

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Fall 2008

NEWSLETTER

Cheshvan/Kislev

A special lecture

In commemoration of the bicentennial anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth

“He Was One of Us --

American Jewry's Relationship with Abraham Lincoln”

**Presented by
Dr. Gary P. Zola**

**Thursday, December 4, 2008
7:30 P.M.**

**Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple
222 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey**

No Charge for Admission



Gary Phillip Zola is a historian of American Jewry and serves as the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Associate Professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. The American Jewish Archives is the world's largest free-standing research center dedicated solely to the study of American Jewish history. In his academic capacity, Professor Zola edits The Marcus Center's award-winning biannual publication, The American Jewish Archives Journal—one of only two academic periodicals focusing on the total historical experience of American Jewry. In 2006, Dr. Zola became the first American rabbi to receive appointment to the Advisory Council of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Dr. Zola was the organizer and chair of the congressionally recognized Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, a historic collaboration of the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, the American Jewish Historical Society and The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.



President's Message

I would like to congratulate Ruth Patt on completion of the 11th year of the American Jewish Experience lecture series. Ruth originally conceived the series, and each year has devotedly enlisted speakers to participate. She always seems to find speakers whose topics are timely and that the audience finds interesting.

We would like to welcome our new intern, David Borowik. David, who is in his senior year at Rutgers University, is working on improving our Society's Web site, with the goal of providing more information about our holdings. Eventually we hope to have our entire catalog online, which will make it possible for researchers everywhere to be aware of items in our collection.

On Thursday evening, December 4, our Society will be pleased to host Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, and Associate Professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Dr. Zola will share his extensive knowledge of American Jewry with us in his lecture *"He Was One of Us—American Jewry's Relationship with Abraham Lincoln."* Admission to the lecture is free and refreshments will be served. Be sure not to miss this important event, and feel free to invite your friends! For more details, please see the announcement on the front page of this Newsletter. *Nathan Reiss*

Lecture Series Wrap-Up

We will soon be concluding another successful season of our two major lecture series in Monroe Township and New Brunswick. We were fortunate to have many of our best lecturers return this year, as well as adding many fascinating new lecturers. These talks have made me very proud. Wherever possible, the text of each lecture has been included in our permanent collection, and transmitted to the ten national historical libraries for their collections. This allows us to put these research papers in the hands of many historians. Kudos to all who have helped to plan these series. Already we have begun to officially schedule our 12th series for 2009, and we have a number of offers under consideration.

One more thought on the matter. Our Speakers Bureau has been very busy supplying speakers to other organizations. The honorariums are all given to the JHSCJ, bringing in valuable support and publicity to our work. We particularly salute Mildred Goodwin, Nat Reiss, Harvey Hauptman, Phil Cantor, and Hazel Rabinowitz for having given the most lectures. We are indebted to each of them.

Ruth Marcus Patt

Are You A "Snowbird"??

Please make sure to give your winter address to Debbie in the JHSCJ office so you do not miss our winter newsletter!

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

Contributors Deborah Cohn
Ruth Marcus Patt
Nathan Reiss

Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

CONTENTS

Archives CornerPage 3
A Successful Collaboration.....Page 3
Donations/Tributes.....Page 4
Editorial Page.....Page 2
The Jew Who Fought.....Page 5
JHSCJ Officers.....Page 2
Lecture Series Wrap-Up.....Page 2
Membership News.....Page 4
President's Message..... Page 2
Speakers Bureau.....Page 3

JHSCJ OFFICERS

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

A Successful Collaboration

A successful joint effort between the JHSCJ and the American Hungarian Foundation took place for a week in October. We were invited by the Hungarian Foundation to co-sponsor an exhibit of photographs which document the efforts of the Swiss Embassy in Budapest, and in particular the Swiss Vice-Consul Carl Lutz, in saving the lives of thousands of Jews by hiding them in safe houses throughout the city. The exhibit focused primarily on the Glass House, which accommodated close to a thousand people at a time. The exhibit opened with a lecture by Dr. Randolph L. Braham, who was presented with the Abraham Lincoln Award by the American Hungarian Foundation.

