

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Winter 2008

NEWSLETTER

Tevet/Shevat

An Oral History of Congregation Etz Ahaim by Dr. Nathan Reiss

Congregation Etz Ahaim is Sephardic, originally formed in New Brunswick during the 1920s by Jewish immigrants from Salonika, which was formerly in Turkey and is now in Greece. Until the mid-1960s, the Congregation was composed almost entirely of those original immigrants and their descendants. Around that time, loss of the original members through death and relocation drastically diminished the size of the Congregation. By the early 80s, not much more than a decade after its new building in Highland Park was built, the synagogue had difficulty in maintaining a *minyan* for *Shabbat* services.

Around that time, a new group of Sephardic Jews began to filter in: Jews who immigrated to the U.S. from the Middle East and from North Africa. Although most of them were Sephardic, they had a diverse range of backgrounds, reflecting the societies from which they came.



Three generations of the family of Edward Naway

About a year and a half ago, Seth Rubenstein, a part-time employee of the Congregation, who has a strong interest and capability in videography, asked me if anyone had ever videotaped older members of the Congregation being interviewed about their oral histories. He mentioned that the Middlesex County Cultural and Historical Commission had small grants available for doing that type of work. Together we wrote a grant proposal, in which we proposed to interview about twenty people and indicated that the final product would be a set of DVDs or videotapes with the interviews on them. We were very pleased to have been chosen to receive the grant,

and also grateful to Congregation Etz Ahaim for providing the matching funds.

As soon as we began deciding exactly who we were going to interview, it became apparent that there weren't even close to twenty persons left in the Congregation who had knowledge of its early history. That caused us to broaden our definition of what we were looking for, and we began to look at the rest of the Congregation, and what stories they might have. We quickly realized that the Congregation had literally become a miniature United Nations, with Jews from a wide range of areas. So, in our synagogue Bulletin, we put out a call for people who wanted to be interviewed.

We wanted to interview everyone who asked to be interviewed, but we didn't expect to obtain much historical information from the younger members. However, we soon made a surprising discovery: **Everyone, no matter how young or old, regardless of where they came from, had an interesting story to tell!** The historical information we obtained was not just about the Congregation itself, but also about the interviewees' great variety of interesting life experiences. Seth and I prepared a list of questions which focused on their religious upbringing, customs and practices, and on religious discrimination or persecution that they may have encountered.

As the completed interviews began to accumulate, Seth and I were very pleased with their tone and substance. They were very interesting and informative. However, having them on video didn't add very much. Each video just consisted of a person sitting at a table speaking for about an hour. It's not something that a typical viewer would care to sit and watch. Around that time, my wife Rose volunteered to transcribe the interviews. I began to think that if we presented the interviews in written form, there would be several advantages:

- **We could give the interviewees written copies of what they said so that they could more easily review it for errors, deletions, etc.**

(continued on page 4)



President's Message

Within the past few months we were greatly saddened by the loss of two of our particularly valuable members, Moshe Moskowitz, a former President of our Society, and Judy Moroz, who had been our Archives Chair. We will certainly miss them both. Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find reflections on their contributions from persons who knew them well.

If you haven't visited our office lately, you should do so. Ever since we moved in, we have been reorganizing the space in our climate-controlled archives room, to take full advantage of the much higher ceiling in our new quarters. We have disassembled the shelf units, one by one, and reassembled them so that each unit is 50 percent taller than before. We've purchased more shelves to fill the recaptured floor area, creating space for our ever-expanding collection.

We have just begun a project of transferring our audiotape files onto DVDs. Hopefully the DVDs will provide better protection from degradation, and will make it much easier to transfer the files to whatever types of media may come into use in the future. These audiotapes, some of them about 30 years old, include oral histories of members of Central New Jersey's Jewish community, tapes of many of the lectures presented at our meetings, and various other recordings. We have also begun making manual transcriptions of the material on least some of these tapes.

We will continue to add to our collection of oral histories as the opportunity arises. If you know someone who would make a good interview subject, or if you would like to do some interviews, call Debbie at the JHSCJ office and let her know.

