

SPRING/SUMMER 2009

CIRCA

Preserving
the Past

*MSJE Brings
Smithsonian
Exhibit
to Natchez, 5*

Planning
for the Future

*Education
Program
Continues
to Grow, 6*



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*Historic B'nai Israel building
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Message from the ISJL President

Macy B. Hart



We could all use some good news these days. So much bad news is thrust at us constantly: the economy is hurting, times are tight, people all over are feeling the pinch. The economic climate is dire. However, doom and gloom do not dominate the forecast at the Institute; here, we're excited by what we're seeing and doing today, and the outlook is bright for the future, too.

The Institute is once again expanding our staff and our services, continuing to provide more and more Jewish programming opportunities to our thirteen-state region, reaching our communities from Texas to Oklahoma, Louisiana to Virginia. We take pride in our very enthusiastic staff members, who are always working to further our mission. We take pride in the resources we provide, the speakers and artists we bring to communities, the classrooms, teachers and students who utilize our education program. We will not be cutting any of these services; instead, we're increasing them.

Yes, we do have some very significant financial challenges facing us. We're realistic, of course. Raising money for our operations is extremely difficult. We depend heavily on grassroots support, individual givers, nearly all of whom are impacted by the current financial situation – but continue to show support of our work by gifts of all sizes. We are therefore able to expand our staff for the 9th straight year. We refuse to lose momentum, and instead, plan to continue picking up speed. That's why in the coming year the Institute will employ almost 30 full-time staff members.

How is it possible for us to grow and thrive in this "dire economic climate"?

It's really quite simple. The Institute came into being to address and challenge the "status quo" of the Jewish community. The reason we are growing is because we have been addressing systemic communal issues, such as limited Jewish

education, movement discord and stratified communities head on. Our work is relevant. Our work is *needed*. We are thriving because since our inception, we have consistently helped our Southern communities to thrive, and working together, we will not let anything stop us from continuing our vital endeavors.

We are lean, frugal, and agile as we respond to our "constituents." I hope you share with me the pride I feel in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and the impact our organization is having across the South.

The Institute is about innovation and "what can be" – so thank you, once again, to all of you who have supported us financially. If you have not yet given to the Institute this year, please consider this my humble request that you make a contribution. Without your support, we would not be able to deliver such good news.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Macy B. Hart". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial "M" and "B".

Message from the Institute Board Chair

Jay Tanenbaum



Having served as chairman of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life for six and one-half years, it is time for change. As I step aside, I won't go very far because it's clear to me that our most exciting days, indeed our most important ones, lie ahead. I want to be part of that future.

I cannot claim credit for what we have accomplished since my term began in January of 2003. That belongs to our wonderful staff. But I can take great pride in telling you what has happened. Plucked from the board by our previous chair, Sylvia Goodman, and by our chief executive, Macy Hart, I shared their vision of what could be. Already our award-winning Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience had opened the doors to an expansive strategic plan designed to enhance Southern Jewish lives. We were beginning the real work of the Institute.

Our Education Department was launched in the fall of 2003, and we put two young Fellows on the road to support ten communities that believed we could help them. As we completed our full curriculum and support system, that initial cluster grew to this year's sixty-one congregations across eleven states.

Also in 2003, we hired our first full-time itinerant rabbi. Our rabbis and rabbinic interns have since

visited scores of southern communities, and garnered attention from national press, while delivering vital services to congregations without rabbis of their own. Our first two rabbis have gone on to distinguished pulpits, as our third comes aboard to build further on this work.

Before 2003, our History Department was a small mountain of unorganized source material. Today our historian is a leading authority who has transformed that start into histories of 115 Southern Jewish communities, with more on the way, all web-accessible. He has lectured in more than forty-five cities nationwide.

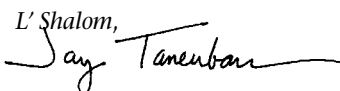
In 2002, we launched our first Southern States Jewish Literary Series and we continued Jewish Cinema South, our regional film festival. Today we have added music concerts and stand-up comedy. Our cinematic festivals have impacted a dozen communities to date. Without question, our cultural programming reputation is stellar among both artists and audiences.

