

L'Dor V'Dor

from generation to generation • the newsletter of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society



This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Marlene W. Hechtman and Martin M. Staenberg.

Letter from NJHS Board President, Sue Friedman Millward

I am honored to be the new President of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society and I look forward to continuing the preservation of our Jewish heritage in this community.

While pursuing my passion for genealogy, I have spent a great deal of time over the last three years watching and learning from the staff and volunteers of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society. They quietly pursue their daily activities hidden away behind the doors of their offices. Many people pass by each day with no idea how important their work is to each of us.

Renee Ratner Corcoran, the Executive Director, and Kathy Simon Weiner, the Archivist/Assistant, receive calls and requests from people throughout the country who are looking for their family's information. Whether it is the location of a gravesite or a picture of their Great Aunt Rose, Renee and Kathy listen to the stories behind the people who have resided in our Jewish community over the last 150 years. They respond, research, or refer each request. Often, they may even connect a person to a long lost relative who may be living right here in Omaha or in some distant place.

Renee and Kathy are assisted by a team of volunteers and board members that include:

Louise Abrahamson, Bob Belgrade, Joanie Bernstein, Midge Bowers, Don Dandy, Helen Epstein, Beverly Fellman, Jan Fischer, Norma Fried, Michael Gendler, Doug Hartman, Gary Javitch, Debbi Josephson, Lorrie Katelman, Nan Katz, Angela Krieger, Rocky Lewis, Ira Nathan, Vicki Perlmeter, Helen Rifkin, Caryn Rifkin, Dick Rochman, Larry Roffman, George Shafer, Beth Staenberg, Rocky Stern, Phyllis Wasserman, and myself. (My apologies in advance for anyone I have overlooked, it was not intentional.)

I want to take this opportunity to *THANK* every person involved with the Historical Society for their care and concern. Together we are gathering and maintaining the history of the Jewish Midwest. It's not only the stories of our parents and grandparents, but the history of us and our children, so that future generations will know where they came from. The Nebraska Jewish Historical Society has the stories of "Who we are - Where we came from - And where we are going."

The NJHS is privately supported through donations made by families and individuals who understand the importance of the preservation of our history. Join our efforts today with your donations and contributions. We hope you will come by soon to see the Henry and Dorothy Riekes Museum, the only Jewish museum in Nebraska and the Carl Frohm Archival Center.

You are already a part of it -- make it a part of you.



Sue Millward and Debbi Josephson



Rocky Stern, Sue Millward and Debbi Josephson

MARK YOUR CALENDAR !!!!!!

On Sunday, October 14th at 1:30 PM we are inviting the entire Jewish community to celebrate our 30th anniversary.

Jewish Studies in Nebraska

Oliver B. Pollak

There were hardly any Jewish Studies in Nebraska outside the synagogues and JCC before 1974. Steve Riekes characterized it as a 'desert.' I have written about the 1982 establishment of the NJHS in the 2003 and 2007 *L'Dor V'Dor*. You can get away with repeating lectures, but not published articles. So here I focus on the changes that produced robust Jewish intellectual opportunities in Nebraska.

Today the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Lincoln, Creighton University, University of Nebraska Press, Nebraska Humanities Council, and of course, the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society provide a prominent presence of Jewish heritage.

People of a certain age, wealth, life experience and Jewish consciousness, like the Klutznick, Harris, Kripke, Schwalb, Fried and Blumkin families become generous benefactors to posterity. Their own comforts and those of their children assured they reach out philanthropically through bricks, mortar and spirit, advised by attorneys, accountants, friends, university and Jewish community professionals. Nebraska's experience reflects the momentum of Jewish Studies, driven in part by Holocaust awareness.

Founding dates may be misleading as raising funds could require lead time. Commitments include:

1975 – University of Nebraska at Omaha: Jewish Studies professor position established on the initiative of Omaha Jewish Federation, Bureau of Jewish Education, and Livingston Foundation

1982 - Nebraska Jewish Historical Society founded

1988 - Creighton University: Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization

1991 – University of Nebraska – Lincoln: Norman and Bernice Harris Center for Judaic Studies

2005 – Creighton University: Rabbi Myer and Dorothy Kripke Center for the Study of Religion & Society

2009 – University of Nebraska at Omaha: Natan and Hannah Schwalb Center for Israel & Jewish Studies

2012 – University of Nebraska at Omaha: Sam and Frances Fried Holocaust and Genocide Education Fund

2012 - University of Nebraska Press partners with Jewish Publication Society

University of Nebraska at Omaha: In 1975 the Omaha Jewish Federation, funded by the Milton S. and Corinne N. Livingston Foundation, partnered with UNO to employ a Jewish scholar who would also administer the Bureau of Jewish Education. S. Daniel Breslauer filled this position in the 1975/76 academic year, followed by Rabbi Jonathan Rosenbaum (1976-86), Rabbi Richard Freund

(1989-99), and Guy Matalon (1999-2012). Professor Freund inaugurated student archaeological activity at Bethsaida, Rami Arav (1994-) has assumed that aspect.

Natan Schwalb graduated from Omaha University in 1964, went on to earn a law degree at Creighton and found success in real estate development. In 2009 he and his wife established the Natan & Hannah Schwalb Center for Israel & Jewish Studies.

Sam Fried, a Holocaust Survivor, started public education on the Holocaust in the 1970s. Six Million Lights Education Fund became Heartland Holocaust Educational Fund in 2002. Renamed the Sam and Frances Fried Holocaust and Genocide Education Fund in 2012, it combined with the Blumkin Family of Nebraska Furniture Mart fame, to create the The Frances and Louis Blumkin Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The inaugural holder of this chair, Professor Waitman W. Beorn, will teach an honors colloquium in Fall 2012: "Killing in the Name of: A Study in Comparative Genocide."

University of Nebraska – Lincoln: The Norman and Bernice Harris Center for Judaic Studies established in 1991 has been directed by political scientist Michael Steinman, historian of 20th century Germany Alan Steinweis, the novelist Gerald Shapiro, and Jean A. Cahan, a specialist in modern Jewish philosophy. The program also includes occasional public lectures sponsored by, among others, former Nebraska Chief Justice Norman Krivosha. Alan Steinweis who taught at UNL from 1993 to 2008, offered the Holocaust at least once a year with class sizes of 40 to 100. He recalled "The class never failed to fill up." Gerald Steinacher, author of *Nazis on the Run* now teaches the course in an auditorium.

