president of the Bank of Woodville and Secretary of the local school board; Charles Cohen, a prominent local merchant who was a director of the Bank of Woodville; and several other local merchants. Lee Schloss published a short-lived local newspaper, the *Woodville Courier*, and later served as president of the school board, city council member, and city treasurer. When the Rosenwald Fund gave money to build a school for African Americans in Woodville, it was





Woodville's synagogue was sold in the 1920s, and burned in the 1930s.

Leon Schwartz was a longtime local leader in Woodville.



named the Schloss-Rosenwald School.

The economy in Woodville was almost wholly dependent on cotton agriculture. But the rise of the boll weevil in southwest Mississippi, and the emergence of the Delta as the leading cotton growing region in the state, led to a sharp decline in the local economy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of Woodville's Jewish community left in search of greater economic opportunity. In the 1920s, Congregation Beth Israel closed and sold its building. All of its furnishings, including the lectern, pulpit chairs, and pews went to the local Baptist church. In 1992, the church gave these items to the Wilkinson County museum, which put together an exhibit on the Jewish history of Woodville. Today, the last vestige of this "Little Jerusalem" is the Beth Israel cemetery, as no Jews currently live in Woodville.

### Congregation Beth Israel, Woodville

As the Jewish population of Woodville grew in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, they began to organize religiously. As early as 1850, Woodville's Jews worshipped together in private homes. In the late 1860's, they formed the Woodville Hebrew Education Association, which grew into Congregation Beth Israel. The Hebrew Education Association was designed to establish a school at a time before public education in Mississippi. In January of 1873, members of the association wrote in the *American Israelite*

newspaper that they were looking to hire a teacher for the school who was "first of all, a good English scholar; secondly a good Hebrew [and Jewish] scholar...; thirdly a man who is able to teach the German and French languages." They claimed to be able to send fifteen Jewish and ten Christian students to the school. If this teacher could give a lecture during Shabbat services, they could make extra money.

After this ad was placed in a national Jewish newspaper, the congregation hired Emanuel Rosenfelder as rabbi in 1873. After a year, he returned to his native Germany, though he came back in 1876 as circuit-riding rabbi in the region before settling in Natchez. Beth Israel was formally chartered in 1878, when they completed their first synagogue on the corner of Banks and Natchez Streets.

In 1885, Rabbi Henry Cohen came to Woodville. Though he only served Beth Israel for three years, Rabbi Cohen had a significant impact on the young congregation. In 1924, the *Woodville Republican* proclaimed that "no minister who ever served a church in Woodville was more popular than was Rabbi Henry Cohen." Cohen sought to encourage his small congregation to be more religiously observant, a very challenging task in an isolated community like Woodville. Since most of the congregants were merchants, strictly observing the Sabbath was very difficult since Saturday was the busiest day of the week. Cohen was willing to compromise, getting his members to agree to keep their stores closed during the hours of Saturday morning services. Once services were over, they could open their stores to the throngs of customers who came into town on Saturday. Rabbi Cohen's services drew several non-Jews who came to hear his compelling oratory. In 1888, Rabbi Cohen left Woodville to become the rabbi at Temple B'nai Israel in Galveston, Texas, where he served for over 60 years.

In 1896, Beth Israel's synagogue burned down, but was soon replaced by a new and more impressive building on the same Natchez Street site. The congregation also built a small religious school building behind the temple. Next door was a parsonage for the congregation's rabbi.

As the cotton economy of the area went into decline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community went into decline. By the mid 1920's, the congregation no longer had a rabbi or held regular services, and the remaining members sold the building. The building was moved to Main Street, where it served as a local theater until it burned down in the 1930's.



The Beth Israel Cemetery is the last vestige of Woodville's Jewish community.

# ISJL Receives Magdovitz Torahs from Clarksdale

On August 20, 2006, the ISJL Sefer Torah collection expanded with the generous donation of the Magdovitz Memorial Torahs from Temple Beth Israel in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Lawrence Magdovitz of Clarksdale, accompanied by his son, Lawrence Magdovitz II and grandsons, Lawrence Magdovitz III, and Connor Magdovitz, of Memphis, delivered two Torah scrolls to the Museum of the Southern

Jewish Experience site in Utica, Mississippi. During the program, Dr. Stuart Rockoff presented a brief history of the Clarksdale congregation, and Lawrence Magdovitz described his family's close connection to the Torahs. Rabbi Batsheva Appel discussed the symbolism of the donation and read a small section from each of the Torahs. The scrolls were then symbolically passed through three generations of the Magdovitz family before being placed in the ark at the museum.

