

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Winter 2007

NEWSLETTER

Shevat/Adar

## A Family Reunion at the JHSCJ Offices by Susan Lederer Geiger

On Friday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Harlee Strauss and her brother, Richard, their daughters, their cousin Robbie Strauss Setrin, and I, Susan Lederer Geiger, of Simi Valley, California, met for lunch in New Brunswick, New Jersey. We all shared the same great-great-grandparents, Samuel and Marie Lederer, members of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick for many years before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But we were unaware of each other's existence and would never have met were it not for intrepid archivist Debbie Cohn and the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey.

I've always been fascinated by my family history, especially by Samuel Lederer and his wife Marie Abeles Lederer who emigrated to the United States before the Civil War from Bohemia. I had fascinating old photos and a page from the family Bible in Hebrew and Yiddish, which recorded the names and birth dates of Samuel and Marie's children. I knew that Samuel Lederer, true to his name, was a leather worker who made saddle bags for the Union army and then moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1865. According to the 1880 Federal Census, the Lederers lived at 109 Neilson Street. Samuel's occupation is listed as a "puller of wool". Through great good luck, on the Internet I found a cousin in Israel who sent photos of the Lederers' ancestral town and grave-stones in what is now the Czech Republic.

My great-grandfather was Julius Lederer, the fourth child of Samuel and Marie. He married Martha Posner, the daughter of Isaac Posner and his wife Bertha Vogel. The Posners emigrated from Prussia to New York City in 1848, about the time Samuel Lederer arrived from Bohemia. They moved to New Brunswick in 1872, where they opened a dry goods store. In 1880 they were living at 153 George Street. Julius and Martha eventually moved to New Haven, Connecticut in 1887, where Julius joined Morris Baumann, the husband of his younger sister Clara, as a partner in a rubber business.

Last summer, my husband, son, and I made plans to travel to New Jersey for a nephew's wedding in Flemington, which I knew wasn't far from New Brunswick. Somehow on the Web I found the JHSCJ, and I sent an e-mail inquiring if they had any information on my great-great-grandfather, Isaac Posner, who operated a dry goods store in New Brunswick in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I promptly received a response from Debbie Cohn saying, "I HAVE A PHOTO! It is in a book called



*Four generations of the Lederer family (L to R): Julius (b.1859); David (b.1886); Julius David (b.1913); Samuel (b.1824). Julius David Lederer is the author's father.*

*The Jewish Scene in New Jersey's Raritan Valley, which was written in 1978 by Ruth Marcus Patt, the founder of JHSCJ."*

Next I asked about Samuel Lederer, and she replied that I had stepped right into New Brunswick's early history. She quoted from Ruth Patt's book again, "The third family, headed by Samuel Lederer, which belonged to Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple since its earliest days...One of his eleven children, Max, married Henrietta Sondheimer in 1892, and both continued to be prominent in Anshe Emeth affairs...Their daughter Edith married Harry Strauss

*(Continued on Page 3)*

## President's Message

During the last few months we have had regular monthly meetings of our Genealogy Group on the first Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. Unfortunately, the response so far has not been strong. If you have not been receiving notification of these meetings, and you would like to, please let us know. Also, we would very much like to receive feedback from those of you who might be interested, with recommendations as to the best time for the meetings, ideas for subjects to be discussed, offers to help plan the meetings, etc. You can email your responses to the Society, or call us.

It was an unpleasant shock when last May, Bluefish Publications, the publisher of several of Central New Jersey's Jewish newspapers ceased operations and their newspapers ceased publication. We are, however, pleased to report that Bluefish Publications donated complete sets of these newspapers, including The Jewish State, The Speaker, and the Jewish Journal, to the Society's collection. Other publications have now begun to fill the void left by the demise of these papers, and we wish them well. The new publications are of course being collected in our archives.

As usual, the Society needs volunteers to do a variety of tasks. Please contact our office if you would like to help. Also, if other Jewish organizations to which you belong are looking for speakers, please direct them to our Web site, where our list of speakers and their subjects can be found.

Nathan Reiss

*Please watch your community and local newspapers for information about JHSCJ activities.*

As the result of a request by the librarian of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, a complete set of back issues of the JHSCJ Newsletter is now in the archives of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

## Notes From The Editor

I am really pleased with this issue of the Newsletter. The front page story emphasizes how useful the JHSCJ can be. Even if you are not in search of your ancestors, it is important that you allow us to save some of your families' mementos for someone else who is doing the research. Debbie Cohn and Nat Reiss are available to discuss your need or to determine what would be valuable in our archives.