The **University of Nebraska Press** established in 1941, in recent years has published an impressive number of Jewish themed books. It garnered such a significant position in the marketplace that in January 2012 it assumed part of the distribution operations of the venerable Jewish Publication Society founded in 1888 and its list of over 250 titles.

Creighton University played a special role in providing undergraduate, legal and medical education to aspiring Jewish students before the Second World War. It did not have an exclusionary anti-Jewish quota system. Jesuit merit based admissions resulted in grateful alumni.

Philip M. Klutznick, a 1930 law graduate assisted in funding the law school library, and in 1988 established the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization, directed by Professors Menachem Mor (1988-1995) and Leonard Greenspoon (1996-). Papers presented at the annual Klutznick symposium have been published in 23 volumes of proceedings by the University of Nebraska Press, Fordham University Press and Creighton University Press. In 2000 the Fall Symposium became a Klutznick and Harris joint venture.

Creighton's Center for the Study of Religion & Society, directed by

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Professor Ronald A. Simkins opened in 1988, in 2005 and following a gift from Rabbi Kripke it became the Rabbi Myer and Dorothy Kripke Center for the Study of Religion & Society.

Awareness of Jewish history has been fostered by several programs. The **Missouri Valley History Conference**, established in 1958, meeting annually in Omaha, frequently presents research on Jewish subjects. *Nebraska History* published by the Nebraska State Historical Society has published several articles on Nebraska Jewish history. The **Nebraska Humanities Council** has sponsored programs on the Holocaust in Imperial, McCook, Seward, Tilden, Newman Grove, Bassett, Ainsworth, Wuaneta, and many places in between.

Nebraska Jewish Historical Society: On March 31, 1982 Mary Fellman, Lois Friedman, Silvia Roffman, Joie Simon and Oliver Pollak sat down to lunch at Mary's home on Western Ave. We had a variety of talents and experiences, energy, and thoughts of possibilities. We moved from an idea, to sharing space with the Ham Radio Club to ever larger quarters in the Jewish Community Center. JCC Directors were very accommodating as we filled walls with photographs and documents that spoke to Jewish life in Nebraska. The archives mushroomed as closets, attics and garages yielded precious artifacts of the past which became the basis for many temporary and permanent exhibits.

The Torah ark and central bimah from the synagogue on Cuming Street were reconstructed for the Riekes Museum at the JCC. Ben Nachman, of blessed memory, supported by Steven Spielberg Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation enhanced the NJHS oral history collection. In 1990 the NJHS hosted the annual meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society, at the Marriott Hotel. *L'Dor V'Dor* and *Memories of the Jewish Midwest* are mailed throughout the country.

Jewish presence in Nebraska appears larger than our relatively small numbers. In great part this is due to academic philanthropy, payback and a sense of place. Each initiative in the patchwork reaches out in face to face contact, in print and on line to overlapping communities of scholars, students, faiths, and the Jewish communities.

I thank Mary Bort, Jean A. Cahan, Renee Corcoran, Richard Freund, Leonard Greenspoon, Steven Riekes, Ronald Simkins, and Alan Steinweis for their assistance.

Thirty years! Can it really be that long ago??? With great pride I was honored to be among those organizing the NJHS and later served as President. Our goals were to preserve the past and present of Nebraska Jewish history here in Omaha, outstate Nebraska, and we wanted to include Council Bluffs as well. We have done just that with the help of a dedicated staff and many of you who have added to our archives and to those of you who will do so in the coming years. A salute to Mary Fellman, Oliver Pollak, Sivvy Roffman and Joie Simon for their efforts to establish this wonderful organization.

Lois Friedman

MORE ABOUT MOM AND POP GROCERY STORES...



THE OWL SUPERMARKET

From Lorrie Steinberg Bernstein- Excerpts from article printed in Volume 13, Memories of the Jewish Midwest, Jewish South Omaha, Founding a Neighborhood, Fostering a Community, Summer 2006

Bess Lipsey Stoller married Sam J. Steinberg. Bess had two children and Sam had two children. Bess was divorced six years and had worked for Herzbergs. Sam was a widower for over a year and worked with his father George in a grocery store in Council Bluffs.

They found a very small empty store on 36th and V Streets for rent and opened the V Street Market. It had a tiny apartment in the back and that was the beginning for this new put-together family.

Three of the kids worked every day after school. The store was open seven days a week. It's hard to imagine how six individuals could manage in such small quarters, but Bess was an organizer. They even delivered the groceries--anything to make a living.

There was a vacant lot next to the store they were renting. Four years later they begged and borrowed enough money to build a store. What a thrill a new store was and also a big house in Hanscom Park. We kids were in heaven.

Bess and Sam were two of the most giving, honest, hard-working people with complementary, opposite talents. Bess was an organizer, a delegator and worked tirelessly. Sam was laid back, loved to work with figures, talk to the customers and salesmen. They built the first super market in Nebraska.

The new store on the corner of 36th and W was named the Owl Supermarket. It had a drug department, a pharmacist, a tremendous liquor department and three butchers. Sol Lewis Co. furnished all

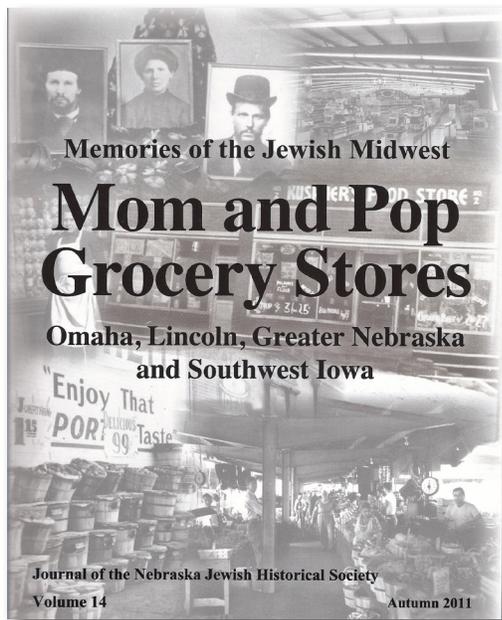
the latest equipment in walk-in freezers, open refrigerated cases, automatic cash registers and check-out stands. People from all over shopped at the Owl. The store policy was “the customer is always right.” They had a very large parking lot. Baggers and take-out boys took groceries to your car. Novelties were a great attraction as well as weekend specials and discounted merchandise. Sam was way ahead of the times.

