

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Spring 2007

NEWSLETTER

Iyar/Sivan

ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

Guest Speaker

Stephen Eisdorfer, Esq.

**OYEZ AND SHEMA:
A Glimpse of
Jewish Religious Life
through the
Old Courthouse Door**



Come hear about local court decisions over the past 200 years, and how they serve as evidence of the complex and changing relationship between Jews as a visible minority and American mainstream culture.

Stephen Eisdorfer graduated with honors from public schools in Haddonfield, New Jersey, Haverford College, and the Harvard Law School. He has practiced public interest law in New Jersey for 27 years, arguing numerous cases in the N.J. Supreme Court involving discrimination in housing and public education. For the past 13 years, he has been a partner in Hill Wallack law firm in Princeton.

Sunday, June 24, 2007
10:00 a.m.
Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple
222 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey

The lecture is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.



Archives Corner

Over the past several months, I have been sending out letters to congregations in the counties served by the JHSCJ. In these letters, I have explained the mission of our Society, and asked that the congregation make sure we are on their mailing list. We want to receive newsletters and information about the activities of every congregation in order to keep our archives up to date. I have also explained that our archives would be a safe and secure place for congregational documents, and that we safeguard these items for future generations to access at no charge to the congregation. Lastly, I suggested that a member of the JHSCJ would be happy to speak to congregational groups such as Men’s Clubs, Sisterhoods, senior groups, or the Board of Trustees, to explain what we do and how we can partner with a congregation to preserve its history.

As a result of these letters, we have been added to more mailing lists and are receiving more newsletters for our archives. But so far no congregation has asked us to come speak to them. It has been my experience that the JHSCJ is still largely unknown outside the immediate New Brunswick area, and I believe that a personal presentation is the best way to tell people what the JHSCJ is all about. If you belong to a synagogue or a Jewish cultural group, why not suggest that they invite us down for a presentation? We would come with examples from our archives and an interesting story, and the members would certainly find it enjoyable.

By speaking to various groups and synagogue communities, we can both expand our archival resources and increase our membership.

Debbie Cohn

(Lincoln’s Chiropodist, continued from Page 5)
Zacharie. The New York World wrote that Zacharie “enjoyed Mr. Lincoln’s confidence more than any other private individual. . . [and was] perhaps the most favored family visitor at the White House.” Most importantly, Zacharie employed this privilege to aid his co-religionists, much to their benefit.

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Notes From The Editor

All you people out there! Remember all the times you promised to give me photographs and stories of growing up in the various communities in Central Jersey — I think you forgot. It may not seem to be significant to you right now but we are a very important generation whose history must be preserved. As we all know, the Jewish population is dwindling in places like Carteret, Perth Amboy and New Brunswick and many other communities. You could just jot down ‘one liners’ of an interesting memory and we will compile them into an interesting article. Although I have only been in this area for 52 years, I remember stories that my husband told me about taking a boat to Coney Island from New Brunswick and the swimming pool on Livingston Ave. Since I did not live these moments, those of you who have, please tell us about things like that. Your photographs are priceless to us.

While I am on my soap box, I would like to encourage you all to tell your children and grandchildren about our era and to encourage them to seek out their past and record it. It is so important. Our organization can do much to help with research. Nat Reiss, our president and super genealogist, conducts workshops on designated evenings for people to begin, further or gain from other participants experiences while searching for background materials and missing relatives.

If any of our younger members do not know what “chiropodists” are (page 5), that was the term used before foot doctors became podiatrists.

I hope everyone will avail themselves to our lecture series and spring meeting speaker. Mr. Eisdorfer will explain his lecture title to those of us who are confused.

Looking forward to seeing you this summer.

Helene Handaly

Membership News

Welcome to New Member Stephen Friedlander!
Thank you to Adelaide and Terrill Brenner for becoming Life Members. Thank you to Dr. Norman Reitman and to Leonard and Adele Blumberg for renewing at the Patron Level.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Helene Handaly
Contributors Deborah Cohn
Ruth Marcus Patt
Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

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Treasurer Susan Marchand



Remembering “A Bintel Brief”

By Ruth Marcus Patt

Those of you who know me will probably be surprised that I devour the weekly newspaper *The Forward* (in English), and love it! There is so much of Jewish interest in it. Someone gave me a gift subscription about ten years ago and I have kept it up ever since. Believe it or not, I pull out of it a lot of area Jewish history.

The Forward is just now celebrating its 110th anniversary with a wonderful commemorative edition, which I shall leave in the JHSCJ office for anyone wishing to see it. When it was the original daily Yiddish newspaper headed by its well known editor, Abraham Cahan, he literally drew his readers into America helping them to understand what was going on, and how to make the necessary accommodations to adjust to life in a new world.

One of Cahan's most popular features was *A Bintel Brief*, which he started in 1906, and which in my opinion easily surpasses any of the advice columns in today's papers. It gave advice for any kind of problem that might be faced by his readers, whether it was advice to the lovelorn, how to locate relatives, or how to balance assimilation and yet maintain connections to Judaism.

