

L'Dor V'Dor

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

Nebraska's Panhandle Families: Faith in a Faraway Place

by Rita Shelley

Editor's note: This is the first of a series of articles about Nebraska's Jewish communities outside Omaha and Lincoln.

Northwest Nebraska's panhandle includes 11 counties that cover 20 percent of the state's total geographic area. The panhandle's five largest towns range from Kimball, with 2500 residents, to Gering/Scottsbluff, with slightly less than 23,000 people.

In a region not known for its heavy population, it most certainly is not known as a hub of Jewish activity.

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Gering was the Shapiro family's third stop in North America. Irving and Clara had survived the Holocaust, met in a displaced persons' camp, and gave birth to their first daughter there. Because a post-war quota system limited the number of displaced persons who could enter the United States, they had moved first to Montreal, Canada, with the help of an international relief agency. Under the sponsorship of Joseph and Leah Mandelberg in Alliance, an hour northeast of Gering, the Shapiros were then able to leave Canada. Irv worked as a salesman, traveling throughout Nebraska and neighboring states, for Joe Mandelberg's auto parts supply business.

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By drawing on their own resources and those of the Jewish communities of Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Denver, Colorado, these families were observing their faith and honoring their parents' wishes that children grow up knowing Judaism. They organized a Sunday School for their children that met in the Nathan's basement, took turns hosting holiday services at their homes, and shared Seder meals at the VFW. When Reva Nathan learned that a

new couple in town, Dick and June Segal, were Jewish, she invited them to dinner and recruited them to teach the Sunday School.

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The Segals didn't feel qualified to accept the assignment, but Reva could be persuasive. Dick taught the older kids and June taught their younger brothers and sisters.

Tania Shapiro Moore, who today lives in Omaha, was nine when her family moved to Gering. Her brother, Herschel, was born the same year.

The Shapiros moved to Gering under the sponsorship of Sam and Esther Cohen. Irv worked in Sam Cohen's hide processing plant and eventually would buy the business when Sam retired.

"Father drove to farms and ranches, buying hides of cattle that had been slaughtered," Tania Moore said. He also had arrangements to purchase hides from local slaughterhouses. The hides would be soaked in foul-smelling vats that to Tania seemed to be the size of swimming pools. Workers salted, folded, tied and stacked the soaked hides on pallets for shipping by railroad to tanneries.

The tanneries were on the East Coast and often Jewish-owned.

"What was really great about the hide business, my father used to say, was that he never had to work on Saturdays or (Jewish) holidays because the tanneries he dealt with were closed," Moore said.

Being Jewish wasn't a "secret", Tania recalls, but it wasn't something to talk about in casual conversation, either. She was a cheerleader at Gering High School. Her parents were active in local fraternal organizations and bridge clubs. Both of her parents enthusiastically embraced the busy life of being involved in their children's school activities.



With no synagogue in their hometown, Scottsbluff, the Nathan family traveled to Cheyenne, Wyoming, for Allen Nathan's bar mitzvah at Mount Sinai Synagogue. Standing in the back row are Reva Nathan, Rabbi Susman, Allen Nathan and Paul Nathan. In the front row are Ira Nathan and Reva's brother, Phil Frankel, who traveled from Brooklyn, New York, for the occasion.



Lori and Deiter Nashelsky lived in Mitchell, Nebraska, about 10 miles from Scottsbluff. Deiter owned the Ben Franklin store in Mitchell.

"But the sense of being different was always present," Tania said. At 15, she attended a Jewish summer camp and also felt "different." Being around other Jewish kids wasn't something to take for granted, but for the kids from Denver, it was just part of their daily life.

If her parents ever regretted moving to Gering, Tania never heard them say so.

"They really loved living in a small town. My father arrived there with nothing and was able to become quite successful, the great American Dream," Tania said.

Paul and Reva Nathan also embraced the advantages a small town could offer. Paul moved to Scottsbluff in the late 40s to work at Scottsbluff Pipe and Supply Company, his brother-in-law Harry Rushall's metal salvage business. Paul had hesitated to propose to Reva, a Brooklyn native, because he didn't know how she'd feel about living so far away from her family, but she didn't hesitate in accepting his offer of marriage. She learned to love Scottsbluff and Scottsbluff learned to love her.

Moving? Please notify us of your address change!

Reva's initial intention was to keep a kosher kitchen, but she gave up on the impracticality and expense of importing meat from Denver that arrived by bus, packed in dry ice.