The only other stores were tiny, had charge accounts and soon went out of business as they couldn’t compete with the low prices and service. My folks weren’t satisfied with one store. There was an empty lot on 30th and U just six blocks away next to a bar, a liquor store that served drinks. They purchased the Manhattan Bar and built a drug store next door, complete with a soda fountain. That was around 1946.

Bess and Sam owned the stores for 30 years and when Bess said she was tired of working, Sam retired, too. Harold Cooperman was a long-time friend of the folks. When he got out of the Navy he worked in their store so they could take a long vacation. When the folks were ready to sell, he bought it from them.

They, too moved to California. Sam died in 1968 and Bess in 1998.

NJHS GROCERY BOOK STILL AVAILABLE



Copies of the most recent edition of Memories of the Jewish Midwest can be purchased by contacting the NJHS office or at Amazon.com and www.nebraskajhs.com

Mary Fellman called me and asked if she could come to my home to talk with me. She did this twice during the course of the time we worked together. Both times, she made a statement, “You are going to become a member of the Historical Society Board!” She knew how to get things done.

We worked together on the Wall of Business which is currently on the main corridor of the JCC. It was so well received that we had to go back to artist Milt Heinrich and ask him to create a second part of the exhibit. He designed it so that it could become one beautiful piece as you see it now. We also worked together on the beginning of the Anniversary Wall. Those two exhibits were both outstanding ideas from our founder, Mary.

She taught all of us about preserving the past for the future. It is up to each one of us to save family and community history for upcoming generations. It never ceased to amaze me that the builders of our community can be so easily forgotten even ten years after they have passed away. We have a job to do for Mary, for our children, our grandchildren and our community. The Historical Society needs everyone to join us in this endeavor.

Joanie Bernstein

BENEFITS AND IMPORTANCE OF NJHS MEMBERSHIP

Membership to the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society ensures the continuation of our rich heritage and helps us know who we are and where we came from. NJHS is looking forward as well as preserving our past.

Your membership helps plan programs, exhibits and continues our goal of preserving the history of Jewish families for future generations. Your support is very important to us.

The new redesigned NJHS website now gives you the ability to pay dues and give a gift membership for a happy occasion.

FROM DICK ROCHMAN,
NJHS MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

MORE ABOUT GROCERY STORES...

Dave Dvorkin did not work for the Omaha Potato Market. Obie (Abe) Gomberg left his job at the Potato Market to open his own market around the 10th and Pierce Street area. He asked Dave to leave his job baking butternut bread to work at his new store.

MOTHER MOVED

Oliver B. Pollak

Mother's Certificates, Matchbooks, and Ephemera

What we save creates an archive identifying our interests and passions. My mother whittled down from 2000 to 1000 to 700 square feet. Each move required possession reduction. Among the preserved heritage are photographs, travel literature, education certificates, Democratic Party memorabilia, and matchbooks.

Mother, Ruth Bachmann, born in Germany in 1921, finished high school in Hannover and fled to England after Kristallnacht. Her father Felix, a World War I decorated physician, survived Theresienstadt/Terezin. Mother deferred her education. She encouraged my sister and I in our academic pursuits in America. My father, dispossessed in Europe, emphasized education, stating, 'whats in your head they cannot take away'.

Raising my sister and I delayed mother's further education. At her first opportunity she employed a housekeeper, went to nursing school and made a pincushion of my father as she practiced injections. She assisted in an eye surgery and decided on the nonclinical side of medicine, avoiding blood and scalpels. My father died in 1978. Mother 'retired' in 1983 and moved to Leisure World, a retirement community in Laguna Hills, Orange County, California.

In retirement she took continuing education at nearby Saddleback Community College and attended lectures at Leisure World. She took classes in pottery and glass cutting. Mother loved traveling and put together photograph albums, travel books and mementoes of visits to Canada, Mexico, England, Austria, Germany, Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Alaska, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, and the wild flowers of Southern Vermont. Her bookshelves included travel books on Istanbul, Tuscany, Hanover, Lake Louise, and Sedona.

Mother moved in March 2011 to an assisted living apartment. She misses puttering in her garden. My sister, wife and I reminisced and chuckled as we divided mementoes and furniture between us and our four children, the Salvation Army, and trash.

Elderhostels, conceived in 1974, initially based in New Hampshire created reasonably priced educational programs with accommo-

dations like youth hostels and cafeteria food for inquisitive and physically active seniors. It spread to all states and many foreign counties, and became Road Scholar in 2004. My high school friend Nathan Bassing works part time at UNLV hosting Road Scholar programs; CSI Las Vegas, Entertainment Las Vegas, and Organized Crime Las Vegas. Some participants have been on over 50 trips, the record is 74.

Certificates of Elder Hostel attendance reflected mother's commitment to adult education. Between 1983 and 2005 she enjoyed elder hostels at College of the Desert, University of Hawaii at Hilo and Brigham Young University in Hawaii, South Georgia College, College of Santa Fe, University of Kansas, and California State University San Bernardino. In the 21st century she went to Grand Canyon University, Savannah State University, and Ventura. She went on a multigenerational Inter hostel in 1994 to Leysin, Switzerland with my sister Judy and her grandchildren Justin and Chelsea. Karen and I accompanied mother to Stirling, Scotland in 1995.

Mother, an environmentalist, decried the disruption of Southern California's natural landscape, the defacing of mountainsides to build ocean view condos, and fretted about orange groves and strawberry fields making way for shopping malls and parking lots. She became a Life Member of the Sierra Club in 1989 and qualified as Citizen Water Quality Expert in 2002. In 2006 she received a certificate for "support of the decade-long struggle to defeat El Toro Airport and protect Orange County residents' quality of life." Certificates reveal volunteering at Reiss-Davis Child Study Center, City of Hope, and Meals on Wheels. She donated to the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.