In my view, enabling and supporting Jewish life in the South is a vital mission. As Jews, we must not limit our lives to America's traditional cities. I believe the Jewish threads in the American tapestry must continue to run through the entire fabric and not be bound only to the

edges. To continue to earn the respect and appreciation of our neighbors, we must live and build communities with them, wherever they are. With this in mind, the ISJL is now launching its newest department — one to continue the tradition of social justice and community involvement. The South has many deep histories of Jewish families enriching local life and building bridges of trust and understanding. With our Social Justice Department, the ISJL will continue that legacy.

We are very fortunate that my friend and long-time vice chairman of our board, Ray Solomon, has agreed to become our new chairman. Ray brings a passion for our work and has been instrumental in our successes. The journey from his boyhood home in Helena, Arkansas to dean of Rutgers School of Law-Camden, has given him clarity of purpose and the leadership skills to motivate all of us to greater things. My promise to Ray, to our supporters, and most importantly to the communities that we serve, is to continue to work energetically and creatively to support our mission.
Yasher Koach, Ray!

With deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve –

L' Shalom,




Smithsonian
Institution

Journey Stories has been organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services (SITES) in association with the Mississippi Humanities Council.

be located on the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience page – <http://www.isjl.org/museum/index.html>. The web page for the exhibit will go up in early summer, and include both a program schedule as well as Natchez tourism information. We encourage museum visitors to take full advantage of Natchez's many historic and cultural offerings as well as great accommodations. Information about directions, museum and historic building hours and hotel deals will all be located on our website.

Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



MSJE Brings Smithsonian Exhibit to Natchez

Journey Stories, a traveling exhibit made possible through a joint venture of the Smithsonian Institution and the Mississippi Humanities Council, will be opening in Natchez on September 5, 2009. This national touring show's presence in Natchez is made possible by the partnership of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life's Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) and the Historic Natchez Foundation.

Journey Stories will open in Natchez with a weekend of programs aimed at highlighting and celebrating Natchez's Jewish heritage. Services will be held Friday night in historic Temple B'nai Israel, the building which now serves as a satellite location of the MSJE. The general public is encouraged to attend services in that beautiful space, and learn about Jewish heritage. Saturday will include walking tours, children's activities, and tours of Natchez's numerous historic sites. Rabbi Uri Barnea of Hattiesburg's Temple B'nai Israel will perform his Jewish music program on Saturday night. Subsequent weekends will also be themed to highlight Natchez history and migration through the community, culminating in the exhibit's closing weekend which coincides with Natchez's Balloon Race. Weekend themes include The Journey of War,

Family Stories and Genealogy, The Natchez Indians, Transportation and the Natchez Trace, and Public Health and Epidemiology. Along with the display, the MSJE and Historic Natchez Foundation will offer genealogy workshops, public lectures, outdoor movie nights, kids' crafts and story telling, themed guided walking tours, and much, much more!



B'nai Israel in Natchez

Journey Stories will be on display through October 20th. It will be housed in the historic schoolhouse occupied by the Historic Natchez Foundation. The exhibit is free and open to the public with weekly programs highlighting Natchez's diverse immigrant heritage.

Journey Stories is the latest exhibit mounted through the Smithsonian's "Museum on Main Street" initiative. Exhibits are created by the Smithsonian, and loaned to state humanities councils, who then solicit and review applications to decide

which cities will be awarded the honor of hosting the Smithsonian exhibit. The program is specifically aimed at small-town museums and other cultural institutions, in order to engage rural audiences – audiences that might otherwise be culturally underserved. Clearly, this vision resonates with us here at the Institute and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience.

Small-town museums often have the best insight into their community's unique heritage, but they often suffer from insufficient funding, small staffs and limited regional recognition. The Smithsonian's "Museum on Main Street" provides rural museums high-quality exhibits along with extensive state-wide and national publicity through the Smithsonian's reach. The program broadens public heritage in history and preservation while fostering a sense of shared communal pride for the chosen sites. *Journey Stories* will tour six Mississippi sites: Clinton, Southaven, Natchez, McComb, Hazelhurst and Long Beach.

