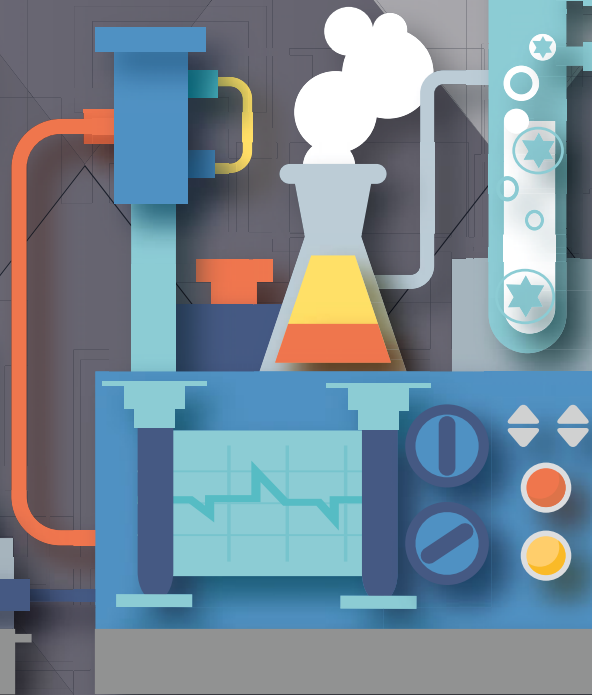


CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



**The ISJL :
An experiment
gone right**





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IN THIS ISSUE OF CIRCA...



We have described the ISJL in many ways over the past decade. But after more than fourteen years of providing a wide range of programming across a thirteen-state territory, creating a model that works in the South and beyond, we have a new favorite way of describing this unique organization: an experiment gone right.



In this issue, we will explore the variables, equations, imagination, re-calibration, and dramatic results that continue to emerge from this ongoing experiment.



For many of our partner communities, working with the ISJL was an experiment on their part, as well. Connecting communities across a region, providing unified curriculum for our education partners, shared programming to promote Jewish culture, putting rabbis on the road—the communities who welcomed us, asked for programs, and inspire us to keep doing what we do are the most important variable of all.

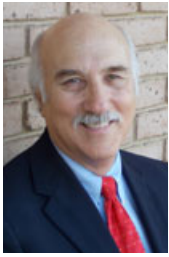


What did you think when you first heard of “the ISJL”? What part of this organizational experiment resonates most with you? Enjoy the stories in this edition of CIRCA, and as you prepare to bid farewell to 2014, consider supporting the ISJL in our ongoing experimentation.



As always, we love to hear your thoughts. Email our staff, join in conversations on Facebook (www.facebook.com/TheISJL) or Twitter (@TheISJL), and tell us what you'd like to see coming out of our labs next!





ISJL President
Macy B. Hart

An experiment gone right.

We chose this theme for CIRCA because it is a description that few organizations can claim as boldly as the ISJL. The truth is, to become an experiment gone right, you first have to be willing to truly be experimental... which is something the organized Jewish world aspires to do, but also seems to fear.

For twenty-five years, ever since the 1990 Jewish Population Study scared us with its findings about decreased affiliation and increased intermarriage, there have been many courageous attempts to address said issues. Some of these attempts never made it past incubation, while others hatched and addressed certain elements of need: education, leadership development, disillusionment with the structures and institutions, lack of opportunity, transitions of philanthropic goals and interests generation-to-generation, and so, so much more.

The Jewish community is an ever-evolving one. We have been this way for thousands of years. When a young Abraham shattered the idols his community worshiped, he thereby shattered the norm and set a precedent for our people. We should not fear bucking the system, but should embrace it as our birthright. Yet change seems to come slowly for us these days.

The twenty, thirty, and forty-something demographic is the one everyone seems to be trying

to reach—now, more than ever. But it's not the first time we've worried about this age group. If you look at today's organizational leadership—this writer not excluded—the truth is, we were once the twenty, thirty, and forty-somethings. (We're not anymore. But we were, once!) There is a fear that some very large percentage of today's Jewish leadership will retire within the coming 10 years. The question looms: who will take our place?

My answer is simple: great leadership has always emerged, and will continue to emerge. We must cultivate this leadership, and also understand that some things might change in the Jewish community. Oftentimes things have to be undone, before they can be redone.

As the ISJL continues to weave itself into the fabric of Jewish life in the South, we are readying today's children—the twenty, thirty, and forty-somethings of the future—to lead the community when it is their turn, too. The ISJL holistic approach to Jewish life, connecting communities of all sizes on a regional basis... that's the real experiment-gone-right, which **should be replicated** in other regions, as well.

