

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Spring 2008

NEWSLETTER

Adar II/Nissan

REMEMBERING HELENE HANDALY

Helene, for many years, was one of the guiding forces of our Society. She was a Board Member, serving for a long time as our Publicity Director and as Editor of our newsletter. In fact, she was the person who first convinced me to become involved.

During most of her years with the Jewish Historical Society, she carried on her activities together with her husband, Al. After Al passed away a few years ago, she continued doing them on her own.

Helene had strong convictions as to when and how things should be done, and she never hesitated to provide constructive input on every subject with which the Society was involved. In seeing her in action as the editor of our newsletter, I sometimes wondered what it would have been like if she had been editor of the New York Times. If a reporter for the Times had turned in a story that was incomplete, Helene might well have jetted off to London or Moscow herself to straighten it out.

I remember when Al was seriously ill and in the hospital, she was a constant and vigorous advocate for him, making sure that no aspect of his treatment and medication was overlooked. Even during her own recent illness, she never handed over responsibility for her treatment to her doctors or to anyone else.

For some years, as a member of Congregation Etz Ahaim, I was the person in charge of informing our members when someone died. So I've had a lot of experience in seeing



people's reactions when they receive this type of news. People were especially shocked when they heard about Helene, even though they knew that she was not young, and they knew that she had been ill. I think the reason for their shock was that they were aware of the vigor and the degree of involvement with which Helene had lived, and was still living her life. She still had a lot left to offer, and she was not yet prepared to stop.

The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey extends its deepest condolences to Helene's family.

Nathan Reiss



Focused, dedicated, and sincere are some words that come to

mind when I think of Helene. She was also generous, sweet, kind, and thoughtful, so she shall be missed by many. Helene Handaly was a good friend of mine. She listed her "Jewels" in my B'nai B'rith Journal in 1963 as Amy Denise Handaly and Lori Miriam Handaly. Helene enjoyed the fact that I had kept that little pamphlet all these years. We shared many good times together as well as unpleasant times, but details are not important now.

Helene's dedication to the printing of this Newsletter was truly out of the ordinary! She started collecting material and information as soon as she dropped the printed ones off at the Post Office. This was, I think, truly a labor of love. The eulogies that our President, Nat Reiss, and Rabbi Bassous gave at her funeral were descriptive of her involvements. I, fortunately, was able to enjoy volunteering with Helene, starting with the Band Mother's Club of North Brunswick High School, all

(Continued on page 7)



President's Message

My message to you begins on a sad note again. We recently lost two more of our Society's most active and involved members — Helene Handaly, who was a Board Member and Editor of this Newsletter, and Seymour Kamp, also a Board Member. We will most certainly miss their longstanding contributions to this Society.

I mentioned in our last Newsletter that we had begun transcribing a large set of oral history audiotapes that were recorded by the Society, some as long as 30 years (about one generation) ago. On many of the tapes, members of Central New Jersey's Jewish community give interesting and enlightening recollections of their childhoods and of other aspects of their lives. The idea has been suggested that, not only should we be doing similar interviews now to leave a similar repository of knowledge for the next generation, but that we should be collecting oral histories on a continuing basis. This makes a lot of sense. Therefore, as a first step, **I would like to invite anyone who wishes to have their oral history recorded, to give us a call, and we'll arrange to do it!** We know that many of our members have interesting stories to tell, and are waiting for someone to whom to tell them. We'll provide a copy of the oral history to you, so that you can retain it for your own family's archives. Also, if you're interested in volunteering to help with obtaining oral histories, we'd be pleased to hear from you.

Nathan Reiss

We Are Bereft

The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey has been able to record and publish the history of Jewish life in central Jersey, and to maintain an archive of its documents, photos, and artifacts, through the work of a devoted group of volunteers. Alas, those volunteers themselves are becoming part of our history and few are coming forward to replace them.

As a relative newcomer to this area I can recall the passing of many of them: our scholarly archivist, Ron Axelrad, and more recently, Judy Moroz; treasurers Al Handaly and Joan Neuwirth; past presidents Eliot Bartner, Sandy Siegel, and Moshe Moskowitz, and most recently, Seymour Kamp and our newsletter editor, Helene Handaly. I miss each and every one of them. More important, JHSCJ misses them. They were part of an active, involved group who contributed time, effort, and knowledge, who became friends, and who made JHSCJ not only an organization but also a community. That era is ending.

Common knowledge has it that this generation is too busy with work and family and other interests to support the longstanding institutions that rely upon volunteers, and that they have no interest in nor knowledge of history. That is very sad, if true. Someday some youngster, blessed with intellectual curiosity, will ask, "What did Grandpa do?" or, "What was New Brunswick like when he was my age?" and no answer will be forthcoming.