On page 3 is the JHSCJ's contribution to the Rutgers University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, arranged by Ruth Marcus Patt. Many of these speakers are available to speak at meetings, luncheons, etc. As you all know we are not a fund-raising organization but we do spend money. Our speakers' fees are donated to the JHSCJ and are a great help with our budget.

Another way to help us would be to give or lend us your photographs. We hope to publish a photo history of the central Jersey Jewish experience, which would enable us to receive royalties. This is a completely pictorial book and we have not yet found enough interesting photographs to submit.

As you'll see on page 4, we have received some very valuable acquisitions. What would eventually happen to these items? From experience, I know they are in a bottom file box in a synagogue or a closet. Years from now people will be wondering what they are all about, and the horrible thought comes to mind that they may be thrown away. Please remember us when you are cleaning or culling files.

I apologize for the delay of this issue. The excuse: Procrastination!

Helene Handaly

### EDITORIAL STAFF

**Editor** Helene Handaly  
**Contributors** Deborah Cohn  
 Susan L. Geiger  
 Nathan Reiss  
**Graphic Artist** Deborah Cohn

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### JHSCJ OFFICERS

**President** Nathan M. Reiss  
**Vice President** Harvey Hauptman  
**Secretary** Marcia H. Spears  
**Treasurer** Susan Marchand

**The American Jewish Experience  
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 Schlaffer (732-932-7233)

- March 6** Dr. Leslie Fishbein  
*Anzia Yezievske: Sweatshop Cinderella and her  
Invented Life*
- March 13** Dr. Barbara Reed  
*Jewish Contributions in American Mass Media*
- March 20** Steven Eisdorfer, Esq.  
*A Visible Minority: Jewish Religious Practice in the  
American Courts*
- March 27** Dr. Ruth Mandel  
*Jewish Women on the National Political Scene*
- April 3, April 10** **NO CLASSES**
- April 17** Philip Cantor  
*The Great Escape*
- April 24** Rabbi Daniel Fellman  
*President Harry Truman and his Business Partner,  
Eddie Jacobson*
- May 1** Dr. Mildred Goodwin  
*The Jewish Experience in Reel Life*
- May 8** Hazel Rabinowitz  
*American Jewish Fashion Design*
- May 15** Deborah Cohn  
*Eavesdropping on History: The Year 1885 as Reported  
by the Jewish Press*
- May 22** Ruth Marcus Patt  
*A Caribbean Jumbalaya*

*A Family Reunion (continued from Page 1)*

and their children and grandchildren remained active in the Temple." I was elated to hear that I had living relatives I might be able to contact.

Debbie put me in touch with the remarkable Ruth Patt, who passed my e-mail on to her sister Helene Strauss, who forwarded them to her daughter, Harlee Strauss, who arranged the luncheon reunion. We met at the offices of the JHSCJ. My family and I were able to visit the beautiful old sanctuary of Anshe Emet and the new, beautifully integrated wings of the building. Debbie found references to Samuel Lederer in the Temple archives which she copied for us. I gave family photos to Debbie to put in the newly created Lederer family file in the archives.

I hope the saga will continue when Harlee brings her daughter, Elana, to California to scout colleges this year. If she does, I'll introduce her to many more

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**Sanford "Sandy" Siegel**

It is with deep regret that we have to inform our members of the death of our past president, Sandy Siegel. His devotion to the search of his ancestry was immeasurable.

In addition to his own research, he was always available to help others and conducted genealogy meetings, sharing his knowledge, including instructions on how to interview your subjects. An article in the January/February 1999 JHSCJ Newsletter, "Searching For Our Roots", was an excellent primer for beginners.

Sandy was devoted to charitable endeavors such as the Jewish Federation. He was the winner of "The Young Leadership Award" in 1971, participated in the UJA Mission to Israel in that same year, chaired the 25th Anniversary Celebration of Israel's Independence for the Jewish Federation of Raritan Valley, performed fund raising activities for the UJA, and was president of the Society of Israel Philatelists.

Sandy's death is a great loss to our organization, the community, and his family.

*Helene Handaly*



*A page from the Lederer family Bible. The name of Julius Lederer, Susan Geiger's great-grandfather, appears immediately above Max Lederer, great-grandfather of Harlee and Richard Strauss.*

Lederer cousins, including a five year old named Max Lederer who shares his name with her great-grandfather. Who knows, maybe she will see a family resemblance!