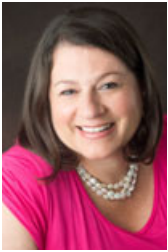
What the ISJL has learned in its experiment is that the issues addressed and the solutions put into practice are needed in every part

of this country. There must come a time when those “not fortunate enough to be raised in the South” realize that the solutions we came up with down here can work elsewhere, too.

We hear all the time, from friends in the Midwest and North and Southwest: “We have the same problems here, and need something like the ISJL.” It will only take a few brave, open-minded groups to get past the boundaries, park some egos, and look carefully at the ISJL's model of success.

People told us the ISJL would fail. We experimented anyway, and we are succeeding. For those of you who have partnered with us in the South, thank you, and let's keep growing; for those friends and supporters elsewhere, I urge you to find your movers and shakers and experiment along with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. B. Hart'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large 'B' and a long horizontal stroke.



ISJL Board Chair
Rachel Reagler
Schulman

Dear Friends:

On July 1, I was proud to assume my new role as Chair of the ISJL's Board of Directors. As we move forward, we must also look back, and I want to thank Rayman Solomon for his years of serving as the Chair of the Board, and for the example he has set as a leader of this organization. The ISJL is fortunate to have Ray continue to serve as a board member, and on the Executive Committee in his position as Immediate Past Chair. I also want to thank the prior group of Officers and Executive Committee Members for their service: Minette H. Brown, Secretary; Robert Roubey, Treasurer; and Jay Tanenbaum, Immediate Past Chair. These board members gave extra time and energy to the ISJL, and their contributions have made the organization what it is today.

As for me, this new position has kept me busy as the lovely summer in Chicago has flown by! As the high holidays approach, I can't believe our short Chicago summer is coming to an end soon. No matter what the weather or season here, I know the ISJL staff is keeping busy down in Jackson.

The ISJL's busy summer included the annual education conference in Jackson, Mississippi, in June, kicking off the twelfth year of our education program. With

Dr. Jeffrey Kress as the featured speaker, a host of Jewish professionals and our top-notch ISJL staff, the conference turned out to be a big success and everyone is focusing on the start of religious school. The ISJL also offered programming in conjunction with Mississippi Freedom Summer 50, the week-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Freedom fighters arriving in the South. Our new Director of Rabbinic Services, Rabbi Jeremy Simons, and our new Historian, Dr. Janet Bordelon, joined our staff along with the new Education Fellows, and our first Community Engagement Fellow. Everyone hit the road for summer visits.

Now that fall is here, there's no slowing down. We'll welcome the holidays, and staff will continue their travels. We'll also welcome the young-adult participants in the TENT program, sponsored by the Yiddish Book Center and hosted by the ISJL—a week of studying culture, social justice and history while traveling from New Orleans to Memphis in October. We are expecting approximately twenty young adults to join in this historic program, filled with cultural and culinary treats for all!

Although I don't live in the South now, I grew up in Arkansas, and still consider myself a Southerner. I am proud to honor this part

of my life and my family's Southern Jewish culture by serving on the Board of the ISJL. The ISJL's mission of "promoting Judaism and our heritage through innovative programs and shared resources" inspires me to work for this organization so that the ISJL continues to deliver inspirational rabbinic services, unique educational programs and memorable cultural events to communities throughout our region.

It was an experiment for me, to join this Board while living in Chicago—but now, as Chair of the Board, I suppose that this, too, is an experiment gone right. Throughout the year and in the years ahead, I am excited to continue supporting the work of the ISJL, and I hope that you will, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel R. Schulman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Rachel Stern leads a keynote session at the ISJL Education Conference.

My Educational Laboratory

Rachel Stern, MAJE/MJCS

What do you picture when someone says “laboratory”? Someone in a white lab coat? A team of scientists conducting some sort of wacky experiment with beakers of all shapes and sizes, and an assortment of colored liquids and smoke? Something pretty cool?

In the world of education, our laboratory is in the classroom and our metaphorical “beakers,” ready to be filled with knowledge and ideas, are our students. In order to remain an effective and current teacher, we must always try new things. When we step away from our classroom experiments to see what worked and what didn’t, we must then dissect why we had some good results, or what led to the failed-experiments, and make sure that we can learn something that we can apply to the future and share with others.

I have been a Jewish educator for 20 years now (gasp!) and I was lucky enough to study Jewish education formally in graduate school at the onset of my professional life. Once you have some years under your belt, and some credentials to boot, many folks step back and leave the classroom experiments

to someone else. As we emerge into leadership positions, we somehow step further and further away from the classroom and from conducting these valuable hands-on experiments.