Donated in memory of Lawrence's wife Kerin C. Magdovitz and his parents, Harry D. and Lenabel May Magdovitz, the scrolls are designated to be loaned to congregations in need of a Torah. Each community that borrows them will be asked to share the story of Clarksdale's Jewish community and how the Torahs traveled to their congregation. The ISJL is deeply grateful to the Magdovitz family for donating such important pieces of Mississippi's Jewish history. The memory of the Magdovitz family and of Clarksdale will be perpetuated with each use of these scrolls. If your congregation is interested in becoming a future loan recipient of one of these scrolls, please contact Neola Young at [nyoung@isjl.org](mailto:nyoung@isjl.org) or (601) 362-6357.



*Macy B. Hart stands with Lawrence Magdovitz, Lawrence Magdovitz II, and Rabbi Batsheva Appel during the dedication of the Magdovitz Memorial Torahs. Photo by Neola Young.*

**Mazel tov** to Rabbi Debra and Alec Kassoff on the birth of their daughter, Sylvia Josephine Kassoff, blessed with the Hebrew name *Shulamit Gila*. "Sylvie" was born on July 12, 2006, weighing eight pounds and measuring 20 inches, healthy and beautiful. All three Kassoffs are settling into their new life in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and appreciate the love and support they continue to receive from across the country.



# MSJE Hires New Projects Director



The Institute of Southern Jewish Life is pleased to announce the hiring of Kate Lubarsky as the Projects Director for the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Kate will work on developing ISJL museum sites in Natchez, Meridian and Selma in addition to managing and archiving the museum's collection of artifacts at its Utica site. Kate grew up in Madison, Wisconsin and graduated Washington University in May 2006 with a degree in anthropology and an interest in pur-

suing museum studies. She joined the ISJL summer staff as a museum intern. "I was drawn to both the mission of the ISJL and the unique message of the museum," Kate noted. As a museum intern, Kate lived with the staff at the Henry S. Jacobs Camp while cataloging artifacts, developing educational programs, and leading tours. Getting to know the community at camp was one of her favorite aspects of the summer. Kate said, "The Jewish community has been incredibly welcoming and open and I am thrilled to be able to continue the relationships I have developed by working full-time with ISJL. It's true what they say about Southern hospitality!"



# Traveling the Winding Roads of the Jewish South

By Emma Kipley-Oggman, ISJL rabbinic intern



Photo by Holly Lange.

As an itinerant rabbinical student visiting Jewish communities in three states this summer, I learned just how seriously Southern Jews take the *mitzvah* of welcoming guests. Folks flung open the doors of their homes and synagogues along with their photographs, songs, stories and questions. From the brand new synagogue in freshly booming Bentonville, Arkansas, where the Spanish language bathroom signs are a hint of the previous church tenants, to the quiet grandeur of the rosy stained glass and warm wood of the 1906 synagogue in Greenville, Mississippi, to the two-towered structure lovingly adorned with the watercolor and mosaic of congregational artists in Lake Charles, Louisiana, the buildings I visited housed the continued vibrancy of small-town Jewish communities where every voice is heard, every contribution is vital, and a visitor receives an open-armed and open-hearted welcome.

In each community, people offered windows into their own corners of the universe: a story of recovery and pain from last summer's hurricanes; an explanation for why a high holidays tune is always sung in a Friday night service; a tale of a grandparent's peddling arrival and a grandchild's new hit film; a taste of the area's best tomato; and a recounting of dancing with a beloved half a century ago. As a rabbinical student in a school where students come from varied backgrounds, I felt very much at home in these synagogues where negotiating the nature of Jewish community happens by necessity.

Our tradition holds that the study of Torah en-

compasses many of the acts of kindness essential to the functioning of community. It was a great privilege to study Torah this summer with communities where I could see how the Torah that they embody is put into practice. A child grinned at declaring to her community of adults that the most important Jewish principle is loving our neighbors. And an adult admitted delighted surprise that encountering a Torah text allowed him, inspired by our ancient tradition, to question his assumptions and access a deeper empathy. I met people who are transforming their broader communities to be ever more welcoming to strangers and people who consistently act with overwhelming generosity to their neighbors because they are living out the Torah they learn.

