

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.

Institute Receives National Attention & Support

Across the country, an increasing number of large philanthropic foundations are recognizing the value and impact of the ISJL Education Program. The Board of Directors of the **Jim Joseph Foundation** recently approved a grant of \$250,000 (ISJL) for support of the Itinerant Jewish Education Program. A portion of the amount will also be allocated to support the ISJL's annual education conference.

*Education Fellow
Amanda Rainey
reads to students
in LaGrange,
Georgia. Photo by
Jackie Newman*



This year, the **Legacy Heritage Trust Fund** approved a generous gift in support of the Education Department, which will allow the ISJL to hire more staff and expand educational programming to more communities. The ISJL also receives generous support from the **Marcus Foundation** of Atlanta. For this year, the Foundation affirmed their commitment to the ISJL with a two-year gift of \$250,000 in support of the Education Department.

For the second year in a row, the ISJL was included in the **Slingshot '07-'08** list of the 50 most innovative nonprofit Jewish organizations in North America. Compiled and published by 21/64, a project of the **Grand Street Group** through the **Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies** of New York, the annual guidebook features programs, organizations, and leaders that take innovative approaches to addressing age-old concerns of identity and community in Jewish life today. This year, the **Slingshot Fund** also selected the ISJL as one of the eight recipients of the organization's inaugural grants. This award of \$45,500 will help fund the Education Department.

"This year's inaugural grantees exhibit the leadership, passion, and innovation that the Slingshot Fund was developed to support," said Jessica Warren, one of the founding members of the Fund. "While the eight organizations we are funding this year had the greatest resonance for me and my peers, all the organizations depicted in *Slingshot* are doing great work in the Jewish world. All represent strong investment opportunities for new and established funders alike."

The **Natan Fund** of New York recently decided to fund the ISJL for a third consecutive year, providing important financial backing for the Education Program. This year, the Natan Fund's gift of \$25,000 was amplified by a private matching contribution of \$40,000 from Natan board member Stacy Schusterman and Steven Dow.

Renowned Scholar Lawrence Kushner to Visit Mississippi



*Photo Courtesy of
Lawrence Kushner*

On Sunday, March 9, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner will speak at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. The event is co-sponsored by the ISJL, Beth Israel Congregation, and the Religious Studies Department at Millsaps College. The event will take place in the Academic Center Complex Recital Hall at seven in the evening.

The ISJL strives to make the highest caliber programming available to communities in our region. Rabbi Kushner is the latest in a line of

distinguished scholars the ISJL has helped bring to smaller, traditionally underserved Jewish communities. Known nationally as "one of the most creative religious writers in America," Kushner is the Emanu-El Scholar at Congregation Emanu-El of San Francisco. He is also a faculty member of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and served as rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts for nearly thirty years. Through his lectures, articles and 16 books, he has

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Message from the Institute Board Chair



In the last few years, we have seen this Institute truly become an institution. The early vision of a few has bloomed into the efforts of many. ISJL programming has expanded, enabling it to touch almost every Jewish community in four states and a substantial number in five more. This is well on the way to the goal of covering our 13 state Southern region.

Our staff has expanded too, enabling these programs to continue growth with the highest quality delivery and an astounding amount of energy and creativity. It is amazing what a group of people can accomplish when they are passionate about what they are doing.

Gratefully, support for our work also continues to grow. In fact, our annual Friends campaign closed its latest year with an increase in both the total gift amount and in the number of individual givers, as it has for every year in our history. Meanwhile our overall funding support, which includes large foundations and other institutional support, added important gifts from leading national philanthropies. This represents a strong endorsement of our work.

As we welcome 2008, this CIRCA is sent to over 12,000 readers in all fifty states and several countries. It is *your* interest in the ISJL that is driving us onward. As our staff grows, our programming grows and our financial supporters grow... our vision is validated. But nothing offers validation more than seeing results. A synagogue without a rabbi for over 20 years fills for Shabbat services as Rabbi Appel arrives to lead them, if only for a weekend. A child comes home from religious school where he or she experienced another lesson designed by the finest Jewish educators and delivered by volunteer teachers who felt prepared and excited by the content. Community groups gather to hear Dr. Stuart Rockoff speak on the subject of Jewish history in their area. Filmgoers attend our multi-site festival, Jewish Cinema South, across the region. Big city synagogues invite small

town counterparts to share in a weekend of programming.

What else? Families can request video oral histories; our museums allow visitors to view the history of our people; renowned authors travel the South celebrating Jewish literature. *B'nai Mitzvah*, weddings, funerals, conversions, anniversaries, speakers, counseling, support, partnering, singing, worship, study. And coming soon: Programs designed to enable each small community to continue the Jewish legacy of community-building, the teaching of tolerance, and the sacred *mitzvah* of *tikkun olam* – repairing the world.