Nathan Reiss

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Morris Aaron Moskowitz

A few weeks ago, we lost one of our past presidents--Morris Moskowitz. He was a distinguished professor at Rutgers University for 28 years, and rose to chair the Hebraic Studies Department. Those of us in the Jewish Historical Society felt honored that he served as one of our presidents, from 1995 to 1996 .

Our audiences enjoyed Morris's lectures on Jewish life, not only of our experiences in the shtetl period, but in the early days when our people settled on the Lower East Side. Who can forget his talks on the Yiddish theater? Who can forget his translating numerous letters written in Hebrew or Yiddish, so they would be used in a meaningful way when researchers went into our archives? Who can forget his inimitable sense of humor? Who could not fail to recognize Morris walking down the street wearing his famous black beret?

Our sympathy goes out to Morris's wife Martha, his two daughters Chaya and Yosefa, and his two grandchildren. We shall miss you, Morris.

Ruth Marcus Patt

The 2008 American Jewish Experience Lecture Series will begin in April at locations at Monroe Township Jewish Center and Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick.
Please watch your community and local newspapers for dates and lecture topics.

The Jewish Historical Society of Central New Jersey continues to build its collection of original photographs, documents, and artifacts relating to Jewish life in Central New Jersey. We also accept letters, diaries, clothing, and original works of art and music with a local connection. The Jewish Historical Society assumes full responsibility for its long-term care and storage and commits itself to making this material accessible to the community. Please call Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894 if you have something that you think we might be interested in for our collection.

EDITORIAL STAFF

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JHSCJ OFFICERS

President Nathan M. Reiss
Vice President Harvey Hauptman
Secretary Marcia H. Spears
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RETURNING THIS SPRING!!

The American Jewish Experience 2008 Lecture Series

(Presented through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Rutgers University)

The Reformed Church
16-21 S. 2nd Avenue, Highland Park
Tuesdays, 1:00-2:30 p.m.

For information regarding class attendance and fees, please call Marvin Schaffer (732-932-7233)

March 4	Philip Cantor	April 8	Dr. Mildred Goodwin
<i>Subject: To be announced</i>		<i>The Jewish Experience in Reel Life, Part II</i>	
March 11	Dr. Nathan Reiss	April 15	Dr. Jeffrey Shandler
<i>The Sephardic Experience in America</i>		<i>Emil and Karl: A Yiddish Novel on the Holocaust for Young Children</i>	
March 18	Rabbi Herman Cohen	April 22	Dr. Frank Dauster
<i>Jews in Jail: A Chaplain's Experience</i>		<i>Literature of Jewish Writers from Central and South America</i>	
March 25	Cantor Anna Ott	April 29	Bill Levy
<i>Jewish American Music</i>		<i>Four Generations in Business on the Lower East Side</i>	
April 1	Dr. Yael Zerubavel	May 6	Marian Stern
<i>To be a Jewish Female and an Immigrant: Autobiography of Eva Hoffman</i>		<i>Jewish Philanthropy</i>	

a tribute to JUDY MOROZ by Rachel Weintraub

Judy Moroz was such a special person that whatever I write will not do justice to her. She was my mentor and my right hand during the entire six years that I worked at JHSCJ and was always a pleasure to work with. I was shocked to find out she was so ill and that she subsequently passed away, because to me she was as strong as an ox despite the fact that she was about 30 years my senior. She was never afraid to get her hands dirty and would do whatever needed to be done any time there was something to do. She did lots of heavy lifting when we packed and moved out of 228 Livingston Ave. to get ready for Anshe Emeth's construction.