What has characterized and maintained Jews throughout centuries of oppression and wandering is devotion to their faith and memorializing their history. I hope that ancient tradition is not dead and that new members will come forth to renew JHSCJ and further its mission. Do it for the memory of those mourned here and for the benefit of your children and grandchildren.

Edith Neimark

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

Editor Helene Handaly
Contributors Susan Dessel
 Deborah Cohn
 Susan Marchand
 Edith Neimark
 Nathan Reiss
 Marcia Hopp Spears

Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

CONTENTS

Archives CornerPage 4
 Donations/Tributes.....Page 6
 Editorial Page.....Page 2
 Jamaica's Jewish CemeteryPage 3
 Jewish Governor of UtahPage 5
 JHSCJ Officers.....Page 2
 Lecture Series Schedule.....Page 4
 Membership News.....Page 4
 Speakers BureauPage 4
 Tribute to Helene Handaly.....Page 1
 Tribute to Seymour Kamp.....Page 7

JHSCJ OFFICERS

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

Hunt's Bay: Jamaica's Jewish Cemetery

~ by Susan Dessel ~

I recently returned from a week in Kingston, Jamaica, where I was one of eight volunteers from Arizona, Connecticut and New York gathered under the aegis of Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions (CVE).^{*} Our goal was to inventory the overgrown, 17th century Hunt's Bay Jewish Cemetery with the prospect that our week-long efforts would add to the knowledge of Jewish history and genealogy while contributing to the diminishing, yet vital, Jewish community of Jamaica. Before leaving we were to witness the cemetery's links to the present.

The site, declared a national monument by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust in 1993, is the oldest cemetery in Jamaica and one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in the New World. Individual Jews arrived in the Caribbean in the 1620s and 30s with larger numbers joining them from the 1650s onward. Jamaica was a Spanish Colony from 1494 to 1655 during which time Jews often arrived via Portugal. Most were Spanish and Portuguese *Conversos*, the term used by Jews to describe themselves and fellow Jews who had been forcibly baptized but continued to secretly practice their religion. Many also arrived via Amsterdam, where the Dutch had established the West India Trading Company and valued the business experience and geographically dispersed contacts in the Jewish community. The first synagogue was built soon thereafter in Port Royal and established the Hunt's Bay cemetery.

Field work was done under the leadership of volunteer Rachel Frankel, architect, member of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments (ISJM), and recognized authority on historic New World Jewish sites. CVE volunteers included architectural conservator Lauren Stahl, who was interested in



The volunteers standing in the midst of the Hunt's Bay Cemetery

^{*}CVE, a non-profit organization since 1991, recruits volunteers to work on historic preservation and genealogy projects throughout the Caribbean (www.cvexp.org)

helping to restore and preserve the centuries-old gravestones; Andree Aeilon Brooks, author, lecturer and creator of a new curriculum package on Sephardic history and culture (Stahl and Brooks had participated with Frankel in a similar effort in Suriname in 1998); artist Susan C. Dessel, who was especially drawn to the imagery and symbols of the sepulchral art; Jacqueline Rokhsar, an educator with careers in both the NYC Board of Education and at the Yad Vashem Education Center in Israel; Michael Nosonovsky, an assistant professor of engineering whose avocation is Hebrew epitaphs and inscriptions, particularly from Ukraine and the former Soviet Union; social worker Rebecca Crowe; and John Crowe, retired academic and immigration lawyer who volunteered with Frankel at Jamaica's Falmouth Jewish Cemetery in 2007. The project volunteers all shared an enthusiasm that was to get us through days of thorny bushes and blistering sun. Jamaica's famed beaches were at the other end of the island, so at the end of each day, long cool showers at the hotel were the destination of choice.

The cemetery was originally situated near the water of Hunt's Bay across from Port Royal. Many of the Jews of Jamaica in the 17th century lived in Port Royal and were brought in row boats to the cemetery for burial. The ships that brought the marble and slate gravestones carved in Europe docked in the harbor that has since been partially filled in. Now, the two miles from hotel to cemetery was a half-hour van ride ending on a dirt track past corrugated metal shacks, some of whose residents were employed to clear the tangled brush from the site. By week's end we were all teammates, the locals' interest and enthusiasm matching our own.

Underneath the brush lay the graves, typically covered by horizontal gravestones on a brick base. Stahl laid out the grid that would enable us to map the site for our work. Eventually we located and marked 359 graves and future efforts may uncover still more.