We are growing so quickly. In case you are new to us, or maybe lost track of all that we are, let me remind you. The Goldring / Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is:

- Committed to preserving and documenting the practice, culture and legacy of Judaism in the South. We are trans-denominational and open to all.
- A group that insists on exploring new paradigms, taking risks with new programs, and doing whatever it takes to deliver support to Jews, no matter how small their community.
- A team of twenty-one staffers, headquartered in Mississippi, but with four staff in satellite offices, and others constantly on the road making sure that communities in 13 states benefit from Institute services.
- A board of twenty-six, from around the country – all giving generously in time and in treasure, helping to lead the growth, and protecting our scarce resources with their wisdom and oversight in addition to review and control systems.
- A donor-supported effort that depends upon your willingness to give.
- And finally, the Goldring / Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is: YOU!

L'Shalom,

Message from the Institute President



The Institute's board, staff, and supporters are one proud group – and with good reason. Our program and support offerings continue to increase, and the number of communities we impact continues to grow. As we move into our eighth year of real operation, our gaze is always to the future. What accomplishments will we have achieved by our ten year anniversary? Our fifteenth? Our twentieth?

I am confident that as we continue to realize the vision of changing some of the negative mentalities present in Jewish communal life, we will truly make a difference. We will keep pushing well-resourced urban centers to think outside their zip code and share resources with smaller congregations outside of the metropolitan areas. We will continue to remind the Jewish world that we are one community, not a collection of islands.

Jews are definitely the people of generations; therefore, the ISJL is in for the duration. In this and my next CIRCA piece, I would like to discuss some of the changes we expect to experience in the next ten to fifteen years. As our supporters know, the work of the itinerant Education and Rabbinic Departments is central to the ISJL's mission to deliver services to traditionally underserved communities. In this CIRCA message, I want to first focus on where we're going with those two pieces.

In 2003, ten communities from four states got on board with our education program, embracing the idea of a "common body of Jewish knowledge," and that while maintaining our pluralistic identities, Jews of varying denominations can share in a trans-denominational, comprehensive curriculum for their children's education. By 2007, forty-nine communities in nine states had joined this "common body" – and all indications are that this number

will continue to increase as we eventually see this concept model embraced throughout the nation.

We have long referred to our itinerant rabbinic piece as a "bold old idea." Our traveling rabbi is a model program. In the future, I think that there will once again be "circuit riding" professionals – rabbis and educators – serving multiple communities. These "circuit riders" should be funded by a combination of sources, including the small communities they serve, federation allocations (communal dollars), community foundations, donors, and the religious movements working together. These professionals will deliver the opportunity for Jewish life and experiences, wherever their congregants or students might be. The payoff for this investment will be a turnaround of the trends identified by the Jewish population studies (lack of Jewish identity, decreasing affiliation rates, and so on) that currently create so much anxiety for the Jewish movers and shakers and policy makers.

The philosophy behind the education and rabbinic initiatives at the ISJL really speak to our overall philosophy and mission. As our chairman Jay Tanenbaum notes, we are engaged in a tremendous amount of activity. As we celebrate our eighth anniversary in February, I am excited for all the activity ahead. I will continue sharing my thoughts on our future impact in the next issue of CIRCA, and would love to hear from you if you agree or disagree with my thoughts on the realities of today's Jewish community. The debate is the beginning, for it makes us think. Working together, we know it is possible to make "what if" into "what is."

(RENOWNED SCHOLAR - continued from page 1)

helped shape the present agenda for personal and institutional spiritual renewal.

Rabbi Kushner originated the concept of synagogue *havurot*, family fellowship groups. He led his former congregants to publish their own prayerbook, *V'tahaer Libenu* (Purify Our Hearts), which was the first gender-neutral liturgy ever written, and has conducted over 75 weekends for

personal religious growth. He was the first Rabbinic Chairman of Reform Judaism's Commission on Religious Living and has been a commentator on N.P.R.'s *All Things Considered*. His books include: *Kabbalah: A Love Story*; *Jewish Spirituality: A Brief Introduction for Christians*; *God Was In This Place and I, I Did Not Know*; and *Honey from the Rock: Visions of Jewish Mystical Renewal*.

Education Department Continues to Enhance Curriculum

The ISJL is committed to ensuring that its educational program is of the highest quality. Since the comprehensive curriculum is a key centerpiece in the program, the ISJL Education Department evaluates the curriculum each year to decide what areas should be added, expanded or modified. Since the curriculum is such an enormous document, editing and fine tuning lessons is a time-consuming process. Last year we conducted a massive edit, bringing in outside readers for their feedback. This year, we have decided to focus on enhancing the general structure of the program with practical guidelines and adding content on Southern Jewish History, anti-Semitism, and topics that affect our students. These components, which will appear in the curriculum released in summer 2008, are described below.

Structural Enhancements

- **Teaching Teens:** Jewish teenagers are a unique group. We are creating a "Teaching Teens Guide" that will help to successfully incorporate high

school students into religious school. This guide will include opportunities for teens to continue learning, gain leadership skills as well as contribute to the religious school by being positive role models for younger students.