Running a school is a multi-faceted job, and one that often times keeps the person sitting in the director’s office out of the classroom, because they are so busy with other things. And yet, how can we effectively run schools when we are further and further removed from the classroom?

This question has inspired me to enter the classroom as often as I can. In fact, although I am the director of a nationally recognized education program (shameless plug, of course, and a shout out to all of our education partner communities!), I am also a 6th grade religious school teacher.

Yes, you read that right! Some may say that being in a regular old after-school religious school classroom is beneath my abilities and experience. I would argue that it’s the



Rachel’s 6th grade students

very place that I gain my abilities and experience. For me, the classroom is literally and figuratively my laboratory. At the ISJL, we try out many ideas and strategies to see what offers our teachers and their students the most engaging and effective teaching experience. We brainstorm as a department, and I literally get the chance to try it out and share what I have learned with hundreds of other teachers just like me who share it with the thousands of students that we serve.

I may not have a lab coat and there may not be test tubes bubbling with a magic potion, but I still think my laboratory is pretty cool.



Students playing the life size board game at Congregation Beth Israel in Corpus Christi, TX.

What Root Beer and Jewish Education Have In Common

Rabbi Matt Dreffin, MAJE

A true experiment gone right usually generates many imitations and iterations. Take Barq's Root Beer, for example.

In Biloxi, Mississippi, at the turn of the 20th century, Edward Barq began to bottle and produce a concoction for consumption. His beverage had a unique taste to it, one we now know as Barq's Root Beer. His experiment (in both business and chemistry) led to a successful business, highlighted by a national presence... and a surge of other imitation root beers.

Believe it or not, this happens in the world of Jewish education, too. But it's a good thing.

We had a number of "imitation-is-the-highest-form-of-flattery" moments this past year. It's one of the benefits of a regional approach: when something works well in one religious school, Education Fellows want to bring it to other schools, and there's a surge of shared program glory.

Take this, for example: At the request of Rabbi Joshua Taub of Temple Emanuel in Beaumont, Texas, the education team created a truly unique program. Rabbi Taub challenged his Fellow at the time (Adam Wassell) to design a Purim program—but he had a caveat. He wanted the students to truly experience what it was like to be in the Purim story.

How could we accomplish this?

The answer lay in a life-sized board game. Students had to create a life-sized game-piece by dressing up one of their peers in "Jewish garb." They then moved from stop to stop encountering different challenges. This choose-your-own-adventure game sometimes took away the Jewish garb, showing the participants what it can feel like when you're discriminated against solely for practicing a certain religion. The reviews were a hit, and the Purim board game spread to a few other cities. Seeing the success of this game firsthand, some Fellows decided to get together and "imitate" it into a "new-and-improved" product. Hence, the Passover Board Game and Israeli Independence Day Board Game were born.

Much like how Barq's Root Beer became a national sensation, the life-size board game experiment took over the region. For this past year, the original game or a derivative of it, made its way to TEN different communities including Beaumont, Wichita Falls, St. Louis, Little Rock, Hattiesburg, Mobile, Dothan, Auburn, Ft. Mill and Blacksburg. Replicating the experiment and bringing exciting Jewish learning to multiple communities? That's even better than a nice, cold root beer.

27th Annual Delta Jewish Open



**October 18th-19th
Greenville, MS**

This year, the Jay Mosow Memorial Delta Jewish Open will be held in Greenville, October 18th-19th, 2014.

The profits will be donated to Henry S. Jacobs Camp and the ISJL. This two day event is more than a golfing fundraiser, it's an opportunity to renew old friendships, as well as a chance for fun, kibitzing, and good food. You don't have to play golf to enjoy the weekend!

For additional information contact Barry Piltz (662-332-3322) or Alan Silverblatt (662-887-5878)



A Beautiful Experiment in Georgia

Malkie Schwartz

As the ISJL's Community Engagement department grows, so too does our work in the state of Georgia.

One of the expanding initiatives of the ISJL's Community Engagement department is congregational partnerships. The ISJL works hand in hand with congregations to develop local, meaningful *tikkun olam* ("repair the world") initiatives. The organization started with one pilot partner community in Shreveport, Louisiana; we now have four, including Temple Israel in Columbus, Georgia.