Sons Ira and Allen Nathan were born in 1949 and 1952. To keep his promise to Reva's father that the Nathan sons would be circumcised, Paul arranged for the services of a mohel from Denver, at a cost equal to two weeks' wages.

For the Sunday School, Paul and Reva made an appointment with a rabbi in Cheyenne, who supplied the books that the Segals taught from.

When the time came for Ira's and Allen's bar mitzvahs, they traveled on Sundays to Cheyenne (two hours each way) to meet at the rabbi's home. To celebrate, the Nathan's invited friends to their home.

"At the time, I had no idea of what a Bar Mitzvah party was because I had never gone to one," Ira Nathan said.

Alums of Paul and Reva's Sunday School have scattered to Lincoln, Omaha, Denver, Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City.

Paul and Reva Nathan moved to Omaha in 1969 when Paul took a job with Aaron Ferer and Sons. Reva died in 1995. From his apartment in west Omaha, he fondly recalls Reva's brothers' awe of a town where locking doors and parked cars was unheard of, and where a nice house with a garage to park your car in could be paid for on a workingman's salary.

"We made many close friends there, both Jewish and gentile," Paul said. "Those were good years."



From left, Vic Nufeld, Harry Rushall, Jack Fine, Helen Nufeld and Josephine Rushall celebrated Passover 1950. Harry and Vic owned Scottbluff Pipe and Supply. Jack was a furrier.

2007-08 NJHS Officers

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DONATIONS TO THE NJHS

ANNIVERSARIES: **Gail & Jerry Kohll (45)** by Midge & Bill Bowers, Fran & Louie Blumkin; **Shirley & Al Sorkin (60)** by Renee & Moe Handleman.

BIRTHDAYS: **Gloria Friedman** by Sissy & Howard Silber; **Irv Yaffe** by Bob Belgrade; **Rose Davis, Henry Davis, Shelly Cohen** by George Eisenberg; **Tilly Raznick, Paul Rifkin** by Helen & Dave Chorney; **Margo Riekes** by Karen & Oliver Pollak; **Phyllis Sherman** by George Shafer;

Donations to the Mickey & George Shafer Endowment Fund for NJHS at the Jewish Federation Foundation for George Shafer's 90th by Sissy & Howard Silber, Midge & Bill Bowers, Nan Katz, Etta & Bae Epstein, Bob Belgrade, Helen & Dave Chorney, Debra Sherman, Myrna & Kevee Kirshenbaum, Anne & Alan Cohen, Ann Kaiman, Rose Rosen, Kathy, Harry & Max Weiner, Shirley & Buddy Goldstein, Doris & Al Abramson, Dottie Rosenblum, Renee, Dan & Ashley Corcoran, Mark, Ben & Sarah Sherman, Steve Sherman.

RECOVERY: **Soralee Cohn** by Arnold & Sheryn Jaffe, **Lloyd Krasne** by George Eisenberg; **Elaine Jabenis** by Sissy & Howard Silber; **Art Jacobson** by Harriet & Sonny Marko; **Howard Silber** by George Shafer, **Jack Belmont, Doris Cohen**, by Helen & Dave Chorney; **Lucille Epstein** by Louise Abrahamson, **Dave Chorney** by Rosalie & Maurie Meiches.

IN MEMORY OF: **Evelyn Alperson** by Raizell Kalishman; **Bernie Jonisch** by Nancy Rips, Sheila Rosen; **Sadie & Harry Kulakofsky** by Beth K. Smith; **Sam & Millie Greenberg** by Barbara Seglin; **Fran Milder** by Sissy & Howard Silber, Alice & Yale Trustin; **Peggy Krasne** by Sissy & Howard Silber, Charlotte Slutzky Koom, Midge & Bill Bowers; **Jim Earp** by George Shafer, Midge & Bill Bowers; **Robert Cohen** by Gita Bessman; **Selma & Robert Cohen** by Dottie Rosenblum; **Earl Siegel** by Dee Goodman; **Sandy Brophy, Paula Mandell, Dorothy Kaplan** by Helen & Dave Chorney; **A. David Katz** by Renee Corcoran; **Betty Rae Weiser** by Myrna & Kevee Kirshenbaum; **Esther Mazvinsky, Harry Berenson, Fannie Sherman Chunovic** by Karen & Oliver Pollak; **Jack Stiss** by Harold Siporin; **Theresa Diamond** by George Shafer, Harold Siporin; **Gertrude Brodkey** by Al & Doris Abramson; **Gwenn 'Babe' Milder Malin** by Joye Tatz, Jordan Bushman, Robert & Helen Bushman, Ron Bushman; **Max Prostok** by Paul Nathan, Rhoda Davis Blatt, Carol & Ira Nathan; **Bernice 'Trickle' Milder** by Doris & Al Abramson, Midge & Bill Bowers, Janey & Jerry Dann; **Deborah Greene** by Midge & Bill Bowers, Helen & Tuffy Epstein, Renee, Dan & Ashley Corcoran, Phyllis & Kieth McAdam; **Sally McGauvran** by Midge & Bill Bowers; **Dave Chorney** by Helen & Tuffy Epstein, George Shafer, Renee, Dan & Ashley Corcoran, Etta & Bae Epstein, Paul Nathan, Midge & Bill Bowers, Joanie & Terry Bernstein, Lois & Mel Epstein, Renee & Moe Handleman, Tootie Simon, Sol Schwartz; **John Sutin** by Judy & Jim Farber; **Willard Friedman** by George Shafer, Renee Corcoran; **Elaine Gilbert** by Ronnie & Art Jacobson; **Theresa Diamond** by Harold Siporin; **Hubert Rosenblum** by Nan Katz.