- **B'nai Mitzvah Handbook:** The Bar/Bat Mitzvah handbook will be an interactive tool for families preparing for this milestone. It will include resources for parents and children and will be available on CD so each community can tailor it to fit their own requirements and traditions.
- **Director Packet:** Many of our directors are part-time volunteers. This packet will help to make their jobs easier, providing such information as how to recruit and train teachers, how to develop policies for schools, how to work with parents, and how to utilize education committees.

Content Additions

- **Southern Jewish History:** The ISJL's History Department has been working on a powerful project called Katrina's Jewish Voices, which collects video testimonials from Jewish community members who experienced Hurricane Katrina. We are creating lessons that will allow students to view these stories, and connect them to Jewish values they are studying, such as *kehillah* (community) and *tzedakah* (righteousness, justice, charity). We will also be writing lessons for students in grades 3-10 focusing on the unique experience of Jews and Judaism in the American South. Included will be documents, photographs and a range of activities that will bring this history to life. Students will explore the past, including their own family history, to help them understand where they came from and to give them a sense of ownership of this rich Southern history.
- **Anti-Semitism:** Many Jewish holidays are jokingly summarized with the following axiom: "They tried to kill us, they failed, let's eat!" Why has persecution been such a theme in Jewish history? Why so much destruction? These new lessons are meant to give a historical context to the summertime holiday of Tisha b'Av, as well as an introduction to Diaspora studies and the roots of anti-Semitism.

Join us this year for our annual

"Go & Teach"

Education Conference

This year's conference will take place **June 22-24, 2008**. Our new location is the Hilton Hotel in Jackson, Mississippi. The conference will showcase many of our partners, such as CAJE and Facing History and Ourselves. Our keynote speaker is Rabbi Seymour Rossel, a nationally recognized author and teacher. The conference will offer informative sessions, the chance to network with other teachers and communities, entertainment, worship and much more. We look forward to our community of teachers and learners coming together for this truly transformative conference! For more information, call 601-362-6357 and ask to speak to any member of the education staff.

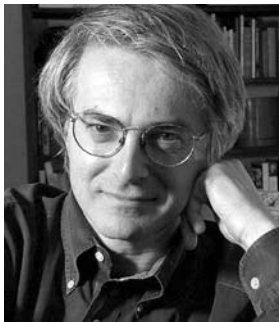
JEWISH CINEMA SOUTH

Every Jewish Cinema South festival brings excitement and energy to its community, and this year's festivals have been no exception. The 2007-2008 season of Jewish Cinema South closed in January with two festivals, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Jackson, Mississippi. Two additional communities, Macon, Georgia and Mobile, Alabama, held festivals in October.

Each festival had several highlights. In Jackson, the Mississippi Museum of Art hosted the screening of **"The Rape of Europa"** in their beautiful new building. This film chronicles the epic story of the systematic theft, deliberate destruction and miraculous survival of Europe's art treasures during the Third Reich. Marc Masurovsky, a consultant for The Claims Conference, spoke in conjunction with the film. Masurovsky is an international expert on the archival record of the looting of Europe's financial and cultural assets by Nazi Germany before and during World War II. In 1980, he investigated hidden Belorussian Nazis residents in the US for the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations. For nearly two years Marc lived underground, providing invaluable documentation from the Belorussian community's own secret archives.

In Baton Rouge, one of the most rollicking events of the film festival was the performance by the Panorama Jazz Band of New Orleans, who rounded out the showing of **"A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden."** The film traces the efforts of two contemporary Klezmer groups trying to recover the Yiddish music and culture in danger of being forever lost. The Panorama Jazz Band boasts a repertoire drawing on the most exciting music from around the world: funky New Orleans Jazz, tropical rhythms of the Caribbean and melodies of Eastern Europe.

The goals of Jewish Cinema South are to enhance Jewish life, strengthen Jewish identity, promote multi-cultural and multi-ethnic dialogue, and encourage



Marc Masurovsky
(Photo Courtesy
of Marc
Masurovsky).



Jackson - Prof. James Bowley and festival chair Marcy Nessel with Marc Masurovsky, speaker for "The Rape of Europa."

Baton Rouge - "Blues by the Beach" filmmakers Jack and Fran Baxter with festival chairpersons Paula and Harvey Hoffman.



Panorama Jazz Band (Photo Courtesy of Panorama Jazz Band)

tolerance and understanding, all while providing entertaining programming. This year's Jewish Cinema South film festivals proved illuminating, thought provoking, and entertaining.

Travel the South as an ISJL Education Fellow!