(continued on Page 6)



American Jewish Experience Lecture Series 2008

Series #1

**Monroe Township Jewish Center
(Etz Chaim)
11 Cornell Drive, Monroe Township**

Lectures are held on the
2nd Monday of the month
10:00-11:30 a.m.

- April 14 Mildred Goodwin
Jewish Experience in Reel Life, Part II
- May 12 Shirley Reich
In the Beginning: The Earliest Jewish Americans
- June 16 Rabbi Daniel Fellman
*60 Years Later: The Role of an American Friendship in
the Establishment of the State of Israel*
- July 14 Harvey Hauptman
Three Media Moguls
- August 11 Philip Cantor
After Anatevka, Part I
- September 8 Ann Gold
Cuban Jews Olé
- October 13 Dr. Nathan Reiss
Jews of the Bronx
- November 10 Philip Cantor
After Anatevka, Part II

Series #2

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

Lectures are held on the
3rd Wednesday of the month
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

- April 16 Deborah Cohn
*Eavesdropping on History: The Year 1885 as Reported
by the Jewish Press*
- May 21 Dawn and Paul Horowitz
Operas with Jewish Content
- June 18 Harvey Hauptman
Three Media Moguls
- July 16 Philip Cantor
After Anatevka, Part I
- August 20 Ruth Marcus Patt
Masters of Merchandising
- September 17 Dr. Nathan Reiss
Jews of the Bronx
- October 15 Ann Gold
Cuban Jews Olé
- November 19 Cantor Anna West Ott
(accompanied by David Schlossberg)
American Jewish Music



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.

JHSCJ President Nat Reiss recently gave two lectures on behalf of the Historical Society. On February 10, he spoke to the Sisterhood of Temple Beth Or in Brick on the subject of "Jewish Family Names", and on March 9, the lecture "Am I My Brother's Cousin?" was given to the B'nai Brith International Concordia Unit. Thanks, Nat!

Archives Corner

From Bill Greenberg: photos of Sinai Congregation, Hillside, NJ from 1930s-1950s

From Connie Landis: Booklet, *The First Fifty Years: New Jersey Federation of YMHA's, YWHA's, and Jewish Community Centers*, published November 1961.

Membership

Thank you to SAUL MOROZ for renewing membership at the Patron Level

**The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey is grateful for the receipt of a
\$1,000 grant from the Wal*Mart Foundation.**

The Jewish ‘Gentile’ Governor of Utah

In 1916, Simon Bamberger ran for the office of governor of the state of Utah. Bamberger was the first non-Mormon, the first Democrat and the only Jew ever to seek that office.

During the campaign, Bamberger visited a remote community in Southern Utah that had been settled by immigrant Norwegian Mormons. According to historian Leon Watters, writing in a monograph published by the American Jewish Historical Society, Bamberger was met at the train by the community’s leader, a towering Norwegian, who told him menacingly, “You might yust as vell go right back vere you come from. If you tink ve let any damn Yentile speak in our meeting house, yure mistaken.” Bamberger is said to have replied, “As a Jew, I have been called many a bad name, but this is the first time in my life I have been called a damned Gentile!” The Norwegian threw his arm around Bamberger and proclaimed, “You a Yew, an Israelite. Hear him men. He’s not a Yentile, he’s a Yew, and Israelite. Velcome, my friend; velcome, our next governor.” The Norwegian was correct; Bamberger was elected.

From the founding of their religion in 1830, Mormons (or Latter-Day Saints, as they prefer to be called) have had a respectful attitude toward Jews. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, proclaimed that “Lehi, a prophet of the tribe of Manasset. . . led his tribe out of Jerusalem in the year 600 BC to the coast of America.” The tenth Article of Faith of Mormonism proclaims, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this (the American) continent.” In Mormon metaphor, the Utah desert was a latter-day Zion, and the Great Salt Lake a latter-day Dead Sea. The Mormons who settled there under Brigham Young’s leadership were, in their own minds, direct descendants of the people of the ancient Hebrews. Non-Mormons—regardless of their religion—were referred to as “Gentiles.” Watters notes, “Utah is the only place in the world where Jews are Gentiles.”

The pioneer Jews of Utah fared well under the Mormon majority. Because Mormon ideology proclaimed agrarian pursuits the only respectable calling and commerce morally corrupting, they left the roles of a shopkeeper, banker and businessperson to Utah’s Jews and other Gentiles. In early Utah, Jews and Mormons lived in symbiotic, commercial harmony.