In May, following some initial planning and assessment, the Temple Israel community spearheaded a Mitzvah Day to beautify the campus of Rothschild Leadership Academy (RLA), a public school named for a Jewish family. Volunteers from the congregation were joined by students, faculty, and families from RLA to clean, collaborate, and literally plant seeds and budding flowers. The students will maintain the plants, learning throughout the year from this endeavor. This is therefore not a



Volunteers at the Temple Israel Mitzvah Day at Rothschild Leadership Academy in Columbus, GA.

one-time Mitzvah Day, but an ongoing, blossoming experiment.

Dr. Michael Forte, Principal of Rothschild Leadership Academy, was ecstatic about the turnout and the impact. "They asked us what they can do for us and so we expressed to them that we would like to beautify our campus....and you did this!" he said. "My heart is really touched by this." Oftentimes, volunteer groups will approach a school or organization with an idea of how they would

like to volunteer. Temple Israel engaged in what can be considered an experiment—they tried something new. They approached the school and inquired as to how they can make an impact.

"We were digging, planting, painting, and having fun as a community," said Temple Israel member Sharon Warshaw. "We value our public schools, and we want them to know it...We started with knockout roses because it is Dr. Forte's favorite flower."

In addition to planting bulbs and blossoms, the congregation planted seeds of friendship. Like many experiments, this beautification project prompted more questions. In particular, the congregation was able to see the development of a beautiful space for students to, among other things, read. The question that followed was how to deepen the relationship, which has led the congregation and the school administration to begin to explore an ongoing reading program at the school. The hope is that Mitzvah Day will be extended to a Mitzvah Year!

This is just the beginning of these sorts of long-term partnerships and initiatives. This summer, the ISJL's first Community Engagement Fellow, Alanna Kleinman, joined the ISJL team. She is hitting the road to continue expanding programs including our congregational partnerships, T.A.P. (Talk About the Problems), a peer mediation project, and Read, Lead, Succeed, a literacy initiative, into communities like Columbus.



Experiential, Experimental, and Ever-Entertaining...

Ann Zivitz Kientz

A couple of years ago, we began experimenting with something new in the ISJL Programming department: The long weekend or the one-stop tour, combined with the occasional 10 day special event tour, with the same amazing presenters. Since attempting this approach, we have had much success with all of our congregations and organizations having several ways to gain access to the highest quality in Jewish artists, academics, and more!

The experiment went very well in 2013, a banner year with 47 events. This year, we've stayed as busy as ever, and 2015 is starting to fill already! Here's a little peek at what's to come:



Benji Lovitt, Comedian and Teacher, will be on tour next spring through the ISJL and available from April 24th – May 12. Benji lives in Israel, and he presents a hilarious and warm picture of life in the Holy Land. Benji's energy and enthusiasm will make you laugh out loud as he sheds light on El Al security, Jewish holidays, and exactly what makes American and Israeli Jews different from each other. He also teaches several creative workshops, if you are interested in an artist in residence weekend.

Joel Hoffman, Author, Lecturer and Teacher, has just published a new book, *The Bible's Cutting Room Floor: The Holy Scriptures Missing From Your Bible*. Synagogues, churches as well as universities are perfect for this lecture tour. His lectures are always filled with dazzling "AHA" moments! He will be in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in November; Southern Texas for several days in January; and this spring, Joel is available for a 10 day tour.



Saul Kaye, Singer, Songwriter and Teacher, was the featured entertainer at the ISJL's 2014 education conference. His Jewish Blues music is unique and fun, and brings true emotion and expression through musical midrash. His next Southern tour will be from January 24th – February 8th. A few dates are still available along that tour, but they're filling fast!

These are just a few of our scheduled upcoming events. For a full list of presenters and opportunities, or for more information on how to use the programming department for your congregation or organization, contact Ann Zivitz Kientz (akientz@isjl.org).

Snapshots from the Road



1

1. HUMBLE, TEXAS

Education Fellows Bethany Berger, Leah Apothaker, and Arielle Nissenblatt presented a Rockin' Shabbat at Temple Beth Torah on their summer visit, complete with musical instruments!

2. TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

Education Fellow Missy Goldstein led an ISJL Crash Course teacher training on her summer visit to Temple Emanu-EL.

3. COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

Education Fellows Bethany Berger and Lex Rofes volunteered at the weekly Sunday morning service and oneg led by Temple Israel congregants at Fort Benning.

4. TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Author Mary Glickman shared a weekend of Southern Jewish programming with members of Temple Israel.



2



3



4



5



6



7

5. AUBURN, ALABAMA

Rabbi Jeremy Simons celebrated July simchas, including his own birthday, with Congregation Beth Shalom.