The schedule will be updated on the ISJL website and we hope you check back to keep informed! The most current *Journey Stories* information will

Institute Welcomes the 2009-2011 Education Fellows

Ben

Berliner

comes from a long line of Jewish educators.

His great grandfather Rubin Magil was the rabbi for Beth Zion B'nai Israel in Philadelphia, and his mother Sandi Berliner is a rabbi and teacher at Gratz College's Jewish Community High School. He majored in politics and minored in Jewish Studies at Ithaca College, and spent a semester at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was a longtime camper and staff member at Camp Ramah, and has served as a peer staff member on a Birthright Israel trip. Ben looks forward to beginning his Southern Jewish Experience with the ISJL.



of Orange County. Alex is extremely excited to start a new life in Jackson, Mississippi.

Molly

Glazer

graduated from the University of Georgia in 2008, and is finishing a Master of Arts in Teaching at North Georgia College. Born and raised in Gainesville, Georgia, Molly was the only Jewish student at her high school. She became very involved with her synagogue, Shalom B'Harim in Dahlonga. At UGA, Molly was the founder of the Jews in Greek Life Organization, and was voted into the UGA Hillel Hall of Fame. She often led Reform services and filled in as a cantorial soloist. Molly hopes that as an ISJL Education Fellow, she will impact children in small Jewish communities.



Alli

Goldman

was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. The fifth out of six children, she got her first passport at eleven, and has been addicted to travel ever since. In high school, she developed an interest in politics and served on the Congressional Youth Advisory Board. She began her freshman year at the



University of Texas in 2006, and quickly got involved in Hillel activities and Israel advocacy on campus. While at UT, her love of travel and politics led her to study abroad in England and Israel. She graduates with a B.A. in Geography this spring, and looks forward to joining the ISJL team this summer.

Jessica

Kent

graduated this May from Brandeis University with a B.A. in psychology. Jess was active in her



temple youth group in Buffalo, New York, throughout high school. In college, she served as Campus Relations Coordinator on the Executive Board of Hillel, and was later selected as one of eight American students to study political philosophy through a partnership with Palestinian students in Istanbul, Turkey. Jess has explored the issue of communal Jewish identity through a group called Klal. Jess is looking forward to learning about the history and experiences of Southern Jewish families and communities.

Nesiya Tova – Safe Journeys to our 2007-2009 Fellows!

The ISJL is grateful to our 2007-2009 Education Fellows – Mandy Farb, Andrew Terkel, Amanda Rainey and Megan Roberts have been wonderful assets to our team, and we wish them the best of luck as they each pursue their next endeavors. Mandy Farb will be teaching 6th Grade Judaics at The Davis Academy, a Reform day school in Atlanta. Andrew Terkel has been accepted into Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion to pursue rabbinical ordination. Amanda Rainey is staying in Mississippi, working in the non-profit sector. Megan Roberts loved the ISJL so much, she's staying with us, taking on a new role as Special Projects Coordinator. Thank you and congratulations to all of our 2007-2009 fellows!

Fellows Class of 2009: Mandy Farb, Andrew Terkel, Amanda Rainey, Megan Roberts.





Win a Concert with Dan Nichols!

This year the Education Department is doing something big. Really big. In between programming and traveling to all our amazing communities, the Education Department decided it would be fun to do something our congregations would enjoy, something they could share with the whole community. We asked the question, "What brings people together?" and the answer became clear... music!

Dan Nichols, a Jewish musician and member of Temple Beth Or, of Raleigh, NC, is partnering with the education staff to bring your community a free concert! Dan Nichols will perform at this year's education conference, June 28-30 2009. During the performance we will announce the details of our Dan Nichols essay writing contest. The essay contest will be open to all students participating in the ISJL education program – and the winner of the contest will get a free Dan Nichols concert for their community!

