

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
of the Upper Midwest

Generations:



LATE FALL 2018

Telling the story of a community JHSUM presents its first permanent exhibit, chronicling the history of the St. Paul JCC

By Robin Doroshow

What is it that defines a community? Sometimes it's geography. Sometimes it's religion. Sometimes it's shared vision for the kind of active, engaged, inclusive world we want to build.

And I believe that in rare instances even a building — a physical space — can define and bring a community together, if it is a very special building.

The St. Paul Jewish Community Center is that kind of special building: a welcoming homebase for families, seniors, artists, veterans and, yes, even fitness buffs, who together make a strong, diverse and growing community.

The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest started exploring the extraordinary nine-decade history of the St. Paul JCC earlier this year, in





cooperation with the Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives (UMJA). The JCC was undergoing a year-long renovation and expansion that gave us the exciting opportunity to create a permanent exhibit in the new Steinfeldt Family History Center, a purpose-built exhibition space. It is the JHSUM's first ever project of this kind and we are grateful to the Steinfeldt Foundation for helping to make it possible.

JHSUM members had the opportunity to tour the exhibit, called "A Kehillah Comes Together," at a reception held after the JHSUM's annual meeting on October 14. UMJA, including archivist Kate Dietrick, was an invaluable partner in locating and combing through the hundred-plus boxes of material related to the JCC, on which the exhibit is based.

"I was blown away by the amount of material we had to work with," said writer Tricia Cornell, who worked on the exhibit. "The archives are truly a treasure. And we've only scratched the surface of what's there. All of us are already looking forward to the next phase, when we can expand and refresh the exhibit."

Those boxes tell a story unique to the St. Paul JCC, through the multitude of photos as well as meeting minutes, building plans, deeds, telegrams, event programs, fundraising materials and so much more. The organization has its roots in an effort to integrate newly arrived Jews from Eastern Europe into the brand-new state of Minnesota. At every stage when new needs arose — new groups of immigrants, new opportunities to welcome children with disabilities, new ways to open its doors to LGBTQ people — the JCC grew.

"What struck me was the path the JCC has been on for decades," said researcher Erica Schultz. "Their story has been one of almost constant growth — in members and in programs — even though some other programs around the country have struggled."

The JCC has stood in its currently location since 1964. The original building was designed to serve about 1,000 members.

With current membership at 5,000, expansion has been much needed. The most recent \$15 million renovation began in 2017, and included a new aquatics center, improved fitness area and theater, and a secure, two-story front entrance, in addition to a number of warmer, friendlier internal gathering spaces.

The Steinfeldt Family History Center occupies one of these nooks, at the base of the stairs leading to the fitness center. A curved wall holds a life-size mural and a screen, which supplements the exhibit with new video material. The main wall tells the story of the JCC, from the time of the first Jews arrived in St. Paul to the present, in photos and narrative. Guests are invited to read stories as told by JCC members in their own words, and to share their own.

"I couldn't be happier with the space," said project lead and designer Jennifer Kaplan. "It's filled with natural light during the day, and the couches and chairs invite people to come and spend some time with the material."

"A Kehillah Comes Together" is open during JCC opening hours. Phase two of the project, which will include adding video and other interactive materials, is now underway. Watch for updates in future issues of Generations.

BE PART OF HISTORY: Celebrate 35 years of JHSUM history

2019 marks the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. Over that time, we've experienced changes of name, location and staff, but our mission has remained constant: *to promote the vitality and continuity of Jewish culture in the Upper Midwest through preservation, interpretation and education.*

Please plan to join us in our celebration of our history and anticipation of an exciting future for our vibrant organization.

SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 19, 2019

Further information coming soon



**JHSUM President
Jamie Heilicher**

A HISTORY OF DOCUMENTING HISTORY

We are nearing the 35th anniversary of JHSUM, and I would like to thank the thousands of community members who have supported the society. Everyone who has attended events, viewed exhibits, shared journals, visited our archives or our website, participated in walking tours or otherwise participated has contributed to our marking this milestone.