The ISJL's two-year Education Fellowship is a unique and rewarding opportunity. Fellows travel to congregations to provide a variety of services such as working with teachers, leading all-school programs, leading worship services, and creating holiday programs. The Fellows become part of the communities they serve, gaining the perspective of small and under-resourced congregations. Fellows gain experience in teaching, creating programs,

writing curriculum, planning a conference, working with multiple congregations, and much more. This job is meant for involved, creative and dedicated recent college graduates hoping to gain an invaluable Jewish experience. This position is highly competitive. To apply, please send us a resume and a cover letter explaining why you are interested. For more information or to apply, contact Rachel Stern, Director of Education at 601-362-6357 or rstern@isjl.org.

Thinking About Art & Interpretation

by ISJL Rabbi
Batsheva Appel



In December 2008, Rabbi Batsheva Appel was a featured speaker at the ISJL's program "Seeing Angels, Seeking Angels: Angels in Hebrew Texts," held at the Mississippi Museum of Art. Her talk focused on art as interpretation of text. The following is excerpted from her presentation.

I have three favorite quotations about translation. The first is "all translation is interpretation" which seems more like a truism than a proverb. The second is Hayim Nachman Bialik's saying "Translation is like kissing through a handkerchief." The third is the proverb, "A translator is a traitor." This last one sounds overly harsh and yet if we think about it, it is very accurate. A translator betrays the text by revealing the secrets of the text and at the same time, concealing the actual meaning of the text. A translator betrays the person for whom s/he is translating, because they will never be able to convey the exact meaning of the text. We know that some details may be "lost in translation" when we read a translation of Biblical stories; sometimes, we forget that pictures and images are another translation/interpretation of the story. We should explore what is lost – or gained – in these artistic interpretations, since images make such an impression.

How powerful are images? Picture George Washington crossing the Delaware. Most likely, you now have a very famous picture in your head: a painting of Washington in a boat pointed to the horizon, soldiers trying to steer around the ice, light in the background. This is the depiction of the event by the German painter, Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze. I have been to the Delaware River and at Washington Crossing, New Jersey. I have seen the boats that the re-enactors use each year at Christmas

to recreate the event. They don't look anything like the picture. The boats are much larger and shaped differently. The crossing actually occurred at night. Leutze was born over thirty years after Washington's Crossing. He painted his depiction in Germany, 75 years after the Battle of Trenton. Leutze wanted to paint an image to convey liberty and freedom, so he created his very famous painting. We see the image, think of liberty and freedom, and think that this is exactly what it looked like the night that it happened.

Images are *very* powerful. We look at them, and don't usually stop to consider that they are a translation, an interpretation of something else. We understand this when we say "A picture is worth a thousand words", but then we don't always stop to consider what the thousand words might be. We understand this when we debate which is better, the book or the movie. I was once having a discussion with a friend about *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and we couldn't understand why our points didn't make sense to one another, until we realized that he was speaking of the movie and I was speaking of the book. To get an idea of how different the two are, imagine the movie starring Truman Capote instead of George Peppard. We look at paintings, movies, photographs, sculpture and other images without considering that this is the artist's interpretation of a story or an event.

Different times, contexts, experiences and artistic choices yield very different interpretation. All works of art depicting biblical imagery are interpretation of the biblical text. *Any* representation of the Bible is an interpretation. We owe it to ourselves and to our tradition to become familiar with the text and all the possible interpretations before settling on just one.

Join the Institute's Virtual Network!



We pack each CIRCA with all of the news and notes we want to share with our supporters... but there's always more to tell you about. Take this e-mail, sent by Dr. Stuart Rockoff to the ISJL board of directors and staff, on January 8, 2008:

"I wanted to send everyone a reminder about the upcoming PBS series on the history of Jews in the United States. The producers contacted the ISJL last year when they were making it, and we sent them several photographs to use. One image included is our picture of Confederate soldier Leon Fischel (this same image is in the beautiful companion book). If you look closely, you will see us in the credits at the end of the program. Please

forward this message to others who might be interested in the series."

There are often opportunities that we would like to share with you, and yet there is not always time or resources enabling us to send you information via U.S. mail. Please join our virtual community – share your email address with us so we can share more timely news with you! We will not inundate your inbox, but once a month will share updates on exciting lectures and cultural programming taking place throughout the region.

Please go to our website www.isjl.org and click on CIRCA/E-news to sign up. We look forward to hearing from you!

Remembering ISJL Board Member Manny Crystal



Emanuel “Manny” Crystal, a long-time supporter of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience and a former member of the Institute’s Board of Directors, passed away on December 24, 2007. He was 81 years old. Born in Passaic, New Jersey, Manny moved to Jackson, Mississippi when he was ten, and fell in love with the South. After graduating from the University of Iowa, he returned to Jackson with his new bride Elaine Gradinger, a native of Waterloo, Iowa. Joining his father at their then-small family business, Jackson Iron & Metal, Inc., Manny became a successful and respected business leader in Jackson. His business and interests expanded; he advised other entrepreneurs, served on the board of the Institute of Scrap Iron & Steel, and the board of Isle of Capri Casinos.