In order to give a historical context to the photo-

(photo)

Adelaide Zagoren and Ruth Patt with Dr. Braham and Dvorah Hilsenrath, wife of local rabbi Yaacov Hilsenrath. Mrs. Hilsenrath, who lived in Budapest with her family, was taken with them to Auschwitz and was the family's only survivor.

Our gratitude goes out to our lecturers, to the JHSCJ volunteers who baked or otherwise contributed to the reception which accompanied Dr. Braham's lecture, and to those who served as hosts during the rest of the week.

(photo)

graphs, the JHSCJ arranged two additional lectures on the Holocaust as it pertained to Hungary. The speakers included Philip Cantor, who spoke about the Righteous Gentiles who put their own lives in jeopardy in order to save individual Jews,

(photo)

Speakers Bureau

Our Speakers Bureau continues to supply interesting speakers to Jewish organizations throughout the area. In September, Philip Cantor stood in for Mildred Goodwin and addressed the Brandeis Women on "Jews in Reel Life". Meanwhile, Nat Reiss spoke to the JCC of Middlesex County in Edison about Jewish family names. He also gave a general talk on genealogy to more than 150 members of the Westlake Yiddish Cultural Club. If your organization might enjoy one of our wonderful speakers, please call the JHSCJ office.

Archives Corner

Our thanks to these contributors to our permanent collection:

From Belle Deblinger: *Jewish Brigade Group* pamphlet, published by The Jewish Agency for Palestine in London, c.1945.

From Bosch Greenberg: Perth Amboy photographs and a t-shirt from Perth Amboy's "Bagels & Lox Club"

From Elaine Fromkin: Hadassah materials covering the past 90 years of the Middlesex County chapter

TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Adelaide & Terry Brenner	Mr. & Mrs. Bud Spitz	Mazel Tov on 60th Anniversary
Adelaide & Terry Brenner	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Adelaide & Terry Brenner	Bert Robinson	In memory of his wife, Phoebe
Adelaide & Terry Brenner	Robert Rubinstein	Wishes for a Refuah Shelaymah
Irma Rockoff	Philip Cantor	In memory of Lillian Cantor
Debbie & Joe Cohn	Philip Cantor	In memory of Lillian Cantor
Bertha Bell	Lori Kaye and Amy Handaly	In memory of Helene Handaly
Beatrice Beck	Family of Sol Schwartzman	In memory of Sol Schwartzman
Beatrice Beck	Rhoda Wagman	In memory of Jerry Wagman
Louis & Sarah Friedman	Lori Kaye and Amy Handaly	In memory of Helene Handaly
Betty Saltiel	Beatrice Beck	In memory of William Beck
Elinor French	Doris Kahn Gunsher	In honor of her birthday
Marcia Hopp Spears	Dr. & Mrs. J. Fertig	In memory of Ethel Fertig
Marcia Hopp Spears	Ruth Marcus Patt	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Marcia Hopp Spears	Adelaide Zagoren	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Debbie & Joe Cohn	Ruth Marcus Patt	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Adelaide & Terry Brenner	Doris Kahn Gunsher	In honor of her birthday
Betty Saltiel	Doris Kahn Gunsher	In honor of her birthday
Peninah & Albert Berdugo	Doris Kahn Gunsher	In honor of her birthday
Irma Rockoff	The Hamelsky Family	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Susan Marchand	Ruth Patt and Adelaide Zagoren	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Susan Marchand	Dayahn & Harvey Klee	Mazel Tov on 50th Anniversary
Ruth Rosenthal	Ruth Patt & Adelaide Zagoren	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky
Bernice & Gene Bernstein	Ruth Marcus Patt	In memory of Dorothy Hamelsky

MEMBERSHIP

Welcome to our New Member

Patricia R. Hale

Thank You for Renewing at the
Life Membership Level

Mark & Frankie Busch
Bernice London

Thank You for Renewing at the Patron Level

Beatrice Beck

Edith F. Berkow

Ruth Bickhardt

Irving Bussell

Muriel Glaser

Mr. & Mrs. William Gorelick

Muriel Greenhouse

Lola Kamp

Sandra Lanman

Benjamin and Charlotte Litwin

Saul Moroz

Dr. Norman Reitman

Larry Riemer

Eileen Robison

Ruth Rosenthal

Betty Saltiel

Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Shure

Mr. & Mrs. Bert Wolf

The Jew Who Fought Beside John Brown

John Brown (1800-1859), the radical abolitionist, remains one of the most controversial figures in American history. Some see him as a principled freedom fighter, others as an outlaw. Brown led Free State Forces in Bloody Kansas, which many historians see as a rehearsal for the Civil War, and reached the height of his notoriety in a raid on the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in 1859.