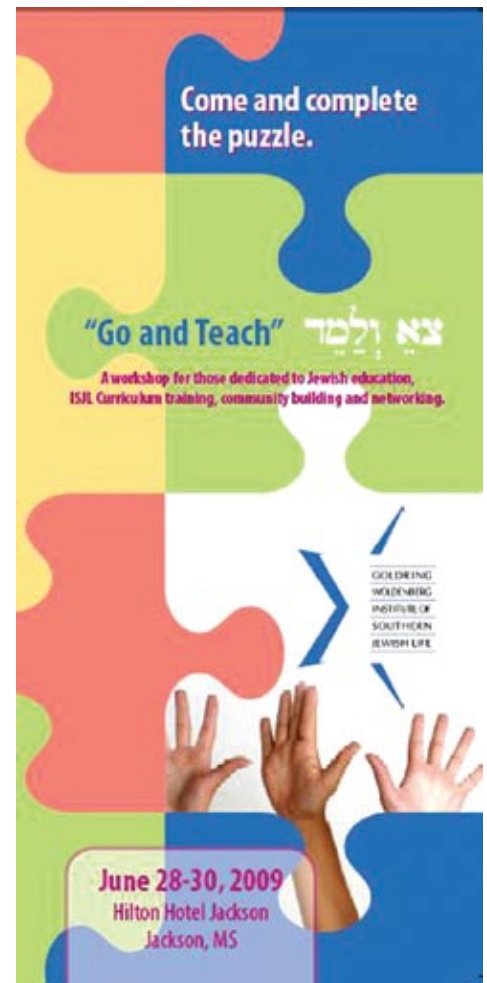
To learn more about Dan and his music, you can visit www.jewishrock.com.

2009 ISJL Education Conference Around the Corner

Six years ago, 30 committed individuals, representing 10 communities, gathered for the first-ever ISJL Education Conference. These pioneers convened with the goal of making Jewish education a priority. Our time together was the beginning of something amazing. At that conference, we showed the Jewish world that every Jewish child deserves an excellent Jewish education no matter where they live and no matter the size of their congregation. We also recognized that Jewish education is a shared Jewish responsibility. At that conference, our shared community school model began to take shape.

In the short time that has passed, our education conference and our education program has grown dramatically. Our 2008 conference had over 150 participants, representing 61 communities. Regardless of our size, our mission remains the same. The conference began and still is the time that our Southern Jewish communities come together as one collective community, in which we learn with and from each other. Our community school is now over 3000 students strong and is strengthened by our common body of Jewish knowledge. Each teacher at the conference meets all of the other teachers who teach the same age group and the same content. The opportunities that this networking creates are countless.

Our 2009 conference will be our largest conference yet. We are expecting fifteen new congregations and over 200 participants. Our conference attracts not only Jewish teachers, but also lay leaders, rabbis and cantors, and directors of education. Each year we have guests from the field of Jewish education who attend the conference to observe our unique approach to building a community.



Although our conference has become quite large, the same passion and commitment from our first conference remains. Each year we have new participants but we also have some of our original conference attendees. Each year we provide a high quality Jewish education conference and each year our participants leave knowing that they now have the skills and support that they need to be a Jewish teacher. Each year all who are involved in the conference know that they are part of something special and that together our goals are being achieved. We look forward to seeing all of you who will be in Jackson June 28-30 for the 2009 ISJL Education Conference.

Explore “Possible Programs” with the ISJL Artists Roster

The ISJL Program Department is pleased to announce the launch of its semi-annual “Possible Programs Roster.” The roster is a compilation of bios and information about the artists, authors and scholars the ISJL is partnering with and looking to put on the road in the coming year.

In the Spring 2009 “Possible Programs Roster,” you can learn about the various cultural programs currently being offered by the ISJL. We’re always excited to work with our communities to schedule collaborative, multi-stop tours for our guests. If you think you might be interested in one of these programs, here’s a quick overview of how it works:

- Contact the ISJL Program Department to express your interest in a specific artist, type of program, or just cultural programs in general.
- We’ll be in touch with you AND other communities near yours, to see if we can build a “geographic coalition” of mutual programming interest and begin planning to set up a multi-stop tour in your region.
- ISJL cultural programming is done on a regional basis: we negotiate ONE fee, secure ONE plane ticket, etc, for our guest, and communities located near one another share all the expenses to cover the multi-stop tour.
- Please note: expressing an interest in a particular program does not guarantee that it can come to your community (we need neighboring communities’ involvement, too!), but if we cannot bring that program, we’ll suggest another opportunity soon.
- Opportunities are currently grouped in three basic categories:

Literary Series/Authors & Scholars

Music Programs

Performance Series (comedy, one-man-shows, etc)

Literary Series/Authors & Scholars

ELLEN BERNSTEIN

Ellen Bernstein is widely recognized as a pioneer thinker and activist who helped define modern “Jewish environmentalism.” An inspired speaker, her ability to merge scholarship with personal passion coupled with her activism and vision makes for particularly compelling presentations and classes. An author several times over, teacher and consultant, she can speak on a variety of topics, including: *The Bible’s Ecological Roots; How Judaism can Help the Environmental Movement; and Creating Inspiring Jewish Communities. Infusing Jewish life with Ecological Vision and Practices.* Her programs on Bible and ecology are appealing to interfaith audiences, as well.



NILES GOLDSTEIN



Niles Goldstein is the founding rabbi of The New Shul in Greenwich Village, New York, where he has served as its spiritual leader since 1999. A black belt in karate and an FBI chaplain, Niles is an engaging and compelling presenter who has spoken all over the United States and abroad. He is an associate faculty member of CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, where he was the Steinhardt Senior Fellow. Rabbi Goldstein is an adjunct lecturer at New York University and a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the New York Board of Rabbis. He has written for or been featured in Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and on national radio and television. The New York Observer included him in its special Millennium Edition as one of the “Top 40 People to Watch” in the 21st century. Niles is the award-winning author of nine books, most recently “The Challenge of the Soul” (releasing August 2009).

JOEL HOFFMAN

Joel M. Hoffman, PhD, is a much sought after presenter who lectures across the globe on popular and scholarly topics spanning education, history, Hebrew, prayer, and Jewish continuity. He has served on the faculties of Brandeis University, the Academy for Jewish Religion, and, currently, HUC-JIR in New York City. Dr. Hoffman is the chief translator for the multi-volume series, “My People’s Prayer Book” (winner of the National Jewish Book Award) and the two-volume, “My People’s Passover Haggadah” and the author of the widely-read “In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language.” He writes a biweekly column on Hebrew for the Jerusalem Post. In 2008, he chaired CAJE 33, the largest gathering of Jewish educators in the world. In addition to his graduate-level teaching, Hoffman serves as Director of Education at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester in Croton On Hudson, NY. Dr. Hoffman did a literary series with the ISJL in February 2009, and was a hit with every community he visited. He is also willing to teach your students while he’s on the road – a truly wonderful “bonus” to this program. We’re thrilled he has agreed to go on the road for us once again – don’t miss out on this fantastic program opportunity!



This year, some of the featured presenters include world-renowned clarinetist Marian Liebowitz, author Rabbi Niles Goldstein, and the return of our own Michael Danziger, a hilarious Memphis-based stand up comedian.

We’re proud of the cultural programs we offer, and look forward to another year of enriching literary series, performances and scholarly learning. If you are interested in getting a copy of the possible programs artist roster for 2009-2010, or to join the program opportunities contact list, email information@isjl.org and put “Programming” in the subject line.

Joel Hoffman Connects with Southern Communities

Dr. Joel Hoffman had his first true “Southern Jewish Experience” when he spent a week on the road for the ISJL in February. Arriving first in Pensacola, Florida, Joel’s journey also took him to Mobile, Alabama, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Joel lectures across the globe on popular and scholarly topics spanning education, history, Hebrew, prayer, and Jewish continuity. He has served on the faculties of Brandeis University; the Academy for Jewish Religion; and, currently, Hebrew

Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. He writes a biweekly column on Hebrew for the Jerusalem Post. On top of all that, he serves as Director of Education at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester in Croton-On-Hudson, NY.

Joel’s scholarly presentation on *The History of the Hebrew Language* was both educational and engaging – more than engaging, participants who attended this program were downright entertained! Joel was warmly welcomed by each



community. In Jackson, he was also able to spend some time with the afternoon religious school students, exploring the depths of the *motzi* prayer with them. He was not only a wonderful teacher, but also a charming guest.