Her mobility declined slowly. She went on a bicycle tour of France in the 1980s. She took long hikes in California's parks and beaches well into her eighties. She surrendered her driver's license on New Year's Day, 2008, she was 86. She swam, went to exercise class, and is still an indefatigable climber of two flights of stairs in her current abode, even though she has vision and hearing problems.

She had eighteen portraits of Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al and Tipper Gore embracing, and the White House, with certificates of authenticity, rewards for contributions to the Democratic Party.

Mother does not smoke, father did. She does not have a fireplace, does not light backyard bonfires, and rarely lights candles. Her 75 matchbooks and boxes, dating back to the mid 1960s, do not make her a phillumenist (a lover of light who collects matchbooks). I remember my grandmother in England cut cereal boxes into tapers to light the gas range in the late 1940s.



Oliver Pollak, Ruth Pollak and Judy Lo

The matchbook trail includes Mexican, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Korean, French, Italian, and Indian cuisine, including Perino's and Scandia on Sunset Blvd in Los Angeles, and The Golden Apple on Omaha's Dodge Street. Lodgings stretch from Marriott, Hilton, Best Western, The Ritz, Raphael, The Grand Hotel, and the Fairmont in California, to British Columbia and to Cape Cod and Stowe in the east.

Some of the matches contain propaganda - "Stop up to 96% tar and sooty smoke particles from entering your lungs by using Nu-Life Smoker's Kit"; "WE STILL DON'T KNOW what happened to our own men whom the Communists captured and have not yet accounted for"; and "Help yourself to a raise - La Salle Extension University Be a Civil Engineer - ICS International Correspondence Schools California Driving School."

Fragmentary mementoes of travel, diplomas, matchbooks, ignite warm memories. Mother's 3x3x9 storage unit contains recycled Trader Joe's two buck Chuck wine boxes with photograph albums, two table leaves, and one chair.

NJHS NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED

The NJHS redesigned website, www.nebraskajhs.com is up and running. Now with just a few clicks, users will be able to pinpoint the availability and location of records in our Carl Frohm Archival Center, search the Dr. Ben Nachman Oral History Collection, pay dues, request tribute cards and much more.

We have been working on our new website for some time and we are very proud of the results. The NJHS will be making additions to the information now available.



The Nebraska Jewish Historical Society is about to turn 30 years old.

Think about what you were doing 30 years ago.

The NJHS has come a long way from the little custodial closet in which we first were housed.

*The organization is in good hands. The board of directors and officers led by **Sue Millward** are very committed to overseeing the growth and prosperity of our organization. Our staff, **Renee Corcoran** and **Kathy Weiner** are talented and efficient. I want to personally thank them for their efforts to keep every thing running smoothly.*

I hope that each of you will show your commitment as well with either some compliments, volunteer hours and/or dollars. We need all we can get of all three!

We have had a productive year. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- *Oral Histories are once again being recorded*
- *The Memories of the Midwest---Mom and Pop Grocery Store book has been published with rave reviews*
- *The board has approved the relocation of the Riekes Museum to a place of more prominence in the Jewish Community Center*
- *The Business Wall artwork has been moved to a place of greater visibility in the Jewish Community Center*
- *Displays have been in rotation at the Rose Blumkin Jewish Home exhibit area--Veterans, Weddings, Grocery Stores and Shop 'Til You Drop are just some.*
- *A tour of Jewish Omaha was conducted with Temple Israel*
- *Our new redesigned website has just been launched*

Remember we are always looking for new members--have your friends or relatives join us whether or not they currently live in Omaha. A membership makes a great gift.

Your archives are also needed. As you are cleaning and organizing think about donating your memorabilia and papers to the Historical Society. If you have any questions about whether an item is worthy of archiving, give a call to Renee or Kathy at 402-334-6441 and they will help determine the worthiness of an article. Please allow the NJHS to preserve your portion of history for future generations to ooh and aah over.

Sunday afternoon, October 14th, will be the Historical Society's 30th Anniversary celebration. Come one and all to the Jewish Community Center to share in our history!

*Debbi Josephson
Immediate Past President*

A Book Review Essay

Michael Gendler

Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany. Alan Steinweis, Harvard U Press, 2006.

This fairly recent publication by Nebraska's own Alan Steinweis (UNL's Rosenberg Professor of History and Judaic Studies) is worth getting acquainted with by anyone who wishes to become knowledgeable about the Holocaust. To me, it connects strongly with a statement that I heard years ago from Erich Goldhagen, a noted Harvard scholar of Nazi ideology and its relationship to the Holocaust (and father of Daniel Goldhagen, author of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*). He said that if he had to write down one word to explain how the Holocaust could have happened he would write the word "book." By this he meant that the flood of anti-Semitic literature emanating from the pens of European writers during the late 1800s and throughout the early 1900s laid the foundation for a population often ready to tolerate and sometimes participate in murdering Jews.

Steinweis's book is about the anti-Semitic literature coming not from the gutter, but from the universities and from independent scholars in Germany during the years of Hitler's dictatorship. They gave an imprimatur of intellectual legitimacy (footnotes and all) to the hatred and even the torture and murder of Jews. In this fascinating study, Steinweis examines nearly forty German scholars who used their academic discipline to present convincing lies to the public. Lies that had the appearance of good scholarship.

Steinweis notes that Hitler called for an "anti-Semitism of reason." That is, a hatred of Jews based upon the scientific study of race, in addition to "old-fashioned" religious or cultural anti-Semitism that had been going on for centuries. Unfortunately, he adds, Nazi scholars were more than happy to accommodate him. They devoted their scholarly efforts to an ideology of hatred and suppression. Not only did they write anti-Semitic works but they established institutions that they hoped would perpetuate such views for a 1000-year Reich.

The book correctly establishes the context of modern anti-Semitism as the 1870s. Indeed, it was in 1879 (ten years before Hitler was even born) that Wilhelm Marr, an atheistic German journalist, was the first to coin the term "anti-Semitism" in the specific sense of racial hostility toward Jews rather than a hate based upon religion. Hitler absorbed this view (and other similar such perspectives) from his obsessive reading of racist and anti-Semitic pamphlet literature in Vienna during his early adult years. It was there that Hitler developed what Hitler himself called "the granite foundation" of his worldview (in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*).