Simon Bamberger was one of the most successful Jewish “Gentiles” in the early history of Utah. Born in Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany in 1846, he emigrated to America at age 14 in search of his fortune. After spending a few days in New York, the young Bamberger departed by train for Cincinnati. He fell asleep, missed a change at Columbus, Ohio, and disembarked in Indianapolis, where a cousin took him

in. After working for his cousin until the Civil War ended, Simon and his brother Herman, who migrated after Simon, moved to St. Louis and became clothing manufacturers. On a trip to Wyoming to collect a debt, Herman notified Simon that their business had failed. Simon decided to travel on to Utah as, in his own words, he “had no other objective in view” and few prospects back in St. Louis.

The enterprising Bamberger purchased a half interest in a small hotel in Ogden, Utah. In Bamberger’s own words, “Soon thereafter an epidemic of smallpox broke out and the Union Pacific passengers were not permitted to come up to the town, so I gave up. I took the Utah Central to Salt Lake and there bought the Delmonico Hotel...and renamed it the White House in partnership with B. Cohen of Odgen.” The hotel flourished.

‘Utah is the only place in the world where Jews are Gentiles.’

In 1872, Bamberger purchased an interest in a silver mine which, by 1874, made him wealthy enough to retire comfortably. The pioneering spirit was too strong in Bamberger, however, to allow him to rest. Two years later, he raised a million dollars to construct a railroad to reach some coal mines in northern Utah in which he had invested. He then built a second rail line to some small towns on the outskirts of Salt Lake

City, hoping to spur their development. Railroad competition was fierce, however, and Bamberger lost much of his fortune in the effort.

In 1910, a Jewish agricultural colony was established in Clarion, Utah, and Bamberger became one of its most ardent supporters. In 1913 and again in 1915, when the immigrant Jewish farmers became bankrupt, Bamberger traveled East to raise funds to pay their debts. His efforts could not save the colony, however, and it folded in 1915.

Bamberger’s civic-mindedness was not lost on his Mormon friends, who urged him to run for governor. Despite being a Democrat, Bamberger’s policies paralleled those of Teddy Roosevelt and the Progressives. He insisted that the legislature balance the state budget, create a public utilities commission to regulate the price of electricity and gas and banned gifts by utility companies to public officials. He created a state department of public health; instituted water conservation; and advocated for a lengthened school year, workers’ compensation, the rights of unions and the non-partisan election of judges. Bamberger was also a teetotaler who supported prohibition. Most of his platform was adopted into law.

Bamberger died in 1926 and is buried in the cemetery of Congregation B’nai Israel, the first synagogue in Salt Lake City. Of course, he is buried in the “Gentile” section.

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TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Marcia Hopp Spears	Lola Kamp and Family	In memory of Seymour Kamp
Marcia Hopp Spears	Eric Flam and Family	In memory of Loretta
Marcia Hopp Spears	Adelaide Brenner	In memory of Harold Marcus
Nat and Sally Hindes	Adelaide Brenner	In memory of Harold Marcus
Nat and Sally Hindes	Arthur Phillips and Family	In memory of Marjorie
Edith Neimark	Sol Moroz and Family	In memory of Judy Moroz
Betty Saltiel	Adelaide Brenner	In memory of Harold Marcus
Beatrice Beck	Florence Freedman	In memory of Joseph Freedman
Beatrice Beck	Gloria Cohn	In memory of Joseph Freedman
Adelaide and Terry Brenner	Eleanor Brenner	In honor of her birthday
Susan Marchand	Lola Kamp and Family	In memory of Seymour Kamp
Ruth Marcus Patt	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Debbie Cohn	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Marcia Hopp Spears	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Edith Neimark	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Ann Zar and Arthur Taub	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Susan Marchand	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Muriel and Stanley Haber	Lori Kaye and Family	In memory of Helene Handaly
Ina Nelson	Lori Kaye and Amy Handaly	In memory of Helene Handaly
Drs. Edwin and Dorothy Sved	Lori Kaye and Amy Handaly	In memory of Helene Handaly

(Continued from Page 3)

Many of the graves did not have gravestones (only the brick bases remain.) Two of the dead were the Levy brothers, born in Austria, probably of Ashkenazi (German Jewish) heritage. All the other names (e.g. Nunez, Henriques, Rodriques) appeared to identify Sephardic Jews (those of Spanish or Portuguese descent.) Original records are assumed to have been destroyed in the 1692 earthquake and the 1703 fire.

Each stone was gently brushed clean so that information could be collected, including the measurements, materials and condition. The data included descriptions of illustrations and transcriptions of Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, and/or English language epitaphs containing biographical information, beautiful poems, and sad records of premature death. In addition, each grave was photographed.



The stones ranged from unadorned to those with lavishly sculpted elements and symbolic images including the unexpected skull and crossed bones. A debate arose as to their meaning but there was no doubt for our local Jewish community on-site liaison, Ed Kritzer. His book, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, will be published this fall.