Joel has another book on the way, and we’re excited to announce that we’re already planning future programming with Dr. Joel Hoffman. He truly embodies the goals of the

Joel Hoffman signs books in Jackson, MS. Photo by Beth Kander.

Southern States Jewish Literary Series – a distinguished series of discussions and book signings with leading authors of newly released works on the Jewish Experience, creating a vibrant literary circuit throughout the ISJL’s thirteen-state region. We look forward to bringing Joel back down South in the future!

JEWISH CINEMA SOUTH: Festivals & Fly-In

Jewish Cinema South is one of the ISJL’s most established and celebrated cultural programs. Each year, a “fly-in” planning meeting for the regional network of film festivals takes place in Jackson, Mississippi. This year, the annual fly-in meeting was held March 2-4 in Jackson, Mississippi. Six communities were represented at this year’s meeting: Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Jackson, Mississippi; Macon, Georgia; Mobile, Alabama; and Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. Jewish Cinema South is heading into its tenth season, and in the past decade has helped launch many

Jewish film festivals, including the now-well-established festivals in Austin, Houston, and Nashville.

Each year at the fly-in meeting, the ISJL provides two and a half days of orientation to the film festival process, networking, noshing, and of course – watching movies! The ISJL furnishes the films, screening space, snacks and several meals over the course of the meeting; communities are responsible for their own transportation, lodging, and additional meal expenses. There is no charge for the meeting itself.



Jewish Cinema South 2009-2010 Fly-In Meeting Group

The fly-in meeting is mandatory for any community wishing to participate in the Jewish Cinema South film festival project, and kicks off the film festival program year. It’s a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the process, and attendance at the meeting enables but does not obligate a community to host a film festival in the following year. We’re excited about the communities who were able to attend this year,

and look forward to working with them on the coming season of Jewish Cinema South.

We would love to have your community join us for next year’s meeting! Start planning now; we strongly encourage all interested communities to send at least two representatives to the meeting to gather the information, learn about the process, and bring their knowledge back to your community.

Exploring Traditional Judaism in South Georgia

By Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Director, ISJL History Department

The ISJL History Department is busy writing the Georgia entries for its online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. Formerly known as the "Digital Archive," the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities currently offers 115 community histories in six different states. By this summer, the histories of 18 additional communities in Georgia will be available. For more information about the south Georgia congregations mentioned in this article, visit the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities at www.isjl.org. Be sure to look for additional states later in the year.

Historically, Reform Judaism has predominated in the South. Even today, a southern Jewish congregation is twice as likely to be Reform as a congregation in the rest of the country. This is especially true in the small towns of the South, where Reform Judaism more easily enabled the economic and social acculturation of Jews who made up only a tiny fraction of the population. But in the south Georgia towns of Valdosta, Fitzgerald, Waycross, and Vidalia, four traditional congregations stand as an anomaly to this trend.

Although Valdosta Jews first held services together in 1892, they did not formally establish a congregation until 1908. The Valdosta Hebrew Congregation built its synagogue in 1920. Jews scattered in the numerous small towns in the Fitzgerald area first gathered together in Eastman to observe the high holidays in 1930. In 1941, the group formed the Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation and bought an old Methodist church, which they refurbished into a synagogue. In Waycross, local Jews organized a congregation in 1924. For many years, they met at the local Knights of

Pythias Hall before building a synagogue in 1953. In Vidalia, Jews didn't form a congregation until 1964, as most had earlier traveled to worship in Macon or Savannah. A Jewish industrialist from New York who owned a factory in Vidalia donated the money to build the small congregation a synagogue in 1969. Each of these small Jewish congregations were founded relatively late by Eastern European Jews. All but one of the thirteen founding members of the Waycross congregation were immigrants from Russia or Poland.