Once Hitler came to power in 1933, the growth of anti-Semitic scholarship came about not from any systematic direction from the Nazi Party according to Steinweis, but, typical of so much of the Nazi regime, Hitler encouraged competition among the various sources of anti-Semitic material so as to make certain that the only

single thing that they would agree upon was their loyalty toward Hitler rather than become a competing center of power unto itself. Thus, universities, free-standing research centers, government agencies, and independent scholars all contributed to the outpouring of scholarly anti-Semitism. However, once the Nazis came into power, Steinweis makes it clear that producing such literature often became a way to enhance a career. By the early 1940s, Steinweis writes, more and more doctoral dissertations were being written about Jews (32 between 1939 and 1942 alone), and courses on Jews or on the "Jewish Question" were being taught at universities in Jena, Munich, Marburg, Vienna, Graz, and Berlin among others.

The historian Walter Frank founded the Institute for the History of the New Germany in 1935. A few years later, this Institute set up what it called its "Research Department for the Jewish Question." It was based in Munich and was headed by the historian Wilhelm Grau. A number of other institutes were set up in Germany for a variety of sub-disciplines regarding the Jews. The Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life was founded in 1939 by the Protestant theologian Walter Grundmann. The scientific research department of the SS, the Ahnenerbe, was headed by the prestigious racial anthropologist Eugen Fischer.

One of the critically important points made by Steinweis is that even though so-called "scholarly anti-Semitism" was written for an elite audience, much of this material often found its way into the mainstream of German society. For example, the Nazi Party newspaper, the *Volkischer Beobachter*, which, in Berlin alone had a circulation of over 200,000, frequently reported upon the lectures given in the anti-Semitic institutes. Such articles also found their way into daily newspapers in Berlin and other major German cities. Steinweis cites the specific case of the 1941 opening of chief Nazi intellectual, Alfred Rosenberg's Institute for Research on the Jewish Question. It was given major coverage in the *Illustrierter Beobachter*, a nationwide publication that had a circulation of nearly 700,000. What is more, Nazi textbooks, especially in secondary schools, frequently incorporated material from professional anti-Semitic writers. Indeed, argues, Steinweis, "these educational materials, with their hybrid content of "science" and propaganda may well have best embodied what Hitler had in mind when he spoke of the need to combine scientific and emotional anti-Semitism."

Steinweis makes an excellent point here, but, as in several other parts of the book, just how important a point it is could have been made clearer to the reader if he had added much more of a substantial sampling of what this anti-Semitic material actually looked like. For example, here, taken from the invaluable anthology of Nazi primary sources by George Mosse (*Nazi Culture*) is a sample from a secondary school assignment during the 1930s (from the text *Familienkunde und Rassenbiologie für Schuler* (2nd ed.; Munich, 1935):

How We Can Learn to Recognize a Person's Race

1. Summarize the spiritual characteristics of the individual races.
2. Collect from stories, essays, and poems examples of ethnological illustrations. Underline those terms which

describe their type and mode of the expression of the soul. . . .

3. **What are the expressions, gestures, and movements which allow us to make conclusions as to the attitude of the racial soul?**
4. **Determine also the physical features which go hand in hand with the specific racial soul characteristics of the individual figures.**
6. **Collect propaganda posters and caricatures for your race book and arrange them according to a racial scheme. What image of beauty is emphasized by the artist (a) in posters publicizing sports and travel? (b) in publicity for cosmetics? How are hunters, mountain climbers, and shepherds drawn?**
10. **Observe the Jew: his way of walking, his bearing, gestures, and movements when talking.**
11. **What strikes you about the way a Jew talks and sings?**
12. **What are the occupations engaged in by the Jews of your acquaintance?**
13. **What are the occupations in which Jews are not to be found? Explain this phenomenon on the basis of the character of the Jew's soul.**
14. **In what stories, descriptions, and poems do you find the psychological character of the Jew pertinently portrayed. ("The Jew in the Prickle" from Grimm's Fairy Tales; Debit and Credit by Gustav Freytag; . . . The Merchant of Venice by Shakespeare. Give more examples. (Mosse, pp. 80-81)**

In this selection it can be easily seen how the Nazis chose to stress the role of racial determinism when it came to a wide range of behaviors including singing, walking, and even work. When, in #1, students are asked to summarize the "spiritual" characteristics of the individual races the word "spiritual" can best be understood in contemporary American English as "psychological." Similarly, the phrase "racial soul" can best be viewed as meaning "racial mind" today. The citation of Grimm and Freytag also suits the purpose of the Nazi educational system at this time. Both Freytag and the brothers Grimm were 19th century advocates of pride in German folklore, history, and people. Such references, as well as the request that students collect their own evidence in order to form conclusions provided the "science" portion of this exercise. The propaganda aspect is manifestly evident as well! The questions obviously are leading the students to conclude that Jews are very different from the rest of their German neighbors. They do not engage in the same occupations (farming, hunting, military science). But this, the students were taught, was due not to historical circumstances, but to the "character of the Jew's soul (which as noted above, should be translated, in today's English as "mind"). Finally, note how students, in #6, are expected to keep a "race book" throughout the academic year. This is very much in keeping with Hitler's view that biology and race should be seen as the foundation in understanding history and society.

The most often recognized Nazi scholar in this arena was Hans Gunther, whose book, *Racial Characteristics of the Jewish People* (1930) was especially important as a touchstone for educational

projects such as this race notebook assignment. After getting his doctorate in Germanic and Romance languages in 1920, he went on to write extensively about how race was the key to understanding the behavior of different groups of people. For Jews, Gunther wrote that their racial background was the key to appreciating their aptitude for building religious communities while at the same time possessing an "unbridled lust for the flesh."

Like most scholarly anti-Semites, according to Steinweis, Gunther did not go to ridiculous extremes such as accusing Jews of using the blood of Christian children to make their unleavened bread for Passover. Gunther even wrote that he did not consider Jews to be inferior. They were, he thought, just racially "other." In fact, Steinweis makes an important point in noting that this idea was the basis of Gunther's support for Zionism. Indeed, writes Steinweis, Gunther saw the Talmud and Jewish law playing a major role, during the Diaspora, of trying to prevent Jews from marrying outside their own group. In so doing thought Gunther, the Jewish people were wise to support their own version of German "Volkstum" or racial consciousness. If the Jews became increasingly mixed with other groups, this would ruin them thought Gunther. Of course, the other side of this coin is that if the Jews mixed with the German people, the Germans would face destruction as a healthy "Volk" or racially conscious people.