Manny’s business success was matched by his generosity. As a young adult, Manny chose to get involved in his community during a time of social turmoil. An active member of Jackson’s Beth Israel Congregation, Manny was serving as its president when its synagogue was bombed by the Ku Klux Klan in 1967. Manny’s leadership helped guide Jackson’s Jewish community through this frightening time. As a relatively young man, Manny emerged as a national Jewish leader, serving as president of the Mississippi B’nai B’rith in 1960 and on the board of the United Jewish Appeal. Manny was an ardent supporter of the state of Israel, traveling many times to the country and serving as a national board member of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He also served on the boards of the ISJL and the Mississippi Holocaust Commission. Manny believed strongly in his responsibility to serve the larger community. His warm and gracious personality enabled him to touch and influence people throughout society. May his memory be a blessing to us all.

Southern Communities Welcome Rabbi Howard Gorin

In early February, the ISJL was proud to coordinate a Southern circuit for Rabbi Howard Gorin, who visited communities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to speak about his work with Jews in Africa.

Rabbi Howard Gorin has served as rabbi of Tikvat Israel Congregation in Maryland since

1980. He has been actively involved with Jewish communities in sub-Saharan Africa for many years. He led a *Bet Din* to Uganda in 2002 and has visited Nigeria twice, in 2004 and 2006, providing both educational materials and spiritual leadership to the emerging community there. His work was featured as the cover story of the *United Synagogue Review* in the spring of 2006. Rabbi Gorin publishes a Torah newsletter, *Shalom Africa*, which is received by readers in seven African countries.

Rabbi Gorin was warmly welcomed in Baton Rouge, Jackson, Greenville, Tupelo and Birmingham. Currently on sabbatical, he wanted to visit the South and share his stories of understanding and valuing *klal Yisrael*, the entire Jewish community. If your community would be interested in hosting a visiting scholar, artist, author or rabbi, contact us at information@isjl.org.

Rabbi Gorin blesses a baby at Uyo. Photo courtesy of Rabbi Howard Gorin.



Spend the Summer at the ISJL!

The ISJL is now hiring summer interns for the History Department and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience.

History Internships: The ISJL History Department is dedicated to documenting, preserving, and interpreting the history of Jews living in the South. You can be a part of this exciting process of preserving the stories of past generations. Interns will reside in Jackson, Mississippi and receive a stipend. For more information, contact Dr. Stuart Rockoff at (601) 362-6357 or email rockoff@isjl.org. To apply, send a resume and cover letter to Dr. Rockoff at the ISJL.

Museum Internships: The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) seeks incoming college juniors or seniors for an exciting, educational, and diverse internship experience in Mississippi. MSJE interns will help manage the museum collection and catalog new acquisitions, develop and run museum-related educational programs for children, lead group tours, and assist with MSJE traveling exhibits. Interns will receive free room and board at the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, as well as a stipend. Interns will also work at the ISJL office in Jackson and the MSJE’s site in Natchez. For more information, contact Kate Lubarsky at (601) 362-6357 or email klubarsky@isjl.org.

A Bar Mitzvah in Natchez: A True Simcha



Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, MS has a current active membership of fewer than ten individuals. But on Saturday, December 22, the beautiful, historic sanctuary was filled to capacity as the Natchez community and many out-of-towners came to share in the joy of Kyle Weber's Bar Mitzvah.

Kyle, Los Angelino by birth (but a Southerner at heart) chose, with his parents' blessing, to have his Bar Mitzvah take place in Natchez. In Kyle's own words: "I've been lucky enough to travel to many places and see all kinds of great things, but my favorite place in the entire world is this tremendous city... the real magic of Natchez is the incredible people with whom I've developed fantastic relationships." Kyle has spent many a vacation in Natchez at the Monmouth Plantation which is owned by Kyle's maternal grandparents, Lani and Ron Riches.

The Jewish community of Natchez today is small and predominately elderly. In 1991, Temple B'nai Israel went into partnership with the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience as a way of preserving the temple into the future. Once the temple fully transitions from functioning house of worship to permanent museum, the building will continue to tell the story of Natchez's once prominent Jewish community. Preserving the past is ensured – but as the voices of the two hundred participants joined in worship and song this December, the past was present as the often-silent sanctuary was filled again with life and joy.

Photo by Greg Mintel

Make Future History: 2008 Annual Campaign



GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE
2008 ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

The first Jewish congregation in the South, and the third established in this country, was Mickve Israel, founded in Savannah, Georgia in 1735. Since then Jews have settled throughout the region, establishing communities and congregations and making the South their home. At the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of

Southern Jewish Life we are committed to building on this long and distinguished legacy of Jews in the South. *With your help, we can ensure that Southern Jews continue to make history in the future.*

We truly appreciate the hundreds of gifts that we received as part of our 2007 annual campaign. If you are one of the hundreds of our long-term supporters, please consider a slightly larger gift this year. If you have not yet become an ISJL supporter, we encourage you to consider us in your

philanthropic giving for 2008. Your support continues the growth in our outstanding work with our rabbinic outreach services, educational program, cultural development and preservation work throughout the South.