While I was driving through the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas, the endless stripes of highways folding into crevasses of mountains recalled for me a poem of the late Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, who asks, "And why is the tallis [prayer shawl] striped and not checkered black-and-white/like a chessboard? Because squares are finite and hopeless/Stripes come from infinity and to infinity they go/like airport runways/where angels land and take off." The landscape shifts around and through the Jewish communities of the rural South, but as I learned this summer, these communities are interwoven with the infinite, hopeful tallis stripes of highways that fold to encircle the particulars of each community and lengthen to embody the interconnectedness of our people, making possible our magical encounters.

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## Having a Blast with the Past at the MSJE

By Rona Kremer, ISJL Museum Intern



My co-worker Kate Lubarsky and I spent our summer living and working in the rural gem of Utica, MS, home to both the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) and Henry S. Jacobs Camp. When not busy dodging wasps, we served as both museum interns for the ISJL, as well as Education Specialists for the camp. We were responsible for creating educational museum programs for campers.

Our goal was to get each camper to understand that the history and identity of a Southern Jew are simultaneously unique and universal within the trajectory of the Jewish people. Our programs were designed to evoke themes that campers could relate to through activities like a memory game about immigration called "Packing Your Trunk," a peddler's cart race, making an arts and crafts "community" quilt, and posting drawings of their own Southern Jewish home on the museum's wall-sized map. Both campers and staff found the activities to be fun and educational. Through teaching, Kate and I learned a lot about the Southern

Jewish Experience. Aside from running programs for campers, we also cataloged artifacts, planned future exhibits, and led tours for visiting groups of all ages.

Until recently, I barely knew that Southern Jewry existed. As an anthropology major, I wanted to experience and learn about this phenomenon myself. Gaining a connection to Southern Judaism while living in Utica, Mississippi helped me better understand what it means to be an American Jew. However, I was also able to share my strong Jewish education and identity I received from growing up in Southern California's gigantic Jewish community. I felt gratified that I left just as much in the South as I took back to California. I would like to thank the ISJL and everyone I met in Mississippi for a meaningful two months full of dynamism, exploration, and self-discovery.

*If you are interested in being an MSJE intern for the summer of 2007, contact Kate Lubarsky at [klubarsky@isjl.org](mailto:klubarsky@isjl.org); (601) 362-6357.*

# ISJL Creates Synagogue Partnering Program in Atlanta Area

At The Temple in Atlanta, on August 21, 2006, the ISJL convened its second Atlanta roundtable discussion with a group of the city's rabbis. The ISJL has been trying to develop a synagogue partnering program in which large congregations in Atlanta would "adopt" a smaller congregation in a small town in the Southeast. Congregations throughout the United States adopt sister congregations in cities in Israel and Russia. They partner to create connections and even in some cases provide resources. ISJL President Macy B. Hart asked the roundtable participants why such partnerships couldn't be applied to our own region. The response to this idea was overwhelming, and the Institute is pleased to announce the creation of its new Synagogue Partnering program. Some have understaffed religious schools and all have adults interested in learning.

This pilot program boldly positions Atlanta as a national model. The ISJL is facilitating the matching process by identifying small congregations within a 300 mile radius of Atlanta who would be interested in being matched with a larger congregation. Several congregations have already committed to participate.

A successful program can surely serve as a national model as there are many communities around the country, both large and small, who would enjoy the opportunity to worship, learn, and celebrate together with members of a partnering congregation. At the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, we feel that this is another way of working together to preserve, share, and strengthen Southern Jewish Life. If you know of a congregation that would benefit from this type of relationship, please contact the ISJL.