# ARCHIVES CORNER

## JHSCJ Archives Meet the Internet Age

The archival material preserved by the JHSCJ has been carefully organized over the years into topical collections, and subdivided into folders. Until now, researchers have had to look for information directly by coming to the office, determining which collection they need, and then searching through a large looseleaf notebook to find the specific box and folder the information is kept in. We are now in the process of reorganizing all of this information into a format which will allow effective computer searches not only from the JHSCJ office

computers, but from the Internet as well.

Currently, almost all the collections have been updated and consolidated. We hope to upload them soon to our Web site, from where researchers from all over the world will be able to search our archives via the Internet. By making our collections accessible from remote locations, they will be so much more valuable, and will become an active asset to the world of Jewish historical and genealogical research.

Debbie Cohn

### **New Acquisitions**

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From Mrs. Helen Solomon: Documents relating to Coast Guard service of her husband, Carl Solomon; a family Ketubah; Certificates pertaining to evening school attendance by Mrs. Bessie Solomon for the purposes of learning English language and civics, 1921-22; Book: "The City of New Brunswick", published 1909; "The Advocate" New Brunswick High School yearbook 1937

From Dr. Stan Levine: A collection of movies about the Jewish experience in the south, including "The Natchez Jewish Experience," "Alsace to America: Discovering a Southern Jewish Heritage", "Delta Jews: Jews in the Land of the Blues", "Shalom Y'all", "Pushcarts & Plantations: Jewish Life in Louisiana", and "At Home on the Ranch: Jewish Life in Texas."

From Mrs. Pearl Rakin: Newsletters, scrapbooks, calendars, certificates, ledgers, and clippings from Hadassah of Linden.

From Rachel Weintraub: Hadassah materials including the Raritan Valley Chapter Bulletins from January-June 2006, and a copy of Kee Tov, published by the Southern New Jersey Region; Congregation Etz Ahaim's Tree of Life, Dec. 2005-May 2006; Highland Park Conservative Temple and Center's Kiruv and Passover Guide from April, 1996, and the Scroll from April, 1992; JFVS Newsletter from Spring 2006; Brochures and reports from RPRY, Shalom Torah Academy, and Kushner Academy.

From Bernice Bruskin: Materials representing the creation of the Life Membership Fund of the Auxiliary of the Central NJ Jewish Home for the Aged, including architectural drawings, financial records, constitution, correspondence, committee notes, etc.; Personal documents from the Bruskin family

From Bluefish Publications: Complete collection of The Jewish State from August 1996-February 2006, The Speaker 1999-2005, The Jewish Journal 2001-2005.

From Jack Oziel: 1922 Handbook containing the Constitution and Bylaws of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America, in English and Ladino

From Congregation Adath Israel, Woodbridge: Minutes of Board of Trustees, financial records, and other documents relating to the history of the congregation.

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### **••••• The Jewish Historical Society Seeks Artifacts and Archival Material •••••**

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. In order to continue to document our community accurately, authentically, and powerfully, the Society seeks original material. We are looking for letters, diaries, original works of art and music with a local connection. Clothing, home movies and other artifacts would be welcome additions to our archives. 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.

# Beyond Seltzer: The Kashering of Coca-Cola

As a symbol of American culture, Coca-Cola has penetrated every nation in the world market, including Israel, and is served at the most strictly kosher events. While Coke has been on the market since 1886, only since 1935 has it been certified kosher, including kosher l'Pesach.

Rabbi Tobias Geffen, an Orthodox rabbi who served Atlanta's Congregation Shearith Israel from 1910 until his death in 1970 at the age of 99, is responsible for kashering Coke. Rabbi Geffen was an unlikely contributor to the worldwide success of the beverage. Born in Kovno, Lithuania in 1870, he emigrated to Canton, Ohio in 1903 and accepted the pulpit in Atlanta seven years later. During his long tenure at Shearith Israel, Geffen became the dean of Southern Jewish Orthodoxy.

As the millions of Eastern European Jews who migrated to the United States from Poland, Lithuania, Ruttia, Ukraine and elsewhere in Eastern Europe before World War I became more Americanized, they wanted increasingly to partake of "real" American life, including American foods and beverages. While seltzer water might have been the preference of many traditional Jewish immigrants, their rapidly assimilating children and grandchildren demonstrated their Americanization by drinking Coke.