Frighteningly, Gunther's ideas and those of his ilk did not just remain in the realm of theory. Gunther's ideas were used in support of the Nazi passage of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 which in fact ruled that Jews could not be citizens of Germany. They were also used to reinforce the policy in support of encouraging

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It was my pleasure to be President of NJHS from 2003-2005. Out of several successful programs and events, I am most proud of two accomplishments. Mary Fellman, my friend and mentor of 30 years, was the impetus for the idea of a fund raising effort, the "Mary Fellman Permanent Enrichment Fund." With Renee Corcoran doing most of the leg work, and Bob Belgrade chairing the committee it was a great effort that did raise much needed funds.

It was also important to me to re-establish our newsletter, L'Dor V'Dor, to keep our membership up to date on our activities. I had Louise Abrahamson as my advisor and contributor; and was so gratified by the response.

Our beloved Historical Society had always been the best kept secret in the community, but with the generosity of our donors, and the hard work of the board and volunteers, we have come a long way from Mary Fellman's office in a hallway closet!

*Helen Rifkin
Former NJHS President*

Jews to leave Germany for Palestine until 1939. The purpose of the latter was not, of course, to support a future Jewish state, but as one other way to rid Germany of its Jews (who could be dealt with later on once the Nazis conquered the Middle East).

This ultimately nefarious nature of anti-Semitism that Steinweis rightly brings out is another reason why it would be useful if he included more direct quotes from anti-Semitic literature itself. For example, take a 1938 article written by the Nazi Supreme Party Judge, Walther Buch. It illustrates just how crude the writing from “jurists” could be.

The Jew is not a human being. He is an appearance of putrescence. Just as the fission-fungus cannot permeate wood until it is rotting, so the Jew was able to creep into the German people, to bring on disaster, only after the German nation, weakened by the loss of blood in the Thirty Years’ War, had begun to rot from within. (Mosse, pp. 336-337)

This sort of viciousness brings home just how pervasive biological metaphors were in regard to viewing the Jews as a threat to the German people. The references to rotting, blood, fungus, and wood all seek to reinforce the concept of the Jew as a kind of bacillus infecting the Third Reich, a bacillus which must be eradicated.

Among even the scholarly researchers, activities carried out in the name of science were anything but innocent. Steinweis’s most salient example is the anatomical and anthropological work of August Hirt, Professor of Anatomy at the Reich University of Strasbourg. He had an idea for a project in 1942 that he proposed to Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS. The proposal was entitled “Impounding of Skulls of Jewish-Bolshevist Commissars for Scientific Research.” He asked that captured Jewish communists from the Russian army be kept alive until they could be killed with poison gas so that their skulls would not be damaged! Why? So that he would be able to carry out “comparative anatomical research” on “racial affiliation” as well as “pathological symptoms of the skull structure,” and “much more.” This was indeed carried out using 115 prisoners from the Eastern Front.

Of course, the unspeakable horrors carried out upon camp inmates in the name of so-called “medical experiments” is all too well known and is not covered by Steinweis in this book.

For religious scholars, a different tack was taken. For example, Steinweis notes that Gerhard Kittel, a noted scholar of the New Testament with no history of anti-Semitism before Hitler came to power, began to use his expertise to support Nazi ideology after 1933. His publications increasingly began to emphasize how modern Jews were a different racial mix than those of the “Old Testament” time period. Thus, he argued, modern Jews acted not by the ethics of the “Old Testament” but by the Talmud, which Kittel presented as an anti-Christian, corrupt, and materialistic approach to life. Kittel also interpreted the notion of Jews being a “Chosen People” as meaning that they wanted to dominate others. He called them a “Volk de Weltherrschaft” (People of World Domination). Perhaps most fundamentally, Kittel used his prestige as a scholar to reinforce the notion of the Jew as foreign to German culture

The NJHS oral history interviews are a very important and valuable part of our archival collection. If you or a family member would like to record your history contact the Historical Society office at 402/334-6442. Do it for you, for your children and grandchildren!

and society. Here was yet another way to reinforce the idea that Jews should be removed from Germany in one way or another.

Kittel’s colleague, Karl Georg Kuhn also receives coverage in the book. In one of the most intriguing portions of the text, Steinweis points out how Kuhn used his knowledge of Hebrew to call attention to his expertise in the Talmud. Unlike Kittel, Kuhn did not see a break between Old Testament Jewry and Talmudic Jewry. Rather, Kuhn argued that Judaism was, from its beginnings, legalistic in its insistence that all 613 commandments be followed to the letter. The Talmud was one more example of this complex legalism in contrast to the single, powerful idea conveyed by Christianity. What is more, in his writings, he pointed out example after example where the Talmud displayed Jewish xenophobia and pettiness in comparison to the Christian preaching of universal love. Finally, demonstrating a classic example of transference (my assumption, not Steinweis’s) Kuhn wrote that Jews were guided by a “morality of volkisch struggle” against other peoples! In other words, Kuhn, who really did struggle to get the Jewish people out of his “volkisch” community (people or folk community united by a common racial and cultural bond), accused them of doing precisely that to him.

Interestingly, Steinweis notes that after World War II Kuhn’s written apology for his booklet, *The Jews as a World Historical Problem* was accepted by a denazification board in West Germany. He went on to teach at the University of Heidelberg until 1971 and became one of Germany’s major scholars on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Steinweis rightly expresses concern that fellow scholars in post-war Germany were so easily open to accepting Kuhn despite his record of anti-Semitism during the war. The book explains this based upon how in comparison to most crude forms of anti-Semitism, Kuhn looked almost tame. Also, there was all too much respect for the fact that Kuhn had long been a respected scholar as well as having been an anti-Semite during the Nazi years.