6. PINEHURST, NORTH CAROLINA

Education Fellow Lex Rofes poses with teachers during a summer training at Sandhills Jewish Congregation.

7. BRUCEVILLE, TEXAS

Education Department Director Rachel Stern and Education Fellows Allison Poirier and Missy Goldstein during their week on faculty at URJ Greene Family Camp.



Freedom Summer Veterans Larry Rubin and Ira Grupper discussing their experience with young activists.

Honoring A Social Justice Experiment 50 Years Later

Rachel Myers and Malkie Schwartz

Fifty years ago, Bob Moses, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) chose to capitalize on the energy of young people, and invited college students to come to Mississippi for the summer and help with voter registration and education.

This was certainly a dangerous experiment, one with many unknown variables; an experiment that risked the lives of volunteers and the Mississippians who helped them. There were many who were sure that the experiment would fail, but the organizers moved ahead and the outcome paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

To commemorate the valiant efforts of the volunteers, the Veterans of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and the Mississippi branch of the NAACP organized a conference to

honor the veterans and look ahead to the future of national civil rights efforts.

The ISJL being a local Jewish organization, committed to social justice, wanted to be a part of these efforts. We spent a lot of time trying to imagine what a gathering of Jewish activists in Mississippi would look like. We surveyed Jewish social justice organizations to learn how they would maximize their time at such a landmark occasion. We also reached out to veterans of the movement who generously shared their experiences and reflections of Freedom Summer as well as their hopes for Jewish activism today and the future.

We were inspired by the courage of these volunteers, and decided to take on a less daring but still-experimental initiative: we invited contemporary Jewish social justice activists back to the state where so

many Jewish volunteers had fought for justice. We knew people were interested in commemorating the anniversary, but weren't so sure they would take up our challenge of actually doing it in the state where the event occurred.

We were pleasantly surprised when 25 Jewish people from all over the country, committed to advancing the legacy of Jewish social justice, joined us in Jackson for this special gathering. The experiment worked, and produced some surprising outcomes including intergenerational, interracial and interfaith conversations, upfront and personal discussions with veterans, and an impromptu meeting with a state representative.

The next page features some reflections from our participants, sharing with what they felt made this experiment turn out right. We are grateful to have been able to participate in this commemoration, and look forward to uniting and inspiring Jewish social justice activism in the future.



“The fact is that inter-generational conversations about anti-racist Jewishness are now flourishing in many places, including, perhaps once counterintuitively, the South. I left Jackson with a great sense of happiness and contentment, particularly in seeing younger Jewish women taking the helm of progressive Jewish work. It’s not so much about passing the torch, but sharing and reflecting on the work together. The conversation continues...”

DEBRA L. SCHULTZ
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



“The most exciting thing for me was that the veterans and older members of our gathering were eager to hear my ideas and challenge my assumptions. I thought about how rare it is for me to interact so candidly, authentically, and practically with people from different generations than my own. This commemoration brought all of us together around a shared memory and then united us in a common purpose. It was profound, energizing. My heart sang.”

ETTA KING
JEWISH WOMEN’S ARCHIVE

“I left Jackson with the understanding that we stand on many shoulders. We should feel the courage to embrace the phenomenal contributions of Jewish activists from the past and should continue to meaningfully act in that powerful legacy today.”

JAY SAPER
JEWS FOR JACKSON



New Rabbi, New Ideas, Same Formula

Rabbi Jeremy Simons

The ISJL Rabbinic Department has served communities throughout the South since 2003. What began as an experiment—the re-introduction of the itinerant rabbi—has proven a success. The previous decade has seen three gifted rabbis bring energy and talent to the position. Rabbi Debra Kassoff, Rabbi Batsheva Appel, and Rabbi Marshal Klaven have all grown the department during their respective tenures.

With the founding of the Rabbinic Department back in 2003, the ISJL really launched two experiments. The first proved a rabbi could provide useful support to dozens of communities throughout the region. The second experiment proved that such a position was sustainable. Even as rabbis changed, congregations continued their partnerships with the ISJL. The long-term nature of our partnerships is no accident—it was part of the department's mission from its inception.

Upon starting this position, I could not help but think of the story of the Talmudic tale of Honi and the Carob Tree. In his old age, Honi planted a carob tree. An onlooker asked him why he planted it when he would never enjoy its fruit. Honi explained that eventually, the tree would bear fruit, and even if he wasn't around to enjoy it, his labor would benefit the generations that came after him.