OTHER OCCASIONS: **Thank you to NJHS for tour** by Hazak; **Wedding of Babe Galenda's grandson, David to Jamie** by Renee & Moe Handleman; **Thank You to Kevee Kirshenbaum for all his work** by Mort Glass; **Thank you to Bob Belgrades' Fund for NJHS- to Bob for all his help** by Al Abramson.

FROM NJHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

BIRTHDAYS: **George Shafer (90), Ida Halperin (90).**

IN MEMORY OF: **Bernie Jonisch, Robert Cohen, A. David Katz, Fannie Sherman Chunovic, Edythe Kavich, Dorothy Kaplan, Deborah Greene, Trickle Milder, Sally McGauvran, Dave Chorney, Aileen Eisenstatt, Willard Friedman, Liberty Faier, Theresa Diamond, Hubert Rosenblum.**

Letter From Kevee Kirshenbaum, Membership Chair

Friends, we need your **help!** If you have not yet paid your 2008 membership dues please consider doing so. We need your support to continue our important programs to preserve the history of our Jewish community for all the generations to come.

The Historical Society receives no financial assistance from the Jewish Federation of Omaha; we depend entirely on membership and donations. Please **help** us to continue our good work and pay your membership dues.

Benefactor membership	\$1000.00
Life membership	500.00
Patron membership	100.00
Sponsor membership	50.00
Basic membership	25.00

Letter From Louise Abrahamson

I continue to be very involved in the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society and I urge each and everyone of to help preserve not only the Present but also more importantly the Past. The information I'm urging you to share with us means a great deal to your family. Your grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the generations to come will be so thankful that you cared enough to preserve your family history. YES, WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Mary Fellman and Oliver Pollak were the pioneers of this wonderful Jewish program. They had great perception and insight that our Jewish population would know the importance of preserving our past for the future. Good and caring people have been working hard and diligently (volunteers are always there to help) to see that the NJHS does not falter. Your membership dues are so vital in continuing to staff the office. Please won't you consider the NJHS when you decide to make your contributions to worthwhile organizations? Renee Ratner Corcoran has worked so hard to keep "the office of the NJHS rolling".

Thank you one and all – Stop by and visit the office. We are open Monday through Thursday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. We are here to serve you - our precious members. New members are always welcome.

Louise Abrahamson
Past President for 3 terms.

With Your Help We Have a Great Past Ahead of Us!

The ongoing campaign to raise money for the "Mary Fellman Permanent Enrichment Fund" continues with generous gifts. The goal of this effort is to provide a permanent fund for the year-to-year operation of the NJHS as well as programs and projects. We are attracting three to five year pledges and gifts from private and public sources.

Donor photos and plaques are displayed on the FRAMING OUR HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS wall outside the NJHS office at the Jewish Community Center. The following names of donors have been included on the wall: Roz Friedman, Iowa West Foundation, Audrey & Joe Kirshenbaum, Rosalie & Milt Saylan, Frances & Norman Batt, Maury Udes, Mickey & George Shafer, Northern Trust, Lois & Lloyd Friedman, Norma & Stan Silverman, the Gary Javitch Family, Patty & Steve Nogg, Sheldon & Marcia Kushner, Sandra & Ed Belgrade, Etta & Harold Epstein, Stanford Lipsey, Sheri & Steve Idelman, the Rose Blumkin Foundation, Inc., the Edward & Beth K. Smith Fund, Shirley Kulakofsky and the Marlene W. Hechtman & Martin N. Staenberg Family.

