

2018 SJHS Conference Program
“Southern Jews, American Citizens”

FRIDAY, OCT. 26

Sessions to be held at Spring Hill College

9:00-10:30 AM: Bus Tour of Mobile’s Jewish Sites

Panel 1 (11:00 AM-12:30 PM): “Answering the Needs of the Community: Jewish Benevolence in the South”

Chair: Diane Vecchio, Furman University

Cynthia Francis Gensheimer, Independent Scholar

“Dear Cousin Nettie: A Jewish Family’s 19th-Century Work in Commerce and Benevolence”

Letters written to the Younker family of Keokuk, Iowa, at the end of the nineteenth century illuminate Jewish life in a small Midwestern town and also the extent to which a large kinship network operated in commerce and benevolence and practiced Judaism. Not only did branches of the family scattered throughout the South, Midwest and East correspond regularly, but frequent visits, shared commercial undertakings, and marriages within the family reinforced connections.

Marlene Trestman, Independent Scholar

“The Ties that Bind: The Vital Relationship Between New Orleans’s Jewish Orphans’ Home and Alabama’s Jewish Communities”

Using previously untapped primary sources, newspaper accounts, and oral histories, Trestman explores the ways in which the New Orleans’s Home was a philanthropic focus for many Alabama Jews, including congregations, clergy, and benevolent organizations. This mutually important relationship, which dates back to the 1860s, unified and elevated Alabama’s Jewish communities, while raising their neediest children as patriotic American Jews.

Rosalind F. Hinton, Oral Historian, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University

“L’dor, v’dor, From Generation to Generation: Jewish Women and Their Impact on New Orleans”

This paper deals with intergenerational mentorship among Jewish women in New Orleans and highlights their impact on the City in Civil and Women’s Rights. It also deals with the process of setting up a public history Tricentennial exhibition

that honors Jewish Women's Leadership. As less than one percent of the population, their impact is far greater than their numbers.

12:30-1:45 PM: Lunch and Roy Hoffman, Journalist and Novelist

Panel 2 (2:00-3:30 PM): "Southern Jews as Advocates and Activists"

Chair: Ellen Umansky, Fairfield University

Leah C. Burnham, Georgia State University

"'All Men are Responsible for One Another': Atlanta Jews and the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary During the Twentieth Century"

This paper explores the involvement of individuals from the Atlanta Jewish community with Jewish inmates at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary from 1900 to the 1980s, examining how volunteers attempted to provide for the spiritual needs of Jewish prisoners and connect the prisoners to the larger Jewish community. The paper also analyzes the Jewish prison ministry's demonstration of a sense of responsibility for all men.

Josh Parshall, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life

"Radical, Jewish, and American: Southern Arbeter Ring Members as Ambivalent Citizens"

Among the many East European Jewish immigrants who settled in the early-twentieth century South, a small number participated in the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle), a national Jewish fraternal organization that supported secular Yiddish culture and left-wing politics. This paper examines the complex and varied ways in which some southern Arbeter Ring members maintained a critical perspective on American economic and political systems, even as they negotiated the opportunities and obligations of American (and southern) citizenship.

Eric Morgenson, University at Albany, State University of New York

"Memories of Richmond: Murray Friedman in the South, 1954-1959"

This paper discusses how Murray Friedman's time in Richmond shaped his thinking moving forward. Throughout his career and his changing political views, he continually referenced his time in Richmond as one of his formative experiences. By using his analysis, we can see broader changes in the civil rights movements, and Jewish intellectual development.

3:45-4:15 PM: Presentation by Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue Board

5:45 PM: Shabbat Services at Springhill Avenue Temple

6:30 PM: Dinner at Springhill Avenue Temple followed by Keynote Address, Beeber Family Speaker Series of the Helen M. Stern Memorial Fund—Jeffrey Rosen, The George Washington University Law School, “Louis Brandeis as a Southern Jew”

SATURDAY, OCT. 27

Sessions to be held at University of South Alabama

Panel 3 (9:30-10:30 AM): “Balancing Local and Jewish Identities: Two Jewish Communities”

Chair: Michele Strong, University of South Alabama

Philip Spivey, University of Central Arkansas

“Concordia: Gender, Race, and Class Conflicts Outside and Within Arkansas's First Jewish Social Club”

In the early twentieth century, the American South was enveloped by a cascade of social and political changes that had a major impact on the lives of Jewish Arkansans. This paper will explore how the gender, race, and class conflicts in Arkansas were mirrored in different ways within the Concordia Association: Arkansas's first Jewish social club.

Kyle Stanton, University at Albany, State University of New York

“Houston, Not Jerusalem: Congregation Beth Israel’s Challenge to Reform Judaism and American Jewish Identity”

To register their displeasure with national Reform bodies, the Beth Israel Congregation of Houston prohibited Zionists and those who kept kosher from full membership in their congregation. In their attempt to reassert principles of classical Reform Judaism as they saw them, the congregation challenged notions of American Jewish identity as well as Reform bodies’ responses to international and national events.

Panel 4 (10:45 AM-12:15 PM): “A Chosen Calling: Three Mensches of Mobile”

Chair: Demetrius Semien, Spring Hill College

Susan W. Thomas, Archivist, Springhill Avenue Temple

“Captain Leon Schwarz: Citizen Soldier, Civic Leader, and Consummate Patriot in Turn-of-the-Century Mobile”

This paper will explore the civic, military, and religious contributions of Leon Schwarz, considered a consummate patriot in turn-of-the-century Mobile. Schwarz's career, which included serving as sheriff of Mobile County, mayor of the City, and Captain of his National Guard regiment in World War I, will be examined.