## Fellows Lead Session at CAJE

In August, the ISJL's team of Education Fellows attended the 31<sup>st</sup> annual Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE), which was held at Duke University. Nearly 1400 educators, clergy, and lay leaders attended the five day conference featuring keynote addresses and workshop sessions on a variety of topics ranging from creating programming for students with learning disabilities to the evolution of Jewish ritual. ISJL Fellows Russel Neiss, Debbie Ovadia, Amy Steinberg, Greg Weisman, and Bethany Zwick led a session on quality Jewish education in small congregations that was attended by religious school directors from across the country. Conference Chair Amy Ripps, of Raleigh, North Carolina noted, "The Conference brought together so many inspiring teachers, some of whom are novices and others of whom are experienced teachers of teachers, to share and learn with each other."

*The ISJL Education Fellows at CAJE 31 at Duke University.*



## Rabbis Hit the Road



Rabbis On The Road  
רַבִּימַי בְּדַרְוֹתַי

We will soon be mailing information about the third year of our Rabbis on the Road program. Rabbis on the Road is a program that works to match rabbis with congregations that are without rabbinic leadership. In previous years, we have been able to facilitate several rabbinic visits, fostering new relationships between congregations. Currently, the Institute of Southern Jewish Life partners with the

Southwest Association of Reform Rabbis and the Southwest Council of the Union of Reform Judaism to serve the Southwest region of the URJ. If you are part of a congregation without rabbinic leadership in any part of our 12-state area or are a rabbi interested in donating a weekend of your time, please contact us as soon as possible at: [nyoung@isjl.org](mailto:nyoung@isjl.org) or (601)-362-6357.

# It's Presidential at the 2006 SJHS Meeting

The 2006 meeting of the Southern Jewish Historical Society will be held November 9 – 12 in Little Rock, Arkansas. ISJL historian Stuart Rockoff is chair of the program committee and has put together an impressive roster of panels and featured speakers. Former presidential advisor and diplomat Stuart Eizenstat will be the keynote speaker at the Saturday night banquet to be held at Clinton Presidential Library. Conference attendees will be led on a special private tour of the library

*ISJL Historian  
and SJHS  
Program Chair  
Stuart Rockoff*



and museum. Friday night at Temple B'nai Israel, Deborah Dash Moore, the chair of the Jewish Studies Department at the University of Michigan, will speak on the experience of Jewish soldiers during World War II. Cheryl Greenberg, a professor of history at Trinity College, will discuss southern Jews during the early civil rights movement. Panel highlights include "Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah, Jewish Camping in the South," which features Gary Zola, director of the American Jewish Archives, Marcie Cohen Ferris, and Stuart Rockoff, who will be presenting a paper on the founding of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp. ISJL board member Eli Evans and Dale Rosengarten will be part of a discussion panel on the Jewish South today and the future of southern Jewish history. Other noted scholars presenting include Ellen Umansky, Holly Cowan Shulman, and Eric Goldstein. For a complete listing of the program and registration information, see the SJHS website: [www.jewishsouth.org](http://www.jewishsouth.org).

## Palmer Supports ISJL with Music of Southern Jewish Composer

John Palmer, the founder of Skytel and the former U.S. ambassador to Portugal, has been a longtime supporter of the ISJL. His foundation was a major funder of the "Alsace to America" exhibit. Recently, he has become interested in the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who was a native Jewish New Orleanian. Palmer found a way to merge these two interests in his partnership with the concert pianist Lambert Orkis. The John Palmer Foundation is helping to support the reissue of Orkis' CD "Selected Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk" and is donating a portion of the proceeds to the ISJL.



*Gottschalk*

During his life, Gottschalk was one of the world's most popular musical composers and performers. After his untimely death at the age of 40 in 1869, his work faded into obscurity. Recently, it has been rediscovered by scholars and classical music fans alike. This CD reissue will help to draw attention to the work of one of the Jewish South's most talented and successful musical composer. Classical music fans now have a new way to support the work of the Institute.

*John Palmer*





# Message from David M. Zemel, Director of Development



Photo by  
Holly Lange.

*The ISJL is pleased to announce that David Zemel has joined the staff in Jackson as Director of Development. David has had a long career in the world of foundations and non-profit fundraising. Prior to joining the ISJL staff, David was principal of On Track Consulting, a Tulsa firm specializing in nonprofit planning, organizational development, and fund raising services. He has also served as Senior Program Officer at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation in Tulsa.*

This is my first opportunity to share some thoughts on development and fund raising for the Institute. While I am new to the staff, I have some experience with the ISJL as a friend of Macy's from our NFTY days, as a representative of a foundation that has supported the Institute, and as an occasional consultant. I continue to be impressed with the mission, the Institute's record of accomplishment and the generous support we receive from so many CIRCA readers. Thank you for your commitment and contributions. You are touching the lives of friends, family, and the Jewish community in twelve states and beyond.