For brochures describing the goals of this effort, naming opportunities or further information please call 402/334-6442.

In Memory of Bernie Jonisch

Bernie Jonisch, NJHS Board President from 1994 - 1996, passed away at the age of 82 on January 1, 2008 after a long series of health problems. Born in Omaha, Bernice served in WWII and married Sally (Marer). He lived and worked in several other cities as a sales executive and returned to Omaha in 1986 for work and eventually retirement. Bernie and Sally moved to Arizona ten years ago.

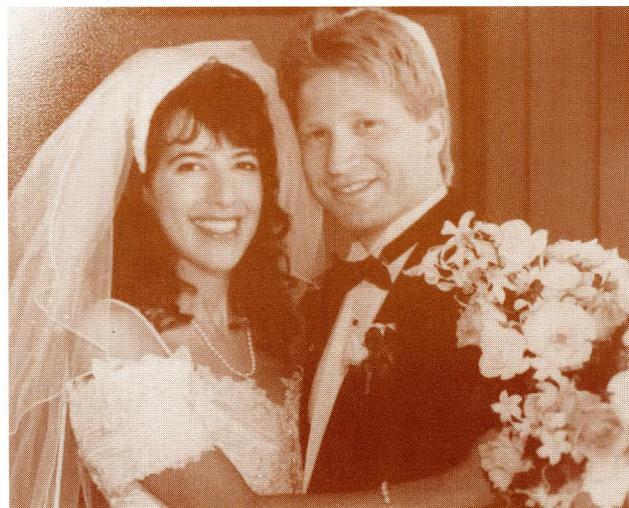
Among the exhibits and programs that took place during Bernie's term of office as President, were: the opening of the Henry and Dorothy Riekes Museum in 1995 and the Goldsten Timeline Wall of Synagogue History in 1996.

Sincere condolences to Sally and their family.



Bernie Jonisch
1926-2006

Can you identify this photo?



Short Notes from the NJHS

An Oral History Update

The following interviews have been added to our collection of oral histories: Bette Alloy, Doris and Harry Alloy, Sam Alloy, Bruce Brodkey, Judy Brodsky, Peggy and Jay Chasen, Helen Rifkin Chorney, Jean Duitch, Etta Epstein, Liberty Faier, Ruth and Harold Fox, Joanne Freeman, Pearl Giventer, Ruth Goldenberg, Dee Goodman, Ethel Grossman, Marilyn Hurwitz, Bernice Kaplan, Mel, Milt and Jerry Katskee, Bob Malashock, Dave Meyers, Sue Meyers, Leo Meyerson, Mike Platt, David Raznick, Jeanne Lipsey Rosenblum, Joyce Swartz, Barbara Seglin, Joye Tatz, Judy Tully, Herb White, Lois and Norm Wine, Blache Wise and Evie Zysman.

The Historical Society has transferred all of our oral history interviews from VHS to DVD. VHS tapes disintegrate while DVD's last much longer. Having all the interviews on DVD makes them much more accessible to everyone. Copies of the interviews now on DVD are available for \$15.00 each and can be obtained by calling 334-6442.

Grocery Store Information Needed

The NJHS would like to hear from families with GROCERY STORE stories from the Omaha and Council Bluffs areas including photographs and memorabilia. Or if you can just provide us with names of GROCERY STORE owners we would also like to hear from you. Please call Renee at 334-6442 or email njhs@jewishomaha.org.

Website Under Construction

The NJHS is currently working on a website, NebraskaJHS.com. Please take a look at it.

Beth El Hazak Tours NJHS

On Sunday, December 16th following a soup, salad and sandwich lunch at the JCC, Hazak members were divided into groups and were given tours of all the NJHS facilities. Helen Rifkin and Renee Corcoran took the groups through the Henry and Dorothy Riekes Museum and the Carl Frohm Archival Center. Included in the tour was the climate control storage area located the basement of the JCC.



NJHS Annual Meeting Set for Sunday, August 3rd

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend the NJHS annual meeting to be held at the Jewish Community Center at 2:00 PM in the JCC auditorium. This year along with the installation of new officers and board members the NJHS will be presenting a documentary about the *Brandeis Store and Family*.

There was a time when every great downtown featured a grand department store. In Omaha it was Brandeis. Join us for the premier of this video about the family and store that dominated our community for so many years. The Alan & Marcia Baer Foundation and Marcia Baer funded this project.