I came to JHSCJ having never seen an archive before in my life. I found myself as the only JHSCJ employee, suddenly being required to act as an archivist without knowing the first thing about archiving. Well, it turned out to be no problem thanks to Judy. Judy audited the Rutgers University graduate-level archival course in order to learn everything she could about archiving. Whatever she learned by auditing this course in the evening, she came back and taught me using JHSCJ's archives as the examples during the day. As an auditor, one is not required to do the course work, since they aren't taking it for a grade. To Judy, that didn't matter. Instead of a final exam, the grade for the course was based on an archival project that was to be worked on throughout the semester and presented to the teacher and class. Judy did this archival project as if she was being graded on it. She picked a collection at JHSCJ that was unprocessed at the time and processed it correctly from start to finish. She even wrote the report on it that would have been required had she been taking the course for a grade. She presented this paper and project to the professor anyway, who said that her grade would have been an A.

Over the six years that I worked at JHSCJ, Judy and I worked hand in hand. We processed most of JHSCJ's unprocessed collections together to the best of our collective abilities. We continued to seek out further training any time it was available. Judy and I attended several library and archiving workshops around the state of New Jersey and always brought the skills we learned back to JHSCJ. We also always looked together to find any opportunity around Central New Jersey to enhance JHSCJ's library and archival collections. Wherever I went, I never went alone. Judy always accompanied me. Many times, we were also accompanied by Judy's husband, Saul, Albert and Helene Handaly, and/or Nathan Reiss. But it was always at least Judy and I. We went together to the now-defunct Perth Amboy YM-YWHA when they were ready to close, and we salvaged all of their materials. We went to the old Rutgers Hillel building and salvaged a good portion of their library collection. We went to now-defunct synagogues in Colonia and Plainfield and salvaged their materials as well. Thank you, Judy. I couldn't have done it without you. Your legacy will live on forever in JHSCJ's archives and in my heart.



New Acquisitions

From Marcia Spears: Materials pertaining to the Raritan Valley Chapter of Hadassah; South Jersey Region of Hadassah; "Kiruv" Newsletter from HPCTC from 2000-2006, plus other assorted material from HPCTC.

From the family of Bernice Kaden Bruskin: Ledger book of the minutes of the NB Jewish Social Service Committee meetings 1943-1966; back issues of the Jewish Journal to fill in gaps in our collection.

From an anonymous friend: the "Y Cook Book", compiled by the Women's Division of the YM & YWHA of Elizabeth, NJ, in 1949, containing not only recipes, but ads from Jewish-owned businesses of that year.

From Edith Neimark: Newsletters dated Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2007 from The Jewish Center (Princeton).

From Congregation Etz Ahaim, Highland Park: Congregational Minutes, 1933-1976, and miscellaneous documents through 1980's.

(An Oral History of Etz Ahaim, continued from page 1)

- **With the interviews in written form, the interviewees could more easily reword and expand on what they said.**
- **We could make editorial changes that would clarify what was said.**
- **With the interviews in written form, we could more easily add maps and photos to illustrate the interviews.**
- **A book is more easily browsed by readers or potential readers than is a set of DVDs or videotapes.**

Transcribing the interviews definitely seemed to be something worth trying.

We stored our recorded interviews as audio files on a computer, which Rose played back and transcribed into Microsoft Word. A one-hour interview took about 6 hours to transcribe. After each transcription was completed, we sent a printed copy of the interview to the person involved, and asked that they go over it and make changes. Some people added more facts, others removed portions that they decided they didn't want to include. No one made any major changes, and it was our feeling that by the time this process was completed the interviewees were comfortable with the product.

As soon as we decided to create a printed document from the interviews, I began asking the interviewees for photos pertaining to people and places that they had mentioned. Although some were reluctant to lend out precious family photographs, I reassured them that I would immediately scan them into my computer and return the originals, in person, to the interviewee. The photos never left my custody, and I kept them for as brief a time as possible.

In addition to the photos provided by the interviewees, we included a portrait photo of each person, and created a map

that showed at a glance where they had lived throughout their life.

Creating a book has become a much simpler project than it was even a few years ago. Inexpensive scanners can be used to bring illustrations into the book. Desktop publishing software simplifies the logistics, allowing even a small home computer to be used to produce a large book with many illustrations. A print shop will take the file that contains your book on a computer disk, and produce a printed copy which looks exactly like what you created on your home computer screen.