If you have been involved with nonprofit organizations lately, you know about increasing demands for greater accountability to donors and program evaluations. Because of my previous as-

sociation with the Institute, I believe the ISJL meets the current standards and that our donors are in fact partners in our mission. Each has the opportunity to know how we operate, where their funds are used, and to become more involved in programming, voluntarism and giving. In short, though nothing is broken, I think we can do better.

Now that the Institute has created a regular development department, we can work consistently to broaden and deepen our donor base. We hope to give current donors more opportunities to support the ISJL in ways that may be more convenient for them and mutually beneficial. We all know that philanthropy is a *mitzvah* and as Jews we have a duty to *Tikkun Olam*, to repair the world. If you are willing to help preserve a rich Jewish heritage, to maintain long family ties and insure that Jews of all ages have opportunities to live meaningful Jewish lives regardless of geography then we are both very much in the "repair the world" business.

I'm delighted to be a part of the ISJL family. If there is anything our new Development Office can do to help you support our work, to encourage new donors, or find answers to questions posed by current or potential donors, do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you and hope we have the opportunity to meet in person. In the meantime, if you have already made a contribution to our 2006 annual campaign – *thank you*. If you have yet to make a pledge, please be generous.

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## ISJL Included in *Slingshot 06*

*Slingshot* is a publication of 21/64: *Strategic Philanthropy Through the Generations*, a new philanthropic resource and mentoring program established by the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation in New York. *Slingshot* selects an annual list of the 50 most creative and effective Jewish organizations and leaders across the country. "We're honored to be included in *Slingshot '06*" said Macy Hart, Presi-

dent of ISJL. "The organizations listed in 2005 are among the best in the business and being included this year is a tribute to our board, staff, and the communities we serve."

Readers can learn more about 21/64 and *Slingshot* by visiting the organization's website at [www.2164.net](http://www.2164.net). Subscriptions to their publication are free and available on the site.

(KATRINA  
from page 1)

They have hired Dr. Rosalind Hinton, an Assistant Professor of Religion at DePaul University, who has deep roots in New Orleans, to run the project under their supervision.

Hinton is now collecting interviews from a diverse cross-section of the New Orleans and Gulf Coast Jewish communities. People of different ages, genders, circumstances, and synagogue affiliations are being interviewed to ensure that the full picture of the Jewish community is captured. The project is documenting amazing stories of heroism and rescue, as well as the "everyday" challenges that evacuees faced, and the issues facing those who have returned. The interviews are being transcribed thanks to a grant from the Cel-

brate 350 organization, and transcripts and clips will appear on the JWA's Katrina's Jewish Voices website: [katrina.jwa.org](http://katrina.jwa.org). The original digital video interviews will be housed at the ISJL History Department.

The ISJL is excited to work with the Jewish Women's Archive, which has been a pioneer in the field of collecting digital artifacts. JWA is building a collection of digital artifacts related to Hurricane Katrina at their website. To view the growing collection or to share your own story, go to [katrina.jwa.org](http://katrina.jwa.org). For more information about the "Katrina's Jewish Voices" Oral History Project or to nominate someone to be interviewed, contact Stuart Rockoff at (601) 362-6357; [rockoff@isjl.org](mailto:rockoff@isjl.org).

## 2006 ISJL Contributions

The ISJL Annual Campaign has been a great success since its beginning and it looks like 2006 will be another record year for the Institute. Within *Circa*, you can see our success and feel the positive impact that we are having across the South. Your contribution will ensure that we can continue to move forward with these exciting programs.

With great appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends gracious thanks to all those who have made contributions between January 1, 2006 and August 20, 2006 to support the mission of the ISJL.