In the same way, the leaders of this department laid the

seeds for its future success. Since its inception, the Rabbinic Department focused on creating institutional memory. Every visit and every encounter was carefully documented, allowing relationships to build and the new rabbi to continue the work of his or her predecessor, without having to start over.

That brings us to today, as I begin my work here, serving as the fourth rabbi to head this department. What can you expect to change, and what can you expect to stay the same? First, our commitment to supporting communities and individuals through educational, religious, and pastoral support remains as strong as ever. We will continue sending our weekly Taste of Torah email, scheduling weekend visits, and providing lifecycle services along with pastoral support.

There will also be changes in the future, reflecting the changing needs of our communities. But really, change is not new for us: virtually every year has seen expansions and additions to our offerings. You can expect that these future changes—“mini-experiments” if you will—will come with the same careful planning and implementation as in the past.

We are partners in this ongoing experimentation, testing hypotheses and strengthening Jewish life. For it to continue succeeding, I need your support. For all those who have



had the pleasure of working with my predecessors, I want to hear from you. I want to hear how I can support you and your community in the coming years. This is also a time for creativity and imagination. It is a time for us to start a conversation about additional ways this department can serve its constituents. Over these 11 years, we've proven the experiment works. We also know that its continued success comes from constant refinement and innovation.

I hope you will join me as a partner in this process—I look forward to hearing from you!

ABOVE
Rabbi Jeremy Simons
leading services at
Temple B'nai Israel in
Natchez, MS

Rabbis on the Road: A Cantor's Travels



This spring, our Rabbis on the Road program is proud to take a musical road trip as we send Cantor Joel Colman from New Orleans to visit communities across the South.

Cantor Joel Colman has been serving as the Cantor at Temple Sinai in New Orleans since 1999. He received a Master's Degree in Sacred Music from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music where he was ordained as Cantor in 1995, and graduated from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan with a BA in Special Education. Cantor Colman's master thesis on Sidor Belarsky was published by the *Journal of Synagogue Music*. He is also a past regional director for the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and has taught High School in Texas and in Israel. Cantor Colman has sung in concerts in New Orleans, Rochester, St. Louis, Miami, Detroit, Tulsa, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York City and Jerusalem, and has also been the featured artist at two concerts held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. He serves the community as a Chaplain with the New Orleans Fire Department, and as an emergency coordinator for Amateur Radio communication within Orleans Parish. Cantor Colman's son Joshua made Aliyah to Israel in 2010, and is serving in the IDF.

April 10 – 11

Congregation B'nai Israel Natchez, MS

April 24 – 25

Mishkan Israel Congregation Selma, AL

May 01 – 02

Temple Sinai Lake Charles, LA

May 02 – 03

Temple B'nai Israel Monroe, LA

May 08 – 09

Congregation Beth Israel Gulfport, MS

May 15 – 17

Congregation B'nai Israel Galveston, TX

In Memory of Robert Fisher

Recently, the ISJL began receiving donations in memory of Robert Fisher of Detroit. We reached out to his wife, Marcy Heller Fisher, to express our condolences for her loss and ask about Rob's connection to the ISJL's work. This is an excerpt of her reply, which we share with gratitude. May her husband's memory be a blessing, and may their children and grandchildren continue to embody his love.

Detroit has a large Jewish population, and it's easy to be Jewish here. It's easy to participate in any kind of Jewish life one wishes or not—non-practicing, cultural, religious—and still identify as being Jewish. Such a contrast to what Rob found in the South. When visiting the Delta, which he did often for business, Rob was intrigued seeing remnants of Jewish life in many little towns—a now-closed synagogue, a shuttered general store. He occasionally met fellow Jews in the cotton business. He couldn't help but be impressed how hard it was to keep the community together and it fascinated him. When he met Roger Malkin at Harvard, where Rob was a team leader for their annual Agribusiness seminars, they talked about the South, and Roger introduced him to what is now called the ISJL. Since that introduction many years ago, we have supported the ISJL. We used to have your VHS tapes (I've since replaced them with your DVDs) which Rob would play when friends visited. Jewish life in the South intrigued him so much that just a week before he died, at a 'meet and greet' we had hosted to meet our new rabbi, Rob brought up his idea for our youth group to go South to mingle and meet their peers, an idea which Rabbi Miller and he had agreed to pursue together for this year.