Throughout the week our gracious host was community leader Ainsley Henriques, and on-site we enjoyed the help of local drop-in volunteers. Argentinean Rabbi Fabian A. Zaidenberg's knowledge of Portuguese was invaluable. On our last day of work, we were joined at the cemetery by Israeli Ambassador to Jamaica, Amos Radian, and the 70 participants in the annual conference of Jewish Communities of the Caribbean and Latin America (UJCLA) including many Jamaican families, a community that is racially integrated in a manner that we in the States unfortunately rarely encounter. Witnessing some of the participants locate graves of their ancestors and gathering together to recite Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, we ended a work week marked by hard physical activity on a very spiritual note.

Then together we all joined more community members for services at the 350-year-old Congregation Shaare Shalom/United Congregation of Israelites. An architectural gem, it is built in the traditional Sephardic style, and the floor is sand-covered (a reminder of our ancestors' wandering in the desert.) And, as family, the community members welcomed all volunteers and conferees into their homes for Shabbat dinner.

Susan Dessel, a New York-based artist, grew up in Metuchen, N.J. Her work can be seen at www.desselstudio.net.

IN MEMORIAM SEYMOUR KAMP

I have fond memories of Seymour Kamp, a man I knew for 48 years. He first sold us a car in 1961; it was a Fiat and he was a salesman at DeAngelis Buick. After that our paths didn't cross for many years. Then they kept on crossing: at Highland Park High School, where our kids were in a play together; at the Y where we swam together; at the Bildner Center for Jewish Life where we often were at the same talks; at Temple, and as Board members of the JHSCJ. Lola and I often met at Douglass Alumnae events. Over the years, we all became friends and I appreciated Seymour's upbeat attitude. He always had a smile and a friendly and warm manner. I'll miss him.



and schooled in New Brunswick and Rider College. His parents were early members of Poile Zedek, where he did the whole service as a Bar Mitzvah on Christmas day. Seymour and Lola still belonged there even after they joined the Highland Park Conservative Temple. He had a wonderful voice, sang in the school choir and then in a Jersey shore nightclub during college years. He was a water boy at boxing matches held in Highland Park. In fact, he was encouraged to become a boxer, but he declined. His father was a baker in New Brunswick who schmoozed with customers at each stop during deliveries. Lola says Seymour inherited his schmoozing ability from his father, but his venue was the Stop & Shop.

Seymour served on the JHSCJ Board for several years. He was a local boy and very interested in Jewish history of the area. Seymour was born at St. Peter's hospital,

Seymour and Lola were married nearly 50 years, and had three children: Alice, an information scientist at Amgen; Ted, a TV pro-ducer; and David, a contract writer for Vanity Fair and GQ. They have six grandchildren.

Susan Marchand

(Continued from Page 1)

the way to the present Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital volunteer programs, to the Women Aware functions, and last but not least, Hadassah here in the Raritan Valley of N.J. Helene was also active in North Brunswick—she was currently still on the “9-11” committee for the township.

Suffice it to say, this vital and involved member of our society will be missed by everyone, but especially by the lights of her heart—her granddaughter Melissa and grandson Harrison.

Marcia Hopp Spears



From the day I began working at the JHSCJ in September, 2005, Helene Handaly spent hours in the office with me every week, never arriving empty-handed. She brought piles of newspaper clippings, family documents to donate to the archives, and even a new coffee maker. But of course, the Newsletter was her first priority, and I was quite impressed with the professional way in which she approached publication. She always had ideas for articles, and she designed the layouts with precision. Her editorial “voice” gave the newsletters a perfect blend of warmth and scholarly authenticity.

As we worked together, I learned about Helene's life and

family. I never had the privilege to meet her husband Albert, but it was clear from the way she spoke that they had been partners in every sense of the word, even in their volunteer work. I could tell how much they had loved each other and how much she missed him. She told me stories about Congregation Etz Ahaim—how she had been an “outsider” who was wholeheartedly taken into the Sephardic community, and how she had always loved being part of the extended family which the congregation represented. She reminisced about past trips with the Historical Society, and she did her best to make the new offices as functional and professional as the previous building had been. When she was ready to leave, she was already promising to bring something else we needed for next time, or giving herself another project to do before she returned. Then she would hurry off to her next volunteer stop: cuddling babies in the hospital's intensive care nursery. Helene was such a lovable person herself—I am sure she was the best cuddler the hospital had!

Helene told me she was ready to stop editing the Newsletter—she had so many other things to take up her time. But of course, we could never replace her. Not as editor, volunteer, or friend. She was simply the best.

Debbie Cohn