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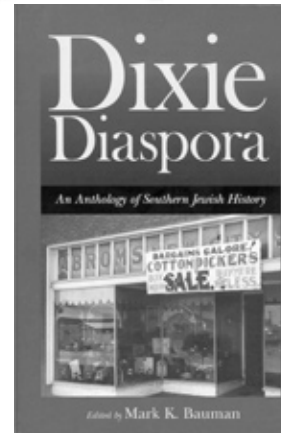
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### Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History

edited by Mark K. Bauman

This book is an anthology of essays designed to introduce readers to key issues in the growing field of southern Jewish history. The essays cover a broad geographical and chronological span and address a variety of topics, including economics, politics, roles of women, ethnicity, and race. Contributors include Mark K. Bauman, Mark I. Greenberg, Howard N. Rabinowitz, Lee Shai Weissbach, Stephen Whitfield, and Gary P. Zola.  
Softcover. Price: \$35



### Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South

by Marcie Cohen Ferris

In a culinary journey through the Jewish South, Arkansas native Marcie Cohen Ferris explores how southern Jews embraced, avoided, and adapted southern food and, in the process, have found themselves at home. Ferris demonstrates how southern Jews reinvented traditions as they adjusted to living in a largely Christian world. Featuring a trove of photographs, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* also includes anecdotes, oral histories, and more than thirty recipes to try at home. Ferris's rich tour of southern Jewish foodways shows that, at the dining table, Jewish southerners created a distinctive religious expression that reflects the evolution of southern Jewish life. Jonathan D. Sarna calls it "a bountiful feast brimming with well-researched history, loving memories, and unique recipes."  
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### The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South

by Eli Evans

Newly reissued by the University of North Carolina Press with a new introduction by the author, this seminal work was the first to take readers on a journey into the soul of the Jewish South. Evoking the rhythms and heartbeat of Jewish life in the Bible belt, Eli Evans weaves together chapters of recollections from his youth and early years in North Carolina with chapters that explore the experiences of Jews in many cities and small towns across the South. He presents the stories of communities, individuals, and events in this quintessential American landscape that reveal the deeply intertwined strands of what he calls a unique "southern Jewish consciousness."  
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### Shalom Y'all: Images of Jewish Life in the American South

by Bill Aron and Vicki Reikes Fox

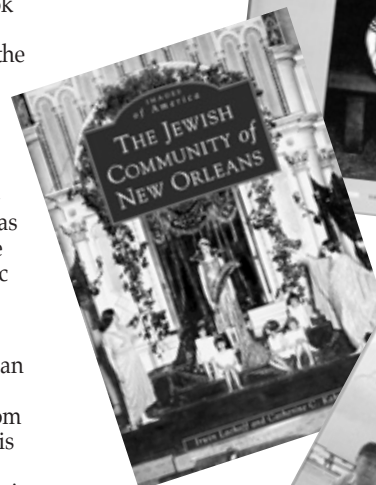
This book tells the unique story of the Southern Jewish Experience through three distinct voices: Bill Aron's evocative photographs, a narrative woven into descriptive captions, and person stories, memories and anecdotes told by southern Jews. The book covers all aspects of southern Jewish life from chopped liver to bagels and grits, from synagogue to civil war cemeteries, from towns named for their Jewish forebearers to the vibrant communities, which exist today. A fitting gift for anyone who has southern Jewish roots.  
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### The Jewish Community of New Orleans

by Irwin Lachoff and Catherine C. Kahn

Irwin Lachoff and Catherine Kahn have gathered over 200 archival photographs to illustrate their fascinating history of this colorful city and its Jewish community. Small as it is in proportion to the population of New Orleans, the Jewish community has made contributions that far exceed their numbers in cultural, educational, and philanthropic gifts to the city.  
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*Shalom Y'all* is a documentary feature film about the Jewish experience in the American South as told through the eyes of a native son and the cultural cousins he encounters. At the center of the story is filmmaker, Brian Bain, a third generation southern Jew from New Orleans, searching his cultural roots. Traveling in an old Cadillac like the kind his one hundred-year old grandfather drove as a hat and tie salesman on the same roads, Brian takes the viewer 4200 miles through Delta flatlands, coastal low country, mountain passes, small towns, suburban subdivisions and sprawling sunbelt metropolises to discover a vibrant regional culture that blends the Old World with the New South. Through his search for a balance between modern life and ancient traditions, the filmmaker paints a post-modern picture of American life at the beginning of a new century.

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*circa* (sər'kə) prep. [L.] about: used before an approximate date, figure, etc. [*circa* 1650]

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