Another anti-Semitic scholar who later managed a post-war career was the economist, Peter-Heinz Seraphim. Steinweis cites, interestingly, Seraphim’s over 700-page 1938 study, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, as a classic example of a genuinely scholarly work that was also clearly anti-Semitic. It included many Jewish sources in its over 1,000 footnotes and 197 charts and graphs. At the time of its publication it came to be considered indispensable for the fiend of Jewish studies in Germany. What Steinweis brings out so effectively here is that despite his arguments that Jews were economic parasites who needed to be relocated, Seraphim wrote notes to a Nazi General for whom he was an economic advisor

expressing genuine shock and horror at the actual murder of Jews. For Steinweis, his story is illustrative of how there were some scholars who, although indeed anti-Semitic, were not necessarily advocates of extermination. And yet, their work no doubt contributed to the justification of precisely that in the minds of its perpetrators.

So, what can we learn from all of this? Steinweis concludes: “With some exceptions, the scholars who participated in Nazi Jewish studies were not intellectual frauds or Nazi party hacks. They were dishonest scholars, but scholars nonetheless. Their careers and their work violated the presumption that the scholar has a responsibility to use knowledge honestly and for positive ends. In the final analysis, the great failing of the Nazi anti-Semitic scholars was more ethical than intellectual.” (p. 156). Steinweis has provided a real service with this book, not only for the Jewish community, but for all those who are concerned about the danger posed by the propagation of misleading, dangerous, half-truths, and blind bigotry, both open and camouflaged. One of my favorite quotations from the great psychologist, William James, is that “Life is a struggle between good ideas and bad ideas.” Steinweis’s book is a major contribution toward the triumph of good ideas (open inquiry, respect for the individual and her liberty) and the rejection of bad ones (totalitarianism, celebration of the community at the expense of individual liberty, viewing persons as members of a race rather than as individuals). This struggle, of course, never ends. For over twenty years (1980-

2002) the Institute for Historical Review out of Torrance, California published a glossy, professional-looking journal about the Holocaust called *The Journal of Historical Review*. It was mailed to professors all over the country. When I received my first copy in the mail and browsed through the journal, at first it looked like an interesting series of scholarly articles. It took just a couple of minutes to see that this was a real snow job. All of the articles were filled with half-truths about the Holocaust and included among its authors and referenced works, some anti-Semites disguised as researchers (e.g., Robert Faurisson, Arthur Butz, and Austin App). Back issues of this flood of anti-Semitic garbage are still peddled by Noontide Press (which, not surprisingly, has links to neo-Nazi and KKK web sites).

The continued publication of this material and its ilk is yet another why it has never been more important for citizens to think carefully and critically about what they read, see, and hear. Ideas are often previews to actions that follow. If ideas advocate harm to the innocent, we must take such ideas seriously. Such ideas come in a variety of guises, including nonsense dressed up as scholarship. I have always treasured the advice given to the graduates of Oxford in the commencement address of Harold Macmillan back in the early 1960s. He told students that the major purpose of their first-rate education in the classics was not to prepare them for a specific job but to make sure that “you will be able to tell if someone is talking rot.” Would that we all cultivate this skill.

When I became president of the board of directors of the NJHS, I really didn't know exactly what the job entailed, or what was expected of me.

It's a big difference from being a volunteer, and passionate about the amazing and wonderful things that the Historical Society offers, to becoming president of the organization.

I quickly learned which board members shared my passion and could be counted upon to volunteer their time. Renee was a big help in guiding me through the maze. Her help was invaluable to me.

I also came to realize that the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society serves the community in many capacities as a resource venue. It provides assistance to people of all ages.

It is truly a treasure for the Omaha Jewish Community.

*Helen Epstein
Past NJHS President*

NJHS MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society is to preserve the histories of the Jewish families who settled in Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa. The NJHS will promote the acquisition, cataloging and use of the collected materials which depict this history by: participating in conferences; issuing publications to members and professionals; fostering research; and promoting museum projects and related education and cultural activities.

ANCESTRY CORNER

Sue Friedman Millward

Six Degress of Separation

“Six Degrees of Separation” refers to the idea that everyone is only six steps away from meeting any other person on earth. This seems to be even more apparent as I continue my investigation of family genealogy here in Omaha. If our families have been here for six generations, we are certainly related. If they have been here for only five generations, then probably we are related. If four generation, then possibly related. And, so it goes from there. But, occasionally we find relationships in the most unexpected places.



San Fancisco bus

For instance, many years ago, before kids and before my return to Omaha, I lived in San Francisco. I worked downtown in the Financial District, and rode the Market Street bus to work five days a week. Over the course of time, I became acquainted with a fellow commuter who I only knew as “Alan”. What first caught my attention was the cowboy boots he wore with his ultra conservative business suit. He had curly kinky hair, a quiet demeanor, and he always carried a well-used black briefcase. For many months, we politely exchanged pleasantries. Eventually, we got to know each other better and spent our 40-minute commute sharing idle conversation. I learned he was from Houston and played the guitar. He was a lawyer for SPRR, the South Pacific Railroad and his downtown office was only two blocks from where I worked.

One day he told me that he was going to visit a cousin in San Diego and would be gone for a week. When he returned, he shared the experience of his visit with me. He told me his cousin Sally Victor was older than he. She had grown up in Chicago and moved to San Diego in the mid-1950s, when she married her husband Jerry.

“I knew I wasn’t in Kansas anymore” he told me, when he visited their large ranch-style house. “I crossed the threshold of their home and entered a world of wonderment. Though everything appeared to be in some sort of order,” he said, “my senses were overwhelmed.”

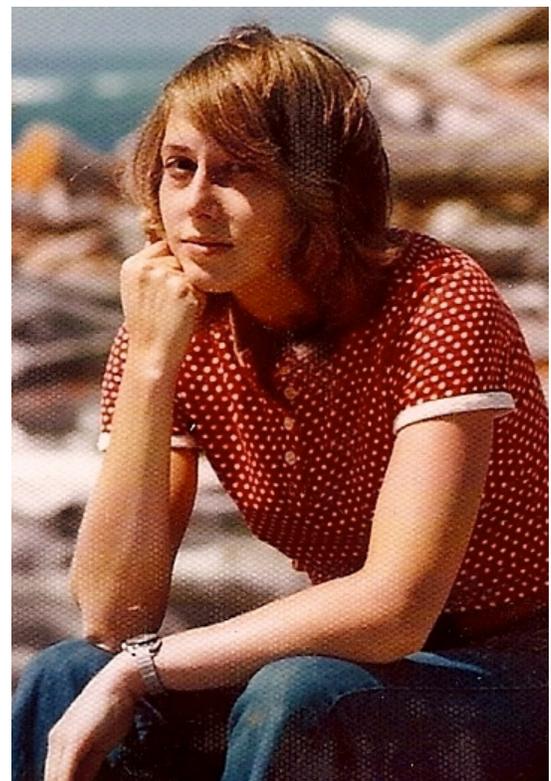
“There were reel-to-reel and 8-track tape decks loaded on the bookshelves, a short-wave radio on the counter and huge piles of old records stacked in various corners of their den. As I

moved from room to room,” he continued “I found more eclectic “chazeray” distributed throughout the house. Some things were modern state-of-the-art, and some things might be kindly referred to as *collectibles*. Most amazing was their private collection of photography equipment – much was from a bygone era. It was stashed in the basement along with hundreds of photographs and their own private darkroom.”