*Rabbi Geffen was one of only a handful to ever learn Coke's secret ingredients.*

The kashering of Coca-Cola began when Rabbi Geffen received letters from several Orthodox rabbinic colleagues around the nation asking whether it was halachically permissible to consume Coca-Cola. Uncertain of the answer, Geffen contacted the company to ask for a list of Coke's ingredients.

The formula for Coca-Cola is a closely guarded trade secret -- perhaps one of the best-kept trade secrets in American history. Only a handful of individuals know the formula. Once Rabbi Geffen inquired, the Coca-Cola Company made a corporate decision to allow him access to the list of ingredients in Coke's secret formula provided he swore to keep them in utter secrecy. Geffen agreed to the terms. The company did not tell Geffen the exact proportions of each ingredient, but just gave him a list of contents by name.

When Geffen was given the list of ingredients, he discovered that one of them was glycerin made from non-kosher beef tallow. Even though a laboratory chemist told Geffen that the glycerin was present in only one part per thousand (one part in 60 is dilute enough to earn kosher certification), Geffen informed the Coca-Cola

company that, since this glycerin was a planned rather than accidentally added ingredient, its inclusion could not knowingly be tolerated by observant Jews. Coke had failed to meet Geffen's standards.

Back at the Company's laboratories, research scientists went to work finding a substitute, and discovered that Proctor and Gamble produced a glycerin from cottonseed and coconut oil which could serve as a satisfactory substitute. When they agreed to change to this new ingredient, Geffen gave his seal of approval for Coke to be marketed as kosher.

Still, a second problem vexed Geffen: the formula for Coke included traces of alcohol that were a by-product of grain kernels. Since anything derived from grains is chametz, or forbidden at Passover, Coca-Cola could not be certified kosher for use at Passover, even after the formula was changed to include vegetable based glycerin.

Coke's chemists experimented and found that, during the Passover season, they could substitute sweeteners produced from beet sugar and cane sugar for grain-based ones without compromising Coke's taste, and so they agreed to start manufacturing Coke with the new

sugars several weeks prior to Passover each year.

Rabbi Geffen was pleased to have performed this service for the American Jewish people and the Coca-Cola Company. In his papers, which are housed in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society, a teshuva (rabbinic response) written by Geffen includes the following:

*Because Coca-Cola has already been accepted by the general public in this country and Canada and because it has become an insurmountable problem to induce the great majority of Jews to refrain from partaking of this drink, I have tried earnestly to find a method of permitting its usage. With the help of G-d I have been able to uncover a pragmatic solution in which there would be no question nor any doubt concerning the ingredients of Coca-Cola.*

Thanks to Rabbi Geffen, even the most observant Jews can feel comfortable that "things go better with Coke."

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*By Michael Feldberg. Reprinted with permission from Chapters in American Jewish History published by the American Jewish Historical Society; Michael Feldberg, Ph.D., Executive Director and Series Editor.*

## TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Dr. Hal Yacowitz	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Harvey & Felice Hauptman	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Eva S. Oles	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Susan Marchand	Flora & Bruce Cowen	In Memory of David Cowen
Leonard & Adele Blumberg	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Arlene & Stanley Ferman	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Bertha & Alex Bell	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliot Bartner
Debbie Cohn	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Helene Handaly	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Helene Handaly	Adelaide Zagoren	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Marcia Spears	Cheryl Katzenell	In Honor of her Master's Degree
Ruth Rosenthal	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Edith & Ben Zamost and Yvette Zamost	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Susan Marchand	Adelaide Zagoren	In Honor of her election to Rutgers Hall of Distinguished Alumni
Debbie Cohn	Elizabeth Davis	In Honor of her graduation from Douglass College
Debbie Cohn	Samuel Aronoff	In Honor of his graduation from Rutgers University
Irma & Dan Rockoff	Bernice Bruskin	In Memory of her sister Ruthie
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Adelaide Zagoren	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Arlene & Stanley Ferman	Family of Rabbi Julius Funk	In Memory of Rabbi Funk
Marcia Spears	Family of Rabbi Julius Funk	In Memory of Rabbi Funk
Sally & Mel Shure	Ruth Patt	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Edith Neimark	Debbie Cohn	In Memory of Ernest Rottman
Sam & Irene Goldfarb	Thelma Bartner	In Memory of Elliott Bartner
Ann Zar & Arthur Taub, Sylvia Taub, and Steven Ames	Debbie Cohn	In Memory of Ernest Rottman
Judy & Saul Moroz	Debbie Cohn	In Memory of Ernest Rottman
Judy & Saul Moroz	Arlene & David Kaplan	In Memory of Sally Gross
Helene Handaly	Ina Nelson	In Memory of Ann Lichtenstein
Betty & Sam Saltiel	Doris Kahn Gunsher	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Irma & Daniel Rockoff	Elaine Isaacman	In Memory of her sister
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Yvette Zamost	In Honor of her granddaughter's marriage
Helene Handaly	Marcia Spears	Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery
Amy Handaly	Joan Zinderman	In Memory of her husband Bernie
Marcia Spears	Debbie Cohn and Ann Rottman	In Memory of Ernest Rottman
Marcia Spears	Ina Nelson	In Memory of her mother
Jerry & Doris Kahn Gunsher	Betty & Sam Saltiel	Mazel tov on the birth of their grand- daughter <i>and</i> wishing Sam a speedy recovery
Helene Handaly	Bernice Bernstein	Mazel tov on the birth of her grandson
Helene Handaly	Bertha Bell	In Memory of Alex Bell
Jerry Katcher	Jerry Katcher	In Memory of Marty and Gertie Katcher