There are a couple of new options for ease in giving. If you are an American Express Card member, you may contribute in two ways: you can make a monetary donation, or you can donate Membership Rewards points. Please go to the ISJL website at www.isjl.org, click on membership, and then click on the Giving Express Program.

If you are like so many of us that prefer to give monthly, as opposed to annually, please join the **ISJL Chai Club**. Donors who make a gift of at least \$18/month for 12 months can have their gift automatically charged to their VISA, American Express or Mastercard. It's convenient and deeply appreciated. Please complete the information on the enclosed contribution envelope and your Chai Club gift can begin!

Thank you in advance for helping us as we continue to grow.

From the Archives: Building a Synagogue in Tupelo

In November, Temple B'nai Israel in Tupelo, Mississippi celebrated the 50th anniversary of its synagogue. ISJL Historian Dr. Stuart Rockoff was the featured speaker and he presented a history of the congregation and the Tupelo Jewish community. Below is an excerpt from his talk "Blue Suede Jews: The History of Jewish Life in Tupelo."

The Jewish community of Tupelo grew with the city itself. The Tennessee Valley Authority made Tupelo the first TVA city in 1934, bringing cheap electricity to the area. After World War II, northeast Mississippi emerged as a regional manufacturing center. In 1950, Lee County had 1,700 manufacturing jobs. By 2000, there were over 19,000. The population of Tupelo more than doubled between 1940 and 1960. In 1937, only 14 Jews lived in town. By 1948, an estimated 200 Jews lived in the area.

Many of these Jewish families owned downtown retail businesses that catered to Tupelo's booming population. Fook's Chevrolet Dealership; Weiner's Store; Peltz's Dry Goods Store; Re-Nal's Ladies Shop, which called itself "the style center of Tupelo"; and Kleban and Matz, "The home of low prices," were just some of the Jewish-owned businesses in the mid 20th century.

It was during this period that the Jews of Tupelo and its surrounding towns first began to meet together regularly for prayer. Interestingly, Jewish women led the way, forming an organization in 1936. In the fall of 1938, they created a Sunday school that originally met in city hall. The school was small, with eleven students and four teachers. Since this school was formed before an official congregation was founded, it seems clear that passing Judaism down to their children was the highest priority for these Jews.

Finally, in 1939, this group of Jews founded a congregation, B'nai Israel. In its early years, they met in city hall, and then in a room above the Fooks Chevrolet Building on South Spring Street. Although they didn't have a permanent building, they hired a student rabbi from Hebrew Union College. B'nai Israel acquired a Torah scroll from a congregation in Nashville, and built an ark for it.

In the 1950s, as the congregation grew, members began to talk seriously about building a permanent house of worship. Several members led the way. Manny Davis, who owned a sportswear manufacturing business in Okolona, made a large contribution to the building fund, and offered to match the contributions of other members. Morris Gorden, who owned a store in Baldwyn, used his business contacts with Jews in other cities to raise money for the synagogue. The building committee printed a glossy brochure that had an architect's rendering of the temple, and a personal appeal from congregation president Maurice Stein, which

asked their "friends and neighbors" for a contribution "so that our new House of Worship may be a vital factor in the civic, cultural, and spiritual life of this community." Sol Weiner, who served as secretary and treasurer of B'nai Israel for 40 years, collected these donations.

The original dedication booklet from 1957 listed all of the donors. While members of B'nai Israel top the list, it's remarkable how many non-Jews supported the building of the synagogue. Of 88 individual donors,

over 40% were non-Jews. In addition, twelve local companies, including nine banks, donated to the cause. In the dedication program, many area banks and manufacturing companies bought ads, including the Bryan Brothers Packing Company in West Point, which advertised its "Prairie Belt Bacon." (This might be the first time there was a bacon ad in a synagogue dedication booklet!)

I've never come across another example of such a significant amount of non-Jewish financial support for a synagogue.

This was, in every sense of the word, a community synagogue. This can also be seen in the dedication ceremony itself. The pastor of the First Methodist Church spoke, as did Tupelo Mayor James Ballard.

This remarkable generosity speaks to the important economic role Jews played in the area. Many of these banks likely had Jewish merchants as clients, thus buying an ad was good business. It also shows the close personal ties many Tupelo Jews had with their gentile neighbors. Many non-Jews likely donated to B'nai Israel because they were friends with its members. Finally, it shows that the area's civic leaders thought it was important for Tupelo to have