Rob was a renowned international agricultural risk-management consultant. He once worked with Congressman Conyers on a Black Farmer's initiative and had testified before Congress regarding Black Farmers and long-standing institutional racism that denied blacks a fair share of farm loans. He also had a lot of business in the South. A third of his clients were in Europe, so we lived in Paris in fall and winter, and we lived in the Detroit metropolitan area the rest of the year, where we have four children. (Our youngest daughter is currently getting her Ph.D at SMU in Dallas, but still calls Detroit home.) He would only work with people and companies he respected and liked, and his clients all became beloved friends. I hope that gives you a glimpse of the man whose memory our friends and his colleagues are honoring; perhaps they'll learn a little about ISJL in the process.

Sincerely,
Marcy Heller Fisher

An Ongoing Historical Experiment

Dr. Janet Bordelon

I only recently began my tenure as the historian of the ISJL, and I am thrilled to be a part of this amazing team. The ISJL staff and community have warmly welcomed me, and I feel quite fortunate and proud to be a part of this tremendous organization. In this short article, I would like to share my philosophy of history, and my own vision for the History Department's expansions and experiments in the coming years.

The opportunity to be the ISJL's historian represented a perfect synthesis of my background and research interests. I recently completed my Ph.D. at New York University. Although I moved to Jackson from New York City, I am a proud Southern Jew interested in communicating my passion for history to the broadest audience possible.

History has always been a love of mine. For a number of years, I taught history to high school students, and I found that history could be used as a powerful tool for individuals to better understand themselves and the world around them. History studies the past, and the legacies of the past playing out in the present. Far from being a 'dead' subject, it connects things through time and encourages its students to take a long view of such connections. All people and peoples are living histories. Understanding the linkages between past and present is absolutely basic for a good understanding of the condition of being human.

The online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities is one of the ISJL's resources I am

excited to have the opportunity to now oversee and enhance. I am so thankful to Dr. Stuart Rockoff for creating such a vast and intricate account of Southern Jewry. It truly is a remarkable achievement, and I hope that over the years, I can add my own positive contributions to this incredible learning tool.

My goals and future experiments are to:

- Make the Encyclopedia more interactive, with more links to primary sources and our large repository of oral histories.
- Add diverse voices and topics in the narrative of these communities, which means delving more into the lives of women and children, and looking in depth at subjects like Jewish education and leisure.
- Highlight accounts of Jewish communities and social justice issues, as well as community relations stories.
- Bring all of our articles up to date. History is the past, but it is also the recent present, so telling these latest stories is very important.

Beyond sharing stories, inspiring people, and helping to cultivate stronger communal identities, I believe that the Encyclopedia provides us with enhanced opportunities to engage our community in the raw material of history and in the collection of historical documents and artifacts. I am challenged to take our work to the next level, allowing the public to



interact with our materials in new ways—not only to look at it from the comfort of their own homes, but also to comment on it, share it through social media, and contribute their own stories.

Everybody has a story to tell, and each story is part of a larger historical narrative. One of the best aspects of this wonderful job is hearing from our readers who have suggestions, new facts, and questions about the content of the Encyclopedia. This only helps to make the history we tell even better. Presently, we are working on the Mississippi entries for our Encyclopedia. We will be doing the same process for every state. Honoring our history should ultimately be a collaborative effort. I look forward to working with our readers as we continue to build our community history together. Call or email me anytime, or visit our website to see how to share files via Dropbox!

ABOVE
Dr. Janet Bordelon

A Hardware Store's Former Life as a Synagogue Remembered

There's something special about the Ace Hardware Store in Donaldsonville, Louisiana: it used to be a synagogue.

Bikur Cholim Synagogue, built in 1872, served as a place of worship for the Jewish population of Donaldsonville and the surrounding area until the late 1940s when membership dwindled below a sustainable level, and the doors of the synagogue shut—but the building itself stayed standing.

This May, Baton Rouge's Congregation B'Nai Israel hosted the unveiling of a poster, created and designed by Baton Rouge artist Elizabeth Randall Neely. Intended to inform everyone who enters the building of its history, the poster is a double-faced exhibit including an historic photograph of the Bikur Cholim exterior from the 1930s as well as a drawing of what the interior of the synagogue looked like. If you're in Donaldsonville, stop into the store and remember the synagogue that once it was.

Do you have some noteworthy news about Southern Jewish life? E-mail suggestions to kander@isjl.org!

Bikur Cholim Synagogue

Built 1872



If you step across Railroad Avenue and look up, you will see the top of the Bikur Cholim Synagogue building above the hardware store's commercial façade. At its dedication in 1872, the Donaldsonville Chief described the synagogue as: "a commodious, tall structure built of wood with Victorian style filigree trimming the roofline and a double archway over the entry. [There is] a rosette window but no other decoration."

A drawing of the synagogue's interior can be seen on this poster's reverse side.