If this wasn’t enough, another surprise awaited him as he stepped into the backyard. Apparently, the San Diego school district was discarding outdated playground equipment. Jerry had managed to acquire a large variety and had distributed many pieces throughout the yard. Life-sized mannequins were placed strategically around the equipment and one could almost believe it was a real schoolyard scene. In addition, beat-up brass tubas were used as garden “art” throughout. This created an almost Salvador Dali-like setting. It was all very surreal.

As Alan spoke, I was reminded of a similar story I had heard from my own family. But, it wasn’t until he mentioned this same couple also owned a sporting goods store that was re-known for specialty gun parts that the facts became clear to me. I asked Alan if he was referring to Sally and Jerry Krasne. (Jerry Krasne was my mother’s first cousin. He grew up in Council Bluffs before moving to California, and visited Omaha often. We all knew him well.) Imagine my surprise when he said “yes.” It turned out that my cousin Jerry Krasne had married Alan’s cousin Sally Victor.

After making this discovery Alan and I spent the next few months exchanging stories of our mutually eccentric cousins and families. Soon he was transferred to another city and I never saw him again.



Sue in 1974



Sue in San Francisco

Imagine that a Midwestern girl from Omaha, like me, meets a Texas lawyer from Houston. Our paths cross on a daily ride to downtown San Francisco and one day we find a common bond through relatives in San Diego. *Hollywood would never make a movie of this – its just too bizarre.* But it did happen and I am here to tell you my story of the “Six Degrees of Separation.” Certainly we all have had a similar experience at least once in our lives. You just have to be open to the idea.

Now some 30 years later as I find myself exploring genealogy, I am again reminded of this story.

A year ago, I was introduced to and had the pleasure of working with Peggy Chasen (nee Spiegel) who grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. As we worked together to expand her family tree, I soon learned that her older sister, Evelyn Spiegel, married Sam Victor from Chicago.

Yes, Sam Victor is an uncle to the same Sally Victor Krasne previously mentioned. It follows therefore that Evelyn Spiegel Victor (Peggy’s sister) is Sally’s aunt. Instead of Six Degrees of Separation, this is an example of a First Degree of Separation... Eureka!

Then I could go on to tell you Peggy’s cousin, Rose Gentis married Abe Krasne, and her Aunt Goldie married Harry Krasne (both from Council Bluffs) but I think you get the idea.

My purpose in presenting these examples of the “Six Degrees of Separation” is this is just one of many such “co-incidences” I have found as I do my research. It also explains why my family tree has grown from a simple family tree with the Friedman and the Krasne families (my First Degrees) to extend further to Second and Third Degree families such as the Greenberg, Sherman and Riseman families. My Family Tree is no longer “mine” - but it has now become “The Omaha Community Tree.”

I have assisted with research for many families in the Omaha community and each time I find a connection of their tree to my own.

As stated at the beginning of this article I believe that any family who lives in or has lived in our region of the country, for a generation or more, will find similar such ties to each other. Therefore, during my term as President of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society I want to further explore these connections.

Renee Corcoran, the Executive Director of the NJHS, has long been an advocate for a Genealogy Club. We are currently organizing such a club and in September we will hold our first Genealogy Club meeting. Members of the community are invited to attend and create their family trees with the assistance of one another.

Our ancestors were real people with lives just like our own. Once we know their stories, they come to life for us.

Please contact me at smillw@gmail.com if you want to learn more or watch the Jewish Press for the announcement of our first meeting.

Dear Friends,

I have been involved with the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society for the past 30 years of my life since Mary Fellman asked for my help. Mary was our first president. She along with Oliver Pollak put a great deal of time and effort into NJHS. I became involved because our community needed a source and place to keep our Jewish heritage alive. Along with Mary we worked very hard to ensure its success.

Our success and accomplishments came from our Jewish community and friends throughout the United States. The support we have received has been outstanding.

I take great pride in our exhibits and yearly community wide events. I am so pleased that I have been part of building the NJHS. I had the great fortune to serve as President three different times. I assure you that the memories will forever remain with me.

Louise M. Abrahamson



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Bat Mitzvah: **Blanche Wise’s grandson** from Ann Kaiman

Special thanks: **Phyllis Sherman** from George Shafer; **Marty & Iris Ricks** from George Shafer, **Karen & Gary Javitch** from George Shafer; **Stacey Rockman** from George Shafer; **Sue Millward** from Peggy & Jay Chasen

Special honors: **Katelman Cousins Club** from Sissy & Howard Silber; **Amy Cassman Friedman-Recipient of Professional of the Year Award from the Public Relations Society of Nebraska** from George Shafer; **Jan Goldstein’s Retirement** from Debbi & Larry Josephson; **Debbie Friedman-Recipient of Jewish Federation of Omaha Volunteer Award** from Debbi & Larry Josephson; **Mark Javitch-Recipient of Jewish Federation of Omaha Volunteer Award** from Debbi & Larry Josephson; **Mark Martin-Recipient of Jewish Federation of Omaha Volunteer Award** from Debbi & Larry Josephson; **Marty Ricks-Recipient of Jody & Neal Malashock Award for Professional Excellence** from Marcia Kushner, Debbi & Larry Josephson

Births: **Granddaughter of Marty & Iris Ricks** from George Shafer

*Remember the Nebraska Jewish
Historical Society in your will.*



Nan Katz arranging the exhibit

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Lorrie Katelman
Jerry Slusky

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