The commemorative article quoted a number of letters from readers along with Cahan's advice. My husband's family was always so proud to point out a letter sent in 1932 by Sol Goldberg, the father of one of our founding members, Meyer Perlmut, on behalf of Meyer's brother, Lou.

Lou eventually did follow Cahan's advice, but first, after majoring in Chemistry at Rutgers, he worked for his father for a number of years as a tailor and a furrier. Then he returned to Rutgers and earned a PhD in Chemistry. He immediately found employment teaching at a university in California, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Meyer and Lou Perlmut always wondered why their father had a name that was different than several relatives, and they researched how this came about. They learned that when Sol came through Ellis Island, the immigration officials didn't understand his language, so they renamed him Sol Goldberg. Meyer and Lou legally changed their names back to the original Perlmut, reconnecting with many Perlmut cousins living all over the world.

It was interesting for me to note in a recent newspaper that the current Jewish Forward has just announced that Ruth Westheimer will soon edit a modern version of A Bintel Brief under her own name, Dr. Ruth. The next time you pick up a copy of *The Forward*, you might enjoy her column.

TEXT OF SOL GOLDBERG'S LETTER

Worthy Editor,

Though I am only a simple tailor, my mind is not occupied with only scissors and needle. I also like to read, to learn, and I have a great respect for educated people. I am a man of middle age with grown children, and I have been a reader of your newspaper for the past 20 years...

I am appealing to you for advice about one son who will soon finish high school. My son distinguished himself in chemistry all through high school and got the highest marks in that subject. He is absorbed in it with all his heart and soul. He studies day and night, carries on experiments and never gets tired.

This pleases me very much...but in spite of this joy I'm unhappy. Why? Because I read in the Jewish newspapers that in this profession there is no future for Jewish graduates. I read that a graduate chemist cannot get a position in a large firm if he is a Jew.

I didn't want to believe that in America, in such a free land, it was really so. But recently I met a graduate, a Jewish chemist, and he confirmed that what I read was true...

I think you might be better acquainted with the situation and you can advise me whether I should let my son continue his studies in this field. Maybe I should make my son a tailor.

I thank you in advance for printing my letter and for your answer.

Your Reader,

S.G.

ANSWER:

We maintain that your son should study the profession in which he is so strongly interested. In spite of all difficulties, he will, in time, find his way in life.

Do you have a family anecdote or story? Why not write it down and share it with our readers? Contact Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894, and she will help you become a “published author” in our Newsletter!

The American Jewish Experience Lecture Series

Our 10th Annual Lecture Series is currently running in two locations. The schedules for the remaining lectures are as follows:

Series #1 Monroe Township Jewish Center (Etz Chaim) 11 Cornell Drive Monroe Township	Series #2 Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple 222 Livingston Avenue New Brunswick
Lectures are held on the 2nd Monday of the month 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE	Lectures are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month 10:30 - 12:00 noon ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE
June 11 Bill Levy <i>The Lower East Side: Then and Now</i>	June 20 Ruth Adler <i>The Frozen Chosen: The Jews of Alaska</i>
July 9 Adelaide Zagoren <i>Jewish Women Authors</i>	July 18 Rabbi Daniel Fellman <i>President Harry Truman and his Partner, Eddie Jacobson</i>
August 13 Philip Cantor <i>Diplomatic Heroes of the Holocaust</i>	August 15 Ruth Marcus Patt <i>A Caribbean Jumbalaya</i>
September 10 Barbara Kuntz <i>The Jews of Hillsborough</i>	September 19 Dr. Mildred Goodwin <i>Jewish Experience in Reel Life</i>
October 8 Shirley Reich <i>An Intimate Look at Some Famous American Jews</i>	October 17 Philip Cantor <i>Diplomatic Heroes of the Holocaust</i>
November 12 Rabbi Herman Cohen <i>A Chaplain's Experience with Jews in Jail</i>	November 21 Philip Cantor <i>The Great Escape</i>

Archival Donations: Thanks to Kenneth Robinson for donating 10 years of back issues of Avoteynu.

Tributes

From	To	Occasion
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Norman and Robert Fein	In memory of Bernard Fein
Saul & Judy Moroz	Mrs. Selma Lippin	In memory of Jerry Lippin
Marcia Spears	Helene Handaly	Best wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Marcia Spears	Irma Rockoff	In memory of Daniel Rockoff
Marcia Spears	Dr. I.H. and Mr. I.B.Kizner	Mazel Tov on their 25th Anniversary
Marcia Spears	Honorable Jane Cantor and Family	In memory of Bernice Kaden Bruskin
Irma Rockoff	Philip Cantor and Family	In memory of Robert Cantor
Muriel & Stanley Haber	Helene Handaly	Best wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Helene Handaly	Ron and Christine Becker	In memory of Nathan Becker
Ruth Marcus Patt	Ron and Christine Becker	In memory of Nathan Becker
Helene Handaly	The Stockum Family	In memory of Rita Brown
Blanche Weinberg	The Stockum Family	In memory of Rita Brown
Louis & Sarah Friedman	The Funk Family	In memory of Rabbi Julius Funk
Louis & Sarah Friedman	Ina Nelson	In memory of Anne Lichtenstein
Susan Marchand	Michael Vilensky	In memory of his wife Rita
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Renee Harris and Family	In memor of Renee's brother Murray

Thanks to our generous donors: Dr. Joseph Cohn, for a new flat-screen computer monitor; Wal*Mart Stores, Inc., for \$750.00; The Jewish Connection of Central Jersey, \$18.00.