Dana Evan Kaplan, Rabbi, Springhill Avenue Temple

“Rabbi Alfred G. Moses of Mobile, Alabama and the Development of Jewish Science in the Early Twentieth Century”

Rabbi Alfred G. Moses led Congregation Sha'arai Shomayim in Mobile, Alabama from 1901 to 1940 and was Emeritus from 1940 to 1946, and yet relatively little is known about his career. This paper will address his thought and impact, especially on Mobile's Reform Jews, by considering his approach to Jewish Science, published in 1916 and in a second expanded edition in 1920, in which he appealed to American Jews who were attracted to Christian Science.

Steve Krause, Independent Scholar

“Mobile, Alabama – in the Land of the Almost Possible: Notes from a 1966 Interview with Rabbi P. Irving Bloom”

P. Irving Bloom served as the rabbi of Mobile's Springhill Avenue Temple from 1960 to 1973, being active in and founding many important organizations, including one in which he fought to keep the schools open during the worst of the school integration crises. This paper will address findings from a 1966 interview conducted by Allen Krause with Rabbi Bloom in which they discussed topics ranging from Bloom's involvement in the integration of Mobile's schools, the resistance he faced from members of the community, and the response of his own congregation to his activities.

Panel 5 (1:45-3:30 PM): “Jewish Soldiers and the American South, At Home and Abroad”

Chair: Hollace Weiner, Independent Scholar

Shari Rabin, College of Charleston, and Adam Dombey, College of Charleston

“Lies and Loyalties: The True Story of a Rabbi Conman and the American Civil War”

This paper recounts the fascinating tale of Simon Gerstman, a Polish-Jewish immigrant who served in the Florida Indian Wars of the 1850s, and then pretended to be clergy at Savannah's Reform synagogue to avoid serving in Confederate forces. Examining governmental records and the secular press from during and after the war, this presentation will show how one Jew utilized religion

to navigate the complicated terrain of wartime division and its aftermath. Gerstman's story shows a more complicated picture of Jewish loyalty and honesty during wartime.

Jessica Cooperman, Muhlenberg College
"Jacob Rader Marcus, WWI Soldier"

This paper will examine some of Jacob Rader Marcus' experiences and reflections on the lives of WWI American Jewish soldiers, focusing on Marcus' time at Camp Sheridan in Alabama, before he shipped off to France. It will consider how his encounters with other Jews, other Americans, and with southern perspectives on race shaped Marcus' views of American Jewish life, and perhaps his development as one of the preeminent historians of American Jewish experience.

David Weinfeld, Virginia Commonwealth University
"Saul Viener's Australian Adventure"

While Saul Viener is a well-known figure in the field of American Jewish history—having been an energetic amateur American Jewish historian, president of the American Jewish Historical Society, a board member of the Virginia Historical Society, and a key founder and past president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society—far less is known about his personal life, and especially his personal history. This paper looks at Viener's experience as a soldier stationed in Australia during the Second World War and compares his understanding of Judaism, based on his upbringing in the South, to that of the Australian Jewish community. It places the Southern Jewish experience in a global perspective.

4:00-5:00 PM: The Helen M. Stern Cultural Encounter—Judah Cohen, Indiana University Bloomington, and musical presentations by Laura Moore (piano) and Thomas Rowell (tenor), University of South Alabama

5:30-6:30 PM: Meet the Authors and Reception

Eric Goldstein (Emory University) and Deborah R. Weiner (Independent Scholar), *On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore* (Johns Hopkins University Press)

James L. Moses (Arkansas Tech University), *Just and Righteous Causes: Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Fight for Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1926-1963* (University of Arkansas Press)

Shari Rabin (College of Charleston), *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (NYU Press)

Paula Webb (University of South Alabama), *Mobile Under Siege: Surviving the Union Blockade* (The History Press)

SUNDAY, OCT. 28

Sessions to be held at conference hotel

8:45-9:45 AM: SJHS Membership Meeting

Panel 6 (10:00-11:30 AM): “Patriotism and Human Rights in World War II”

Chair: David Messenger, University of South Alabama

Edward S. Shapiro, Seton Hall University

“Rabbis Alexander Goode and Sidney Lefkowitz and World War II”

This paper will describe the contributions of Sidney Lefkowitz and Alexander Goode, two southern-born Reform rabbis, to the American war effort during World War II. It will show how both men reflected and shaped the American interpretation of the war as a war for democracy and human rights, and how this conformed to their opposition to southern racial patterns.

Joshua J. Furman, Rice University

“Hidden Stars: The Story of the Beth Jacob Banner”

Two months after Hurricane Harvey, a nine-foot-long banner honoring Jewish men and women who served in World War II was recovered from a garage in Southwest Houston. In my presentation, I will provide more information about how the banner was made, offer context about the history of other Jewish World War II service flags and monuments, and tell the stories of some of the men and women listed on it as we have been able to recover them.

Marilyn Grace Miller, Tulane University

“Jewish ~~Citizens~~ Internees in the American South, 1942-1946”

This paper presents current research on the US detention of "enemy alien" Jewish refugees from Latin America in southern US internment camps such as Camp Algiers, Louisiana, during WWII. While other scholars, including Arnold Krammer (*Undue Process: The Untold Story of America's German Alien Internees*, 1997), Max Paul Friedman (*Nazis and Good Neighbors*, 2003), and James Dickerson (*Inside America's Concentration Camps*, 2010) have provided important studies of this secret program, my research focuses specifically on

Camp Algiers and the fate of the large group of Jews held there between 1942-1946.