Underwritten by Congregation B'nai Israel, Baton Rouge, 2014.

The Adoption & Jewish Identity Project

Are you, or is someone you know, an adoptee between the ages of 18 and 36 who was raised in a family that identified at least in part as Jewish? The Adoption and Jewish Identity Project (AJIP) is gathering stories from young adult adoptees raised in American Jewish families. The AJIP aims to improve the lives of Jewish adoptive families by creating broader understanding of the unique religious, cultural, and identity issues they face. Adoptees will be able to share their experiences and perspectives in a variety of formats. Anyone may submit his/her story either in writing or using other media (audio, video). We will also be conducting 15-20 in-depth interviews with selected individuals, as well as a number of focus groups. The collected stories will be used (either anonymously or for attribution, depending on your wishes) for a book about the complex identities of adoptees raised in American Jewish families.

If you are an adoptee interested in sharing your story, please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AJIPA-adopteeQuestionnaire>

TENT: The South October 19th-26th

Tent: Encounters with Jewish Culture is an initiative of the National Yiddish Book Center to offer immersive, intense, free, week-long workshops for anyone, ages 21 to 30, who's curious about the connections between Jewishness and modern culture. This year, the ISJL is hosting Tent: The South, taking place in various locales from New Orleans to Memphis, October 19-26.

Twenty young Jewish adults will hit the road with us to explore the heritage and culture of the Jewish South. We're a first-time Tent site, so this is another experimental project—and one we can't wait to share the results of with you!

Thank You to Our Supporters!

In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural, community engagement 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 or challenge match pledge from January 1st- August 31st, 2014 to enable our important work.

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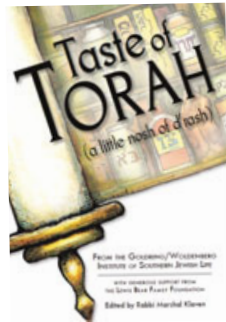
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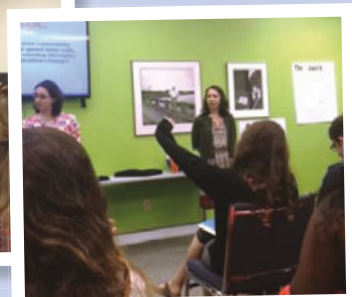
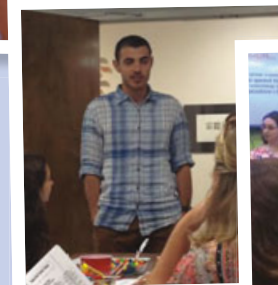
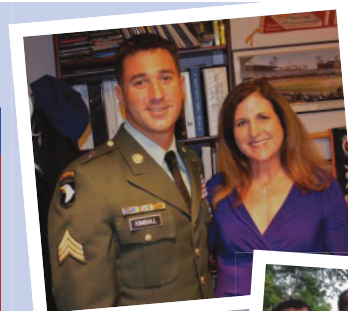
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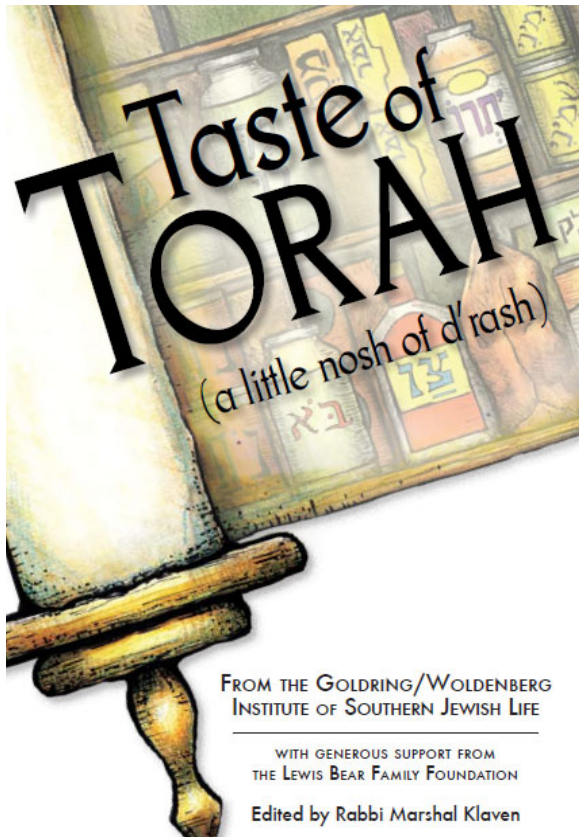


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