We eventually wound up with a 260-page book that has been published by Congregation Etz Ahaim. Additionally, the interviews are available as DVDs and as videotapes. Comments that we received about the book generally mentioned the strong human-interest nature of the material, as well as the presence of the photos. Many persons said that this was a project that needed to be done, and that it was long overdue.

We found this project to be extremely satisfying to everyone who was involved with it, and we strongly encourage other synagogues to consider a similar project.



The YMHA basketball team in 1934, composed mostly of members of Congregation Etz Ahaim

The Original City Game

Basketball has long been known as “The City Game.” Unlike baseball and football, which require grass, open space and equipment, boys and girls can play basketball with only a ball, a hoop, and a flat surface on which to run. Basketball is thus the ultimate schoolyard game. For decades, it has served as an entry point for lower-income urban youth to enter the American mainstream. This was as true for American Jewry from the 1920s through the 1950s.

Sidney “Sonny” Hertzberg, who grew up in New York City and played in the first game in the history of what is now the National Basketball Association, reminisced, “We used to fill a stocking hat with paper and pass it—there was no dribbling—and shoot it through the rungs of a fire escape ladder.” Nathan “Nat” Miltzok, Hertzberg’s teammate, recalled, “I never saw a dirt field. Everything was cement... We had two choices: either go to the schoolyard and play ball or hang around on the corner and get in trouble. So, we played basketball all our lives.”

Athletic scholarships in basketball served as a means of upward mobility for native-born sons of New York’s immigrant Jews. After college, experience on the court led to positions as teachers and coaches. For a talented handful, basketball became a professional career.

In the first game in National Basketball Association history, the New York Knickerbockers put four Jews on the court for the opening tip-off and carried six Jews on their roster. In that initial game, played on November 1, 1946, the Knicks won a thriller over the Toronto Huskies by the score of 68-66. Leo “Ace” Gottlieb led the Knicks in scoring with 14 points. Sidney “Sonny” Hertzberg captained the team. Oscar “Ossie” Schectman scored on the first shot of the game—thus becoming the first man in the history of the NBA to score a point. Ralph Kaplowitz was the fourth Jew in the Knick’s starting five, while Nat Miltzok and Hank Rosenstein played as reserves.

When the league was founded, teams tended to sign players who had roots in their communities. The Boston franchise, appealing to a city dominated by Irish immigrants and their descendants, named itself the Celtics. New York was home to America’s largest Jewish population. Even though Ned Irish, a Catholic, owned the team, the Knickerbockers recruited Jewish players from the New York area. Schectman was an All-American at Long Island University. Kaplowitz, a butcher’s son, captained the NYU team. Hertzberg, whose father worked in children’s clothing and Rosenstein, whose father drove a truck, went to the City College of New York. Miltzok attended Hofstra and Cornell. “Ace” Gottlieb played at De Witt Clinton High before playing semi-pro ball.

In the 1940s, the “city game” was quite different than the high-flying version played today. Players shot and passed the ball with two hands. “In those days, if you took a jump shot,” Miltzok recalled, “you would be sitting right next to the coach.” There was no such thing as the dunk, touching the rim was a technical foul, there was no 24-second shot clock and few players stood taller than 6’6”.

Jews filled key positions in the league’s administration. Maurice Podoloff, former president of the American Hockey League, served as the NBA’s first president. Among the league’s first Jewish coaches were Arnold “Red” Auerbach of the Washington Capitols and owner-coach Eddie Gottlieb of the Philadelphia Warriors. Both Auerbach and Gottlieb were elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame, as was Dolph Schayes of the Syracuse Nationals, the only Jewish player selected among the top 50 all-time NBA players.

Player salaries in 1946 were inadequate to support a family. Ralph Kaplowitz signed a deal for \$6,500 for the season, less than today’s average player makes for a single game. All the players had to work at other jobs during the off-season. For many of the players, a year or two of such insecurity encouraged them to find more stable careers. Hertzberg left to become a successful stockbroker, while Rosenstein became a technical sales consultant in the plastics industry. Ossie Schectman retired in 1947 to enter the garment industry.