The rich history of the Jews of the Upper Midwest represents a story of perseverance over time. Preserving, telling and experiencing that story helps us all understand where we come from and why we choose to remain.

But the story is always changing, and it always depends upon us to keep it alive through continuous transmission. I contribute whatever I can, with pride, and I invite you to join me:

Become a member or renew your membership. Make a donation. Contribute your story. We are the Jewish history of the Upper Midwest, and this is our society.

From the archives:



Tours of Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives

The Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives at the University of Minnesota are a fascinating treasure trove of history. If you've never toured the archives, you're missing a great experience!

Tours regularly bring Jewish communal leaders and community members through the archives. Last June, the Minnesota Rabbinical Association visited the archives for a tour and discussion. A tour was also included as part of the St. Paul Jewish Federation's Mitzvah Crawl series.

Suggest one to your chavurah, your board, your committee, your friends: Tours are led by archivist, Kate Dietrick and can be arranged through the JHSUM by contacting history@jhsum.org, or by contacting Kate directly at diet0132@umn.edu.



VISIT

The Upper Midwest Jewish Archives are open and available to any who are interested in viewing our unique materials. To learn more about our collections, visit our website at www.lib.umn.edu/umja.

On the road:

Tiny synagogue, big history — Aberdeen, SD

By Robin Doroshov

Readers of Generations will recall that in the summer of 2017, I wrote about what I believed were the two active synagogues in South Dakota: Mount Zion Temple in Sioux Falls, and Synagogue of the Hills in Rapid City. Following articles about those congregations, I was contacted by Bea Premack of Aberdeen, who informed me that Congregation B'nai Isaac in Aberdeen is alive and well, and just celebrated the centennial of its founding.

So this past summer, my South Dakota sojourn included a visit to Aberdeen, to meet with Bea and Herschel Premack, learn about their tiny congregation of 12 individuals, and celebrate “centennial-plus-one” of this synagogue — the oldest in continuous use in South Dakota, and the only one in the state affiliated with the Conservative movement.

Despite having never met me, the Premacks welcomed me into their home. I quickly learned that my hosts and guides are the backbone of this community, long involved in civic life and at the center of its Jewish life.

Herschel was born in Aberdeen and has spent his entire life there. His parents were married in 1922 at B'nai Isaac, in a double ceremony with another couple from Sioux City. Herschel was quick to name-drop the twin girls who traveled with the other couple from Sioux City to stand as flower girls: Eppie and Popo, aka Esther and Pauline Friedman, later known to the world as Ann Landers and Dear Abby.

Bea, an Omaha girl, was attending college when she met Herschel. She had grown up in a Conservative synagogue in Omaha that her parents helped form. She and Herschel married and settled in



Gail Pickus, Herschel Premack, Bea Premack outside Congregation B'nai Isaac, established in 1917, it's the oldest synagogue in continuous use in South Dakota.

Aberdeen, establishing their Jewish home and raising three children while Herschel worked in the family scrap metal business.

We visited B'nai Isaac late one Friday afternoon, where I was introduced to Jerry Taylor, B'nai Isaac's current president. Jerry showed me many artifacts, photos and papers relating to the history of B'nai Isaac. There I also met long-term member Gail Pickus, an artist originally from Chicago, who came to Aberdeen with her late husband when

he established his medical practice there; as he built his practice, they raised their three sons.

Joining us for pre-service chat in the building lobby were a young couple who had relocated to Aberdeen to work at the local college, as well as a college student originally from rural South Dakota, who has an interest in Judaism.

We entered the sanctuary, where Herschel went to the bimah and led the Shabbat



The Flame Steakhouse and Lounge, Aberdeen, SD

evening service. Bea brought wine and candles to the bimah. The service was brief and traditional, and concluded with all of us on the bimah for kiddush.