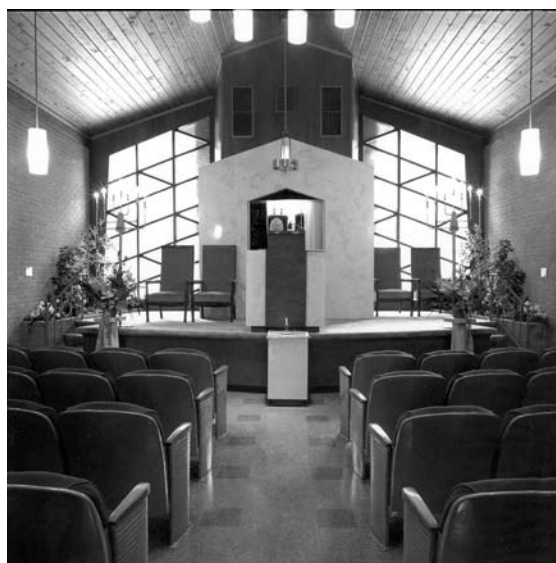


Tupelo Synagogue Dedication Ads

*Tupelo
B'nai Israel
Exterior*



*Tupelo
B'nai Israel
Interior*



*Photos by
Bill Aron*

a synagogue, a dedicated public building for the area's Jewish community, and that Jews were an important and valued part of the larger community.

B'nai Israel has never been defined by its adherence to an individual Jewish movement or ideology. At the building dedication ceremony, Rabbi Meyer Passow of Memphis' conservative congregation gave the featured address, while the Reform Rabbi Alexander Kline of Clarksdale gave the benediction. The congregation held bar mitzvahs, which had been abandoned in many Reform congregations across the country, as well as confirmation, a ceremony which originated with Reform Judaism. Over the years, B'nai Israel has been very successful in balancing the different religious practices of its members.

Perhaps this flexibility has been due to the fact that B'nai Israel has never had a full-time rabbi. Each decision over ritual and practice had to be decided by the members themselves. While the congregation would sometimes hire a student rabbi on the high holidays, services were usually

led by lay readers. In 1957, B'nai Israel held Shabbat services every Friday night, and a weekly Sunday school, all without rabbinic supervision. A number of members have led services over the years. In the 1950s and 60s, Murray Stein, who owned a dress shop on Main Street, acted as the lay leader. In the temple dedication booklet, he was identified as "lay rabbi." He was even active in the local clergy association. Since his death in 1968, several other members have filled this role, including Jack Cristil and Marc Perler, who still lead services today.

When Tupelo's synagogue was dedicated fifty years ago, the congregation had lots of young families and children. Since then, B'nai Israel has declined in size, and the children raised here have largely moved away. In this sense, the Tupelo story is reminiscent of so many other small Jewish congregations in the South. And yet, in those cases, the congregations have declined along with the town. But Tupelo has flourished over the last 50 years. The city's population has doubled since 1960, and Tupelo has been held up as a national model for economic growth and community development.

So why hasn't the Jewish community thrived as well? If this economic boom had occurred a hundred years ago, Tupelo would have emerged as one of the largest and most vibrant Jewish communities in the state. Back then, southern Jews were concentrated in retail trade, and thrived in areas where the economy was flourishing. But Tupelo's growth has occurred during a period in which the Jewish storeowner has largely disappeared. The sons and daughters of shopkeepers have gone to college, become professionals, and moved away to larger cities. Thus, the congregation has not benefited much from Tupelo's economic growth. Nevertheless, the future is not completely bleak for B'nai Israel. Tupelo is a strong community, with a large medical center and a growing economic base. I am optimistic that fifty years from now, people will be gathering to celebrate 100 years of this synagogue's service to the Tupelo Jewish community.

Dr. Stuart Rockoff speaks at the Tupelo Synagogue during its 50th Anniversary Celebration.





Southern Scenes

Fayetteville, Arkansas

ISJL partnering congregation Temple Shalom begins construction of Arkansas' newest synagogue.



Helena, Arkansas

Rabbi Batsheva Appel, ISJL's traveling rabbi, gives a blessing and takes the helm at the dedication of the tugboat MV David Solov...



San Antonio, Texas

The ISJL Education Fellows remember the Alamo!



Greenville, Mississippi

ISJL Education Fellow Megan Roberts gives a lesson at ISJL partner Hebrew Union Congregation.



Houma, Louisiana

ISJL Oral Historian Sarah Litvin conducts an interview with local resident Shirley S...

Tupelo, Mississippi

ISJL Historian Stuart Rockoff lectures on the history of Jews in Tupelo at the rededication of Temple B'nai Israel.

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Knoxville, Tennessee

A student at ISJL partner Temple-Beth El displays his prize-winning dreidel outfit.



Birmingham, Alabama

Author Joyce Antler addresses a crowd attending the ISJL Southern States Jewish Literary Series.



Augusta, Georgia

Sixth graders at ISJL partnering Augusta Jewish Community School read the week's Parsha from their Tanachs.



Panama City, Florida

Sunday Shul students from ISJL partnering congregation Temple B'nai Israel take a moment to smile in their Sukkah.

Jackson, Mississippi

Former governor William Winter speaks at the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Beth Israel Congregation.