Athletic scholarships in basketball served as a means of upward mobility for native-born sons of New York’s immigrant Jews.

Money aside, it wasn’t easy to be a Jewish player when playing outside New York. Kaplowitz recalled that when he played on the road, raucous non-Jewish fans would yell at the Knick players, “Abe, throw it to Abe.” Miltzok said, “Playing in Pittsburgh and we came out on the floor, I heard them singing, “East Side, West Side, here come the Jews from New York.” Concerned that the predominance of the Jews on the Knicks might hurt at the box office, the Knick’s management decided to change the team’s composition. They sold Kaplowitz’s contract to the Warriors midway through that first season and traded Rosenstein to Providence. Sonny Hertzberg played with Washington and Boston before retiring to become an optician. The Knicks never had another Jewish player, although Hall of Famer Red Holzman became their coach in the 1960s.

Today, the city game belongs to African-Americans. In the future, it will pass to Hispanics and other new immigrant groups. In 1946, professional basketball, at least in New York, was not just the city game. It was the Jewish game.

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Speaker's Bureau

A list of available speakers and topics is located on our web site www.jewishgen.org/jhscj. It can also be obtained by calling the JHSCJ office, 732-249-4894. We will gladly try to accommodate your needs. The fees for our speakers go directly to support JHSCJ.

Our speakers have continued to represent the JHSCJ at various group functions throughout Middlesex County during the fall of 2007. Mildred Goodwin gave her presentation on "The Jewish Experience in the Reel World" to B'nai Brith at the Ponds on August 27. The Golden Age Club at Lawrenceville enjoyed the same topic on September 24. Professor Goodwin continued her "lecture tour" in October in Princeton at The Jewish Center, where she spoke on "Through the Stage Door." Harvey Hauptman gave a lecture on Jews in sports for the Ponds Unit of B'nai Brith. JHSCJ President Nathan Reiss made a presentation to Jewish Women International on "Jewish Family Names," and spoke to the Clearbrook chapter of B'nai Brith on November 18 on "Am I My Brother's Cousin." If you belong to an organization that would enjoy one of our speakers, suggest that the meeting coordinator give us a call!

* * * * *

Membership News

Welcome to our New Life Members

Michael and Ruth Hass
Edna Sherber
Manny and Vivian Goldfarb

Welcome to our New Members

Beverly and Ira Susswein
Jerry Liboff
Lawrence Fachler

Thank You for Renewing Membership at the Patron Level

Norma Arbit
Beatrice Beck
Edith Berkow
Ruth Bickhardt
Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Blumberg
Irving Bussel
Muriel Glaser
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Helene Handaly
Seymour and Lola Kamp
Sandra Lanman
Benjamin and Charlotte Litwin
Dr. Norman Reitman
Lawrence Reimer
Eileen Robison

Ruth Rosenthal
Betty Saltiel
Helen Solomon
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Sulam
Ann Zar and Arthur Taub
Bert and Rita Wolf
Victoria Zagorin



Sue Geiger of Simi Valley, CA (left) was reunited this past fall with Lanie and Harlee Strauss when they visited California. See the Winter 2007 issue of this newsletter for Sue's story of how they first met at the Jewish Historical Society office in June, 2006.

Researchers Visit the JHSCJ Office

In the past few months, the Historical Society office has seen a number of researchers come in to utilize our archives. Marilyn Millet Goldberg and Norma Jacobson Messing spent several hours researching the Perth Amboy collection for general information to use in their upcoming book on the Jewish history of Perth Amboy. Jack Stillman, working on the same project, came to investigate our holdings for information on Jewish athletes from Perth Amboy. Bernice Bernstein and her cousin, Jerry Liboff of Dillingham, Alaska, come in to research their family history. And Carolyn Metz used the archives to find information for the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Raritan Valley chapter of Hadassah. All historians, authors and those doing research are invited to use our collections free of charge.

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