Following the service, we had a chance to get to know each other better over dinner at The Flame on Main Street — a perfect small-town supper club.

There I heard more stories about the history of the congregation, the remarkable community service of the people around the table, and the extended relationships throughout the Midwest and beyond that they have maintained over the years.

I learned, for instance, that both Bea and Gail have been named “First Lady of Aberdeen,” a general community honor bestowed on active community members.

I learned about the Warren Buffett connections of Omaha’s Rabbi Kripke, friends of the Premacks through Bea’s family and in attendance at the Aberdeen weddings of both Premack daughters. Rabbi Kripke briefly hit the national spotlight when he made a \$7 million donation to support restoration of the

JTS library in New York following a fire — it turned out he was an early investor with Mr. Buffett.

And I learned about important and timely work that Bea and Gail are currently involved with — the Aberdeen Area Diversity Coalition, a tri-faith organization of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Among its activities is the hosting of an Israel booth and cultural performance at the Northern State University Culture Fest, despite the fact that this year there are no Israeli students attending NSU.

Congregation B’nai Isaac and its members are a cornerstone of Aberdeen life and a beacon of Jewish practice for out-of-town visitors, Jews from even smaller towns



TOP: B’nai Isaac sanctuary



LEFT: B’nai Isaac brochure celebrating the congregation’s centennial.

who need a place for holidays and special occasions, and non-Jewish neighbors who want to learn more about Judaism.

Traveling to Aberdeen? You will be warmly welcomed by the members of B’nai Isaac!

Renew your membership today!
Not yet a member? Join us today!

Use the enclosed envelope to renew or start your membership and include "Membership" on the check's memo line, or go to www.jhsum.org/membership.

Membership will run with calendar year

Calendar year, fiscal year, Jewish year, membership year... all Jewish organizations do some juggling to create and manage our calendars in ways that make sense to our members, donors, and accountants. To reconcile some of these complexities, the JHSUM is shifting our definition of a membership year.

Here's what you need to know:

- Our **fiscal year** runs from September 1 through August 31. This is not going to change.
- Our **membership year**, however, will now run with the **calendar year** (instead of with the fiscal year), from January 1 through December 31.
- All membership gifts received between September 1, 2018 through December 31, 2019 will be considered **2019 memberships**.

If you have any questions about your membership period, please contact history@jhsum.org.

View North Minneapolis through a Jewish Lens

If you're one of the many individuals who has contacted JHSUM for a tour of the old Northside, we have good news! We have 12 newly trained tour guides, ready to lead tours of North Minneapolis through a Jewish lens.



To build up this talent pool, JHSUM conducted a two-part training for volunteers to learn to lead tours of the area while being respectful of the current residents. The first training was led by



Earl Schwartz and Richard Woldorsky, Northside natives and lifelong friends. The second training was led by architectural historian, Peter Sussman. Set up your tour today by contacting history@jhsum.org.

Artistic success! Leon Sorkin exhibits

In the last issue of Generations, we announced the exhibit of art by Leon Sorkin coming to the Sabes JCC in August 2018. The exhibition was well-received, and the opening event felt like a big family reunion with Leon's son, Elliott and his wife, Bonnie in town from Michigan for the event, and Leon's daughter, Rena, in attendance.

Many of Sorkin's portraits of the children he had tutored for B'nai Mitzvah were reunited with their subjects and went to new homes. It was very exciting to showcase the work of such a well-loved teacher and member of the community.

This event followed a week-long exhibit of Sorkin's paintings of North Minneapolis homes and community scenes, at Homewood Studios.

In all, Sorkin's family generously donated 200 pieces of his work to the JHSUM. If you are interested in viewing the



collection, we will be happy to arrange a time. For further information, please contact us at history@jhsum.org.

Exploring the history of Jewish theater in Minnesota

Do you have a connection to the history of Jewish theater in Minnesota? Do you know someone who does? We are looking for you, and for your artifacts!