## DONATIONS

Thank you for your generosity: Gail Kroop, Helene Handaly, Marcia Spears, Arthur Taub, Susan J. Geiger, Dr. Robert G. Berkowitz, Sara Maskin, Sally and Melvin Shure, Paul and Ruth Finkelstein.

**The JHSCJ is honored to have received a bequest of \$1,000 from the estate of Elliot Bartner. We are truly grateful for his generosity.**

Special Thanks: to Dr. Joe Cohn for his help in updating the JHSCJ website, and for his donation of a fax machine, and to Steve Cohen, for obtaining new office software at special rates for tax-exempt organizations.



## Speaker's Bureau

*A list of available speakers and topics is located on our web site [www.jewishgen.org/jhscj](http://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 the past summer and fall. Mildred Goodwin gave her talk on "Six Brilliant Points on the Star of David" at Buckingham Place at South Brunswick in April, and also spoke to the Alisa Chapter of Hadassah at their October meeting. Harvey Hauptman's talk on "Jews in Sports" continues to be popular, as he visited the Men of Brandeis in May, and Temple Shalom in Bridgewater and the JCC of Edison in November. B'nai Brith invited Ed Prince, who spoke to the Clearbrook Chapter, and Phil Cantor spoke to the Ponds Chapter. Nat Reiss entertained the Shalom Club at Renaissance at Monroe with "Am I My Brother's Cousin?", and Debbie Cohn spoke to the Men of Brandeis at Greenbriar at Whittingham. 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

Gail and Howard Weber  
Diane and Barnett Hoffman

### Welcome to our New Members

Rita Brown  
Francine S. Derman  
Edna May and Harold Hirshman  
Jerry Katcher  
Ann Rottman  
Roslyn and Stephen Shaw  
Edna G. Sherber  
Lillian Sokoloff

Thank You to our volunteers: Samuel Aronoff,  
Rita Brown, Sandy Feldheim, Faina Ginsburg,  
Esther Tucker, Roberta Wolf

### Thank You for Renewing Membership at the Patron Level

Norma Levitt  
Manny and Vivian Goldfarb  
Muriel Glaser  
Rita and Bert Wolf  
Benjamin and Charlotte Litwin  
Muriel Greenhouse  
Ruth Rosenthal  
Saul and Judy Moroz  
Irving Bussel  
Seymour and Lola Kamp  
Sandra Lanman  
Helene Handaly  
Sam and Betty Saltiel  
Lawrence Riemer

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!

Monday, April 16, 2007  
Monroe Township Jewish Center  
Monroe Township  
10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Dave Green

Wednesday, April 18, 2007  
Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple  
New Brunswick  
10:00 a.m.

### America's Greatest Musician: Leonard Bernstein

*The first lecture of our spring series will not be on our regular day, due to the Passover holiday. Thereafter, lectures will be given on the first Monday of each month in Monroe Township, and the third Wednesday of each month in New Brunswick. Please watch your community and local newspapers for information about JHSCJ activities.*

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222 Livingston Avenue  
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**For your convenience, this form is for your tributes.**

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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](http://www.jewishgen.org/jhscj) approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.*