From Midge Bowers, Board President

On behalf of the board, staff and volunteers of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society, I am excited to launch in this newsletter a new project: the research and documentation of Nebraska's Jewish communities outside Lincoln and Omaha.

In an article funded by the Special Donor-Advised Fund of the Jewish Foundation of Omaha, we begin with "Faith in a Faraway Place" about a small number of Jewish families in the northwest corner of our state, the area known as the Panhandle.

As you read about Jewish life in a place that is remote even by Nebraska standards, you may find yourself feeling as I did when I first read it--I wanted to know more. I found myself asking how Nebraska's earliest Jewish residents happened to choose to settle here. What were their occupations? What were the experiences of the Jewish residents in communities like Beatrice, Columbus, Fremont, Hastings, Kearney, Nebraska City, Norfolk, North Platte and York?

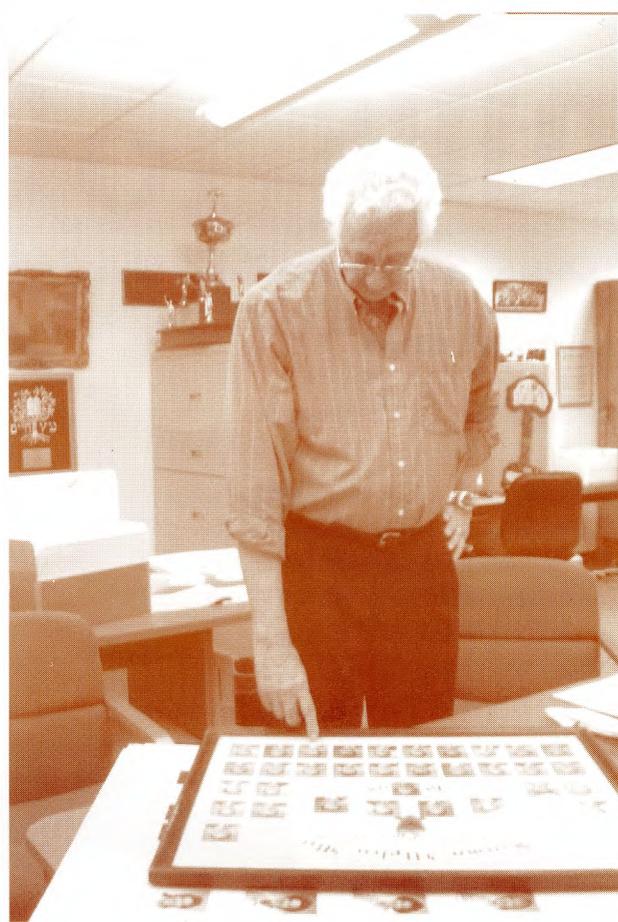
With your help, there will be "more". We are in the process of raising additional funds to publish a full-length journal of these and other accounts of Jewish life in Nebraska communities outside of Omaha and Lincoln. This will allow us to undertake a more complete study of this subject that so far has not been well documented.

I can't begin to tell you how grateful we are for the financial support of the Special Donor-Advised Fund. Also valuable are the photographs and anecdotes many of you have shared with us from your own family histories. These will be incorporated into upcoming newsletters and, once sufficient funding is in place, the full-length journal.

As the project moves forward, we will continue to ask for your help in filling in gaps in our research. Currently, we need help locating more information about Jewish life in rural Nebraska in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. If you are a descendant of one of these families, or know someone who is, we would like to hear from you. Contact NJHS Executive Director Renee Ratner-Corcoran at 402-334-6442, by e-mail at rcorcoran@jewishomaha.org or by mail at 333 S. 132 Street, Omaha, NE, 68154.

I also want to take this opportunity to ask for your ongoing support. We receive no direct funding from the Jewish Federation. Therefore we rely on member support for funding and operating costs so that we can continue to do what no one else can or will do—preserve and document the unique Nebraska Jewish history that is ours to tell.

Being President has been a very enjoyable experience for me giving me the opportunity to learn more in depth about the Jewish people of our state. I plan to continue the work of the Historical Society and want to thank everyone for making my term a positive experience.



Sammy Memorabilia Catalogued

Marshall Becker recently donated his time and efforts to sorting through our large collection of memorabilia from the Sigma Alpha Mu house that was once located on the campus of the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.

New Members

Membership is the key to the strength of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society. We gratefully acknowledge and welcome our new benefactors, life member and members. Thank you for your support.

Benefactor

In memory of Margy Schneider

New Members

Barbara Frohman

Richard Goldman

John & Kay Lynn Goldner

David Raznick

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