These Eastern European Jews brought over a more traditional style of Judaism than the Reform practices embraced by earlier Jewish immigrants from Germany. The congregations they founded were either Orthodox or Conservative. All of these South Georgia synagogues had kosher kitchens. Jewish merchants in each town closed their stores for two days on Rosh Hashanah. Waycross Jews built their synagogue in the Cherokee Heights neighborhood where most members lived so they would be able to walk to *shul* (synagogue) on Jewish holidays. At a time when most southern Reform congregations had abandoned the ritual, these congregations celebrated bar mitzvahs. In Fitzgerald, a bar mitzvah was covered by the local newspaper in 1933, which noted that the boy wore the "conventional cap and scarf of his religion," referring to the traditional *yarmulke* and *tallis* (prayer shawl). In Vidalia, the Beth Israel syna-



*The Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation.
Photo by Stuart Rockoff.*

Meet the New Oral Historian!

The ISJL is pleased to announce a new addition to its History Department. In June, Josh Parshall will join our staff as the ISJL's full-time oral historian. Josh is a native of Columbia, Missouri, and just completed a graduate degree in folklore at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He received a B.A. in American Studies from the University of Kansas in May, 2006. Josh will be conducting new video oral histories and managing the ISJL's growing collection of over 600 interviews with Jews from across the South.

If you are interested in learning more about the ISJL Oral History Project, contact Josh at jparshall@isjl.org.



The interior of the Fitzgerald synagogue.

gogue enforced separate seating for men and women with a *mehitza*, a partition that divides the two sections.

What's fascinating about these Conservative and Orthodox congregations is that most of their members did not follow traditional practices in their daily lives. Most did not keep kosher at home and very few were *shomer shabbos* (Sabbath observant). Refraining from work on Saturdays was very difficult for merchants for whom that day was their busiest of the week. Walking to *shul* on Shabbat was not feasible for the many members who lived in the small towns outside of Fitzgerald or Waycross. Most of these congregations only held Shabbat services on Friday nights, since most members had to work on Saturday mornings. Even as they clung to traditional Judaism, these congregations still assimilated to local mores. In Waycross, the congregation would move up the start time of Friday night services from 8:00 to 7:30 during high

school football season. Since the congregation was conservative, they insisted on waiting until sundown, and thus even with the earlier start time and shortened service, members still arrived late to the game. As they entered the stands, other fans would shout "I hope you prayed for us!"



Beth Israel in Vidalia still has a mechitza, the partition separating the men and women's sections.

These same social and economic pressures were the reason why so many other small town congregations in the South adopted Reform Judaism. But in these South Georgia towns, most synagogue members were of Eastern European heritage and were raised with traditional Juda-

ism. For them, Reform held little appeal, even as their daily religious practice was little different from Reform Jews in other small southern towns. These congregations maintained traditional worship primarily to honor the heritage and traditions of their ancestors who founded these communities.

All four of these congregations remain active today, although none are affiliated with a national movement. Temple Israel in Valdosta is led by Rabbi Moshe Elbaz and holds regular services. The Fitzgerald Hebrew Congregation brings in student rabbis from the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) once a month. The Waycross Hebrew Center still hosts a student rabbi from JTS for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In recent years, Beth Israel has brought down an Orthodox rabbi from Atlanta to lead high holiday services in Vidalia. During the rest of the year, both the Waycross and Vidalia congregations gather each Friday night for lay-led services, even though they sometimes struggle to get a *minyan*. In each of these communities, the remaining Jewish population is aging, as most of their children have moved away to bigger cities like Atlanta. Many remaining members worry about the future of their congregations. It remains to be seen whether these south Georgia enclaves of traditional Judaism can survive the demographic trends that have transformed Jewish life across the South.

Fond Farewell

It was 2006 when I accepted the position of Director of Rabbinic Services at the ISJL, and when I first began telling friends and family that I was moving to Mississippi, I got some reactions that may sound familiar to many of you. The first was “Are there Jews in Mississippi?” That was often followed by the more specific question, “If there are Jews there, why don’t they move to a place where there is a larger Jewish community?”

Both of these questions miss the point. There are Jews and Jewish communities in many places that are far removed from the “big city,” and in some cases, the Jewish history of these communities is longer and richer than elsewhere in the country. Jews have made a home and a difference everywhere they have been, so why would they want to leave?

I moved to Mississippi just three years ago, I don’t have the same roots in the Southern Jewish experience – yet even for me, it is hard to move on, to leave the ISJL and journey away from the communities I have served these past three years.