Not well known is that three immigrant Jews were among Brown's small band of anti-slavery fighters in Kansas: Theodore Weiner, from Poland; Jacob Benjamin, from Bohemia; and August Bondi (1833-1907), from Vienna. Of the three, August Bondi left the most significant mark on history.

In contrast to Brown, whose ancestors arrived in America on the Mayflower, Bondi's family emigrated to St. Louis in 1848 in the wake of an unsuccessful democratic revolution in Austria. Bondi had been a member of the student revolutionary movement in Vienna, and his idealism carried over to his adopted country. In 1855, he emigrated to Kansas to help establish the Free State movement there.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 decreed that in 1855 the settlers in the Kansas Territory would decide by vote whether Kansas would be a slave or free state. Pro-slavery "Border Ruffians" and anti-slavery Free Staters poured into Kansas Territory, hoping to capture the election.

Anti-slavery forces appeared to hold the upper hand, but on election day some 5,000 heavily armed pro-slavery Missourians swarmed into the territory, overwhelmed the polling places, captured the ballot boxes and elected a pro-slavery legislature. Once in control of the state government, the pro-slavery forces launched violent attacks against anti-slavery settlers.

John Brown moved to Kansas in 1855, and his anger rose at the mistreatment of the anti-slavery majority. In May 1856, Brown led a raid on a company of Border Ruffians at Pottawatomie Creek and massacred more than a dozen of its leaders. The next day, Brown and his men captured 48 pro-slavery fighters at the Battle of Black Jack, a few miles from Palmyra.

Bondi, Benjamin and Weiner all fought with Brown at Black Jack. In Bondi's account of the battle, which can be found in his papers at the American Jewish Historical Society, he recounts marching up a hill beside Brown, ahead of the other men:

We walked with bent backs, nearly crawled, that the tall dead grass of the year before might somewhat hide

us from the Border Ruffian marksmen, yet the bullets kept whistling...Wiener puffed like a steamboat, hurrying behind me. I called out to him, 'Nu, was meinen Sie jetzt' (Now, what do you think of this?). His answer, 'Sofodom muves' (a Hebrew phrase meaning, 'the end of man is death,' or in modern phraseology, 'I guess we're up against it').

Bondi later wrote of Brown's leadership:

We were united as a band of brothers by the love and affection toward the man who, with tender words and wise counsel...prepared a handful of young men for the work of laying the foundation of a free Commonwealth. ... He expressed himself to us that we should never allow ourselves to be tempted by any consideration, to acknowledge laws and institutions to exist as of right, if our conscience and reason condemn them.

John Brown left Kansas to take his quixotic last stand at Harper's Ferry. Captured, Brown was tried and hanged for treason. Benjamin only lived until 1866, and Weiner died in obscurity in

1906. But August Bondi remained true to his convictions and continued to support the anti-slavery cause in Kansas. When the Civil War broke out, he was among the first to enlist, serving as a first sergeant in the Kansas Cavalry. After the war, Bondi settled in Salina, Kansas, where he served as land clerk, postmaster, member of the school board, director of the state board of charities, a local court judge and a trustee of the Kansas Historical Society. He was known for his political integrity and idealism.

Bondi, who died in 1907, described himself as a consistent Jew throughout his life, although Salina was too much a frontier community to support a synagogue. When his daughters married, the family traveled to Leavenworth, Kansas, so that a rabbi could officiate. Although his funeral was held at the Salina Masonic Hall, a rabbi from Kansas City officiated at the service.

August Bondi's life traced a remarkable path, from guerilla fighter against slavery to distinguished elected official and pillar of his community. Even in an age and place that could be inhospitable to Jews, Bondi always identified publicly and proudly with his Judaism.

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. To learn more about your American Jewish heritage, become a member of the American Jewish Historical Society.