Lincoln's Chiropodist and Spy

In early 1863, a friend discussed with Abraham Lincoln the idea of restoring European Jewry to its ancient homeland in Palestine. Lincoln agreed that the vision of a Jewish state merited consideration. "I myself have regard for the Jews," he is reported to have said. "My chiropodist is a Jew, and he has so many times 'put me on my feet' that I would have no objection to giving his countrymen 'a leg up.'"

Lincoln was referring to Isachar Zacharie, his foot doctor and confidante. Zacharie's relationship with Lincoln was complex, but one thing is clear: Zacharie had Lincoln's confidence and, for the President, he represented American Jewry.

Born in England, Zacharie never attended college or medical school but was trained in chiropody and called himself a doctor. Zacharie immigrated to America in the mid-1840s and worked in several cities before settling in Washington, D.C. in 1862. Before the perfection of mass manufactured shoes, many individuals suffered corns and calluses caused by ill-fitting footwear. Zacharie's reputation for treating foot pain brought him Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of State William Henry Seward, and, eventually, President Lincoln as clients.

Zacharie and Lincoln talked while Zacharie worked on the President's feet and, as they shared their views, they became intimate friends. Lincoln sought Zacharie's opinion on matters of state, especially Jewish affairs. By the end of 1862, Lincoln asked Zacharie to travel to New Orleans, which had been captured by Union troops, as his personal eyes and ears. Zacharie was to mingle with the Southern white population and assess their sentiments toward General Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Department of the Gulf, which included New Orleans, and toward Union policies in general.

Zacharie recruited a cadre of peddlers to send back information on such vital subjects as Confederate troop movements. Zacharie did his own investigating as well, meeting with local people to gauge their feelings toward the Union (and especially toward Union soldiers, some of whom were African-Americans), and watching out for contraband shipments. He did all he could to help New Orleans' Jews withstand the shortages of food and medication during wartime. He also advised Lincoln to rescind General Ulysses S. Grant's infamous expulsion of Jews from the Department of the Tennessee.

Recognizing Zacharie's natural gift for diplomacy, in mid-1863 General Banks enlisted Zacharie to help him open lines of communication with Confederate leaders that might lead to a negotiated settlement of the war. After establishing contacts in Richmond, the Confederate capital, Zacharie reported

to Lincoln and Seward on the opportunity to initiate talks. Seward was enthusiastic but other Cabinet members were strongly opposed. Lincoln grabbed the initiative and, in the fall of 1863, personally issued Zacharie a pass to the Confederacy. In Richmond, Zacharie met with Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin (like Zacharie, a Jew) and other Confederate cabinet officers. Zacharie reported that the Confederate leaders agreed to have General Banks represent the Union in peace talks, but again the rest of the Union cabinet rejected the idea of negotiations with the Confederates.

There is no archival copy of Zacharie's report, but the New York Herald reported that Zacharie proposed that the Federal government pardon the Confederates and transport them to Mexico, where they would expel the French-supported government of Emperor Maximilian and proclaim Jefferson Davis as President of Mexico. This accomplished, the Southern states would then return to the Union, restoring peace. Whether this account is true cannot be established, and whether such a remarkable idea would be acceptable to Unionists and Confederates alike—much less the Mexicans—is speculative. In any event, nothing came of Zacharie's peace initiative.

Eventually, Zacharie gave up hope of being a peacemaker and returned to work as a chiropodist, opening a new office with a partner in Philadelphia. After briefly flirting with the idea of backing Banks for President in 1864, Zacharie campaigned for Lincoln, particularly urging his fellow Jews to re-elect the Great Emancipator. Continuing to use his influence with Lincoln to help his co-religionists, Zacharie convinced the President to pardon and release Goodman L. Mordecai, a South Carolina Confederate, from a Union prison. Zacharie then took Mordecai to the White House to personally thank the President.

A few months later, John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln and Zacharie lost his White House access. He continued to back General Banks' political career and, in 1872, with Banks' support, applied to Congress for a payment of \$45,000 for having treated the feet of 15,000 Union soldiers. The anti-Republican press skewered Zacharie as the President's conniving "toe-nail trimmer" who had wanted to enrich himself by creating "a corps of corn doctors, or foot soldiers to put the army in marching order." Zacharie insisted only that he be paid for the value of the services he performed. A congressional claims committee rejected Zacharie's petition. He returned to England where he resided until his death in 1897.

Whatever his political opponents may have thought of the chiropodist, Abraham Lincoln trusted (*cont'd on page 2*)

**"My chiropodist is a Jew, and...I would have no objection to giving his countrymen 'a leg up.'"
--Abraham Lincoln**

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In memory of: _____ Other: _____

Major featured articles and events from this newsletter are available on our web site: www.jewishgen.org/jhscj approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.