However, I am excited for my next adventure. I have been selected to serve as the rabbi of KAM Isaiah Israel in Chicago, which is known as a diverse and inclusive Reform Jewish community dedicated to education and inquiry, social justice, Jewish music, and inspirational worship. It is a congregation with a long and rich history. Geographically, it is the synagogue that is across the street from the Obamas. It is an exciting new shift to a big city, and I look forward to what lies ahead.

Eager as I am to begin the next part of my rabbinate, and have my own pulpit,

I am going to miss being the itinerant rabbi for the Institute. I am going to miss the warmth of Southern hospitality and Southern weather. I am going to miss the people that I have met, the students that I have taught, and the communities that I have served, all of whom have shaped my rabbinate in so many ways. I am going to miss writing Taste of Torah each week. I am going to miss the stories and the food and the smiles that I have encountered wherever I have gone. Thank you for a most wonderful and transformative Southern Jewish experience...

...and Shalom, y’all!
Rabbi Batsheva Appel

Welcome our new ISJL Director of Rabbinic Services– Marshal Klaven!

Rabbi Marshal Klaven is a recent graduate of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received his rabbinic ordination in May 2009, and in June, will take over the position of Director of Rabbinic Services at the ISJL. Rabbi Marshal’s diverse background includes military chaplaincy and youth education work. We are delighted to have him joining the ISJL team. Rabbi Marshal will provide his own introduction in the next CIRCA, when he takes over the rabbinic column. In the meantime, if you would like to reach him, after June 1 you can email him at mklaven@isjl.org.



Beyond the Office Walls

In the last CIRCA, we brought you inside the walls of the ISJL so you could “meet” the staff and see the faces around our office. In this CIRCA and the next, we’ll help you to get to know our staff even better, by moving beyond the office walls and sharing some of the talents and pursuits that make our staff such a diverse and dynamic group!

They Sing! Education Fellows Rachel Jarman (2008-2010) and Amanda Rainey (2007-2009) of The Bachelorettes.

By day, Rachel and Amanda can be found in the ISJL offices; on the weekends, they’re often on the road, visiting your communities and working with teachers and students. But some nights, and on their in-town weekends, you can find them on a stage, donning wigs, and rocking out with their girl band, The Bachelorettes. Amanda’s the drummer, and Rachel’s the front woman. To learn more about the band, you can visit www.thebachelorettes.com.



The Bachelorettes. Photo by William Patrick Butler.

She Writes! CIRCA Editor Beth Kander is also an Award-Winning Writer. Beth spends a lot of time writing, and lately, it’s started getting her some attention. So far in 2009, she won the Mississippi Theatre Association Playwriting Award, was named the Best Jackson Writer by the Jackson Free Press, and in the next few months, various scripts she wrote will be performed in Mississippi, Massachusetts, Illinois and New York. Who knows what’s next... a Pulitzer for CIRCA, perhaps?



Beth Kander

Notes

Southern Jewish News & Notes

Two Nice Jewish “Blood Brothers” in Georgia

Steven Fishman of Augusta, GA recently celebrated his 200th blood donation – 25 gallons - with Shepard Community Blood Center, Augusta, GA. His brother, Jack Fishman, recently completed his 589th donation in Atlanta, GA. Talk about being “out for blood!” While good naturedly battling one another for most blood donated, more importantly, these Georgia Jewish brothers are battling to save lives. Each blood donation can help save three lives. In celebration of Steven Fishman’s recent donation, he was awarded a plaque – and the joy of knowing that he has helped save 1800 local lives. As a former member of the Army Special Forces – known during the Vietnam era as the Green Berets - he is no stranger to saving lives; and as long as he’s able to do so, he plans to keep on giving, and maybe even catch up with his brother someday.

Interested in Jewish Genealogy?

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies will be holding its 29th annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 2nd - 7th. The ISJL’s Dr. Stuart Rockoff will be making two different presentations during the event. For more information, you can visit the association online at www.iajgs.org.



Steven Fishman of Augusta, GA



Thank You to Our Contributors!

Your gifts support the ISJL's mission to preserve and promote Jewish life in the American South. In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural and rabbinic programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution between January 1 and March 31, 2009, to enable our important work.

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