The JHSUM has undertaken a project to document the history of Jewish theater in Minnesota. To share what you know and have, to make referrals, or to set up an interview of your experiences, please contact us at history@jhsum.org or leave a message at 952-381-3360.

ST. PAUL JEWISH HISTORY PROJECT

Telling our stories

By Robin Doroshov

Everyone has a story to tell, and through those stories we understand our collective history. That's the foundational principle of oral history efforts, like the St. Paul Jewish History Project.

But have you ever wondered what the experience of providing or documenting an oral history is like? The process is fascinating and rewarding, for interviewer and interviewee.

I recently conducted one of the interviews for the St. Paul Jewish History Project, meeting with brother and sister Harold Smith and Lorraine Applebaum. At 93, Lorraine was the youngest in the room. Harold celebrated his 100th birthday last May. The four Smith children, of whom Harold was the eldest and Lorraine the second youngest, grew up on St. Paul's heavily Jewish West Side.

To say that their memories are sharp is a gross understatement. Harold's memories for names, places and dates is amazing. The information gained in this interview (and so many others that have been taken) are invaluable to the JHSUM's work to build up our knowledge of the Jewish history of St. Paul.

While I have a standard questionnaire that I reference when taking oral histories, each interview is as unique as the subject. I prepare in advance by learning as much as I can about the subject's life — family, career, involvement in the Jewish and secular communities, and any passions or interests. But then the interview takes direction based on what the interviewee wants to talk about.



Harold Smith and Lorraine Applebaum

This was one of the nearly 40 interviews to date of individuals with strong ties to St. Paul's historic Jewish neighborhoods. Dr. Lija Greenseid, whom we hired using funds obtained through a State of Minnesota Legacy grant, has conducted nearly 30 of these interviews.

Recordings of the interviews are being transcribed and will be housed permanently at the Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives at the University of Minnesota. Additionally, copies of each recording and transcript are provided to the interviewee. And, finally, the information obtained in these interviews will be available to JHSUM as

we work toward an exhibit and journal on the Jewish history of St. Paul.

As we start to work through transcribing all the interviews, we're also enhancing this body of work with additional research on the community from the 1920s through the 1960s, for which we hope to receive a grant. The St. Paul and Minneapolis Federations are currently collaborating on a Twin Cities Jewish Population Study, which will also provide context for this project.

We aim to complete the project in 2020, with an exhibit and journal publication.

We need your St. Paul artifacts and photos! JHSUM is seeking artifacts, photos and records related to the Jewish communities and institutions in St. Paul from the early 1900–1960s for our comprehensive St. Paul Jewish history project. Please tell us what you have at history@jhsุม.org.

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of the Upper Midwest

Eloise and Elliot Kaplan Family Jewish History Center
Jay and Rose Phillips Building | Barry Family Campus
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www.jhsum.org

CHANGE SERVICES REQUESTED



Executive Director
Robin Doroshov

As I approach the close of my second year with the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, I am thankful for the opportunity to serve in our community in this unique way. JHSUM has an amazing board of directors and wonderful community members, who make each day interesting and rewarding.

JHSUM's 35th anniversary in 2019 offers a milestone by which we can mark how far we've come in preserving the fascinating history of Jews who settled in the Upper Midwest. But there are still so many varied stories of the Jews of the region to tell.

History is you — please join us!

Participate in programs. Visit our exhibits. Become a member, or renew your membership. And plan to join us at our 35th anniversary celebration in May!

YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Long before the start of my tenure as executive director, a great many of you have been loyal supporters of JHSUM's membership campaigns. Your membership dollars supplement other donations, grants and endowment earnings, to support our annual operating and programming budget.

In short, your generosity and commitment to JHSUM allows us to fulfill our mission: to promote the vitality and continuity of Jewish culture in the Upper Midwest through preservation, interpretation and education.

We mailed membership letters in November. Please consider making a gift of any size before the end of the calendar year.

Thank you for your ongoing support of JHSUM.