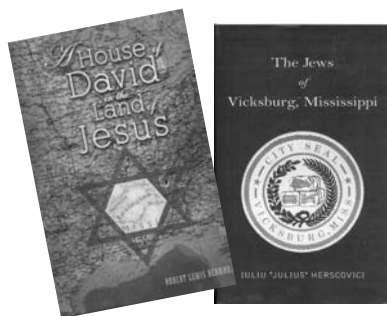
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Two New Books on the Southern Jewish Experience

In recent months, two new books have explored the history of Jews in Mississippi towns. In *A House of David in the Land of Jesus*, Robert Lewis Berman presents a detailed history of the Jewish community of Lexington, Mississippi. He traces each Jewish family's history, and tells the amazing story of Congregation Beth El, which has remained active for over 100 years despite never having a full-time rabbi. The small-town Jews and their stories have national impact and meaning: growing up

in the tiny congregation in Lexington, Mississippi, inspired brothers Gus and Cecil Hermann to give the largest ever individual donation to Hebrew Union College.

Julius Herscovici has recently published *The Jews of Vicksburg, Mississippi*, an exhaustive and detailed study of one of Mississippi's oldest Jewish communities. Focusing primarily on the story of Anshe Chesed, Herscovici traces the evolution of Vicksburg's Jewish congregation. Several years in the making, this work sheds important light on the history of Jewish religious life in the Deep South. Both of these books are available on ISJL Peddler's Cart.



Jewish Stores

The Museum is looking for artifacts from Jewish stores. We are looking for photographs, signs, documents, furniture, giveaways, bags, mannequins, point of sale items...anything you've got, big or small! Don't let them mold in your garage, and certainly don't throw away these important pieces

of southern Jewish heritage! Donate them to the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience where they will be preserved in our climate-controlled repository. Contact our museum director, Kate Lubarsky, at klubarsky@isjl.org to discuss museum accession procedure.

Oral History January Intern

The History Department was happy to welcome Elizabeth Galuardi as a Winter Term intern for the month of January. Liz, a History and Latin American Studies major at Oberlin College, is, in her own words, an "oral history / road-tripping / researching enthusiast." Liz did a fabulous job bringing the ISJL closer to the goal of having an accessible, searchable Oral History collection



Oral History Intern Liz Galuardi. Photo by Beth Kander.

documenting the Southern Jewish Experience. In Jackson, Liz helped to digitize, summarize, and catalogue Oral History interviews—making digital audio files from old audio cassettes and indexing unwieldy transcripts. She was also a great asset on the road where she helped conduct oral history interviews in Auburn, Opelika, and Alexander City, Alabama. Liz returned for her final semester at Oberlin on February 1.

Limmud Southeast + Atlanta

Coming to Oglethorpe University March 1-2, 2008

\$36 (\$18 for full time students) • Register online at www.limmudse.org

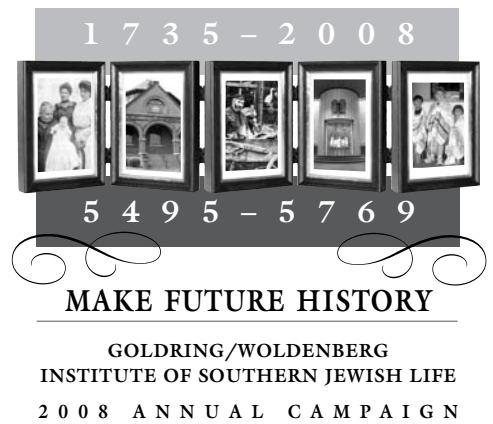
Jews from Atlanta and all over the southeast will come together at Oglethorpe University for Limmud Atlanta + Southeast. Limmud (pronounced lee-MOOD) has been called everything from "a cross between Elderhostel and a Phish Concert," and "a Jewish version of Woodstock," to "Jewish camp for grownups."

In Hebrew Limmud means "learning," and that's what it's about. Using local teachers, artists, thinkers and writers -- plus some special out-of-town guests -- Limmud is blazing a fresh new path to make Jewish learning informal, inspirational, and unforgettable. Run entirely by volunteers, Limmud has an experimental spirit that explores the vibrancy of Jewish life through song, text, film, discussion, and hands-on workshops. Limmud SE is a gathering - a way to connect with Jews of all ages and reconnect with your southeastern family and friends. Save the date - March 1st and 2nd - and plan to be there! Michal Hart Hillman is the Atlanta contact at 404-351-5816. Read more about Limmud worldwide at www.limmud.org

2007 ISJL Contributions

The ISJL annual campaign has been a successful effort for several years. In 2007 we adopted the theme *Make Future History*, and your gifts will do just that. You can help preserve and celebrate our history and build a stronger future in Jewish communities in the South and throughout the United States. In this and future issues of CIRCA you can see the impact our education, history, museum and rabbinic programs have on thousands of Jews in communities just like yours.

With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends its thanks to everyone who made a contribution between January 1 and December 31, 2007. Gifts received after this period will be recognized in the next issue of CIRCA. Again, *thank you*.



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