

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

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Book Reviews

A Slow, Calculated Lynching: The Story of Clyde Kennard. By Devery S. Anderson. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. 299 pages.

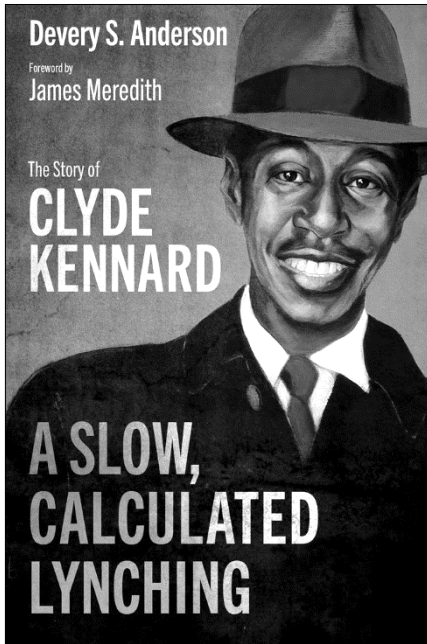
Students of the southern Jewish experience may have first learned of the plight of Clyde Kennard in *The Quiet Voices* (1997), the anthology that Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin coedited that illuminates the southern rabbinate's response to the crisis of civil rights. In a chapter profiling Rabbi Charles Mantinband of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, the British historian Clive Webb devoted a couple of pages to Kennard's attempt to desegregate Mississippi Southern College (MSC), which became the University of Southern Mississippi, in 1962. Kennard was nothing if not persistent; he was also congenitally upbeat. He yearned for change, having seen the wretchedness of white supremacy of his native state from outside. Kennard had spent a decade serving in the U.S. Army in Germany, where he taught denazification, and in Korea, where he made thirty-six jumps as a paratrooper. As a civilian he took classes at the University of Chicago before returning to Forrest County to help his widowed mother manage a chicken farm.

Seeking to further his education, Kennard made three formal attempts—from 1955 until 1959—to enroll at the all-white institution of higher learning closest to the farm. The leadership of MSC justifiably worried that constitutional law was on the applicant's side. After all, in 1950 the Supreme Court had explicitly abandoned the doctrine of "separate but equal" for colleges and universities, even before invalidating Jim Crow in public schools. But rather than get on the right side of history, an option

that Kennard offered MSC, it stonewalled. The school reinterpreted regulations and invented newer requirements. It failed to send the proper forms and provided misleading advice about the admissions process. These delaying tactics frustrated—but did not deter—Kennard. During this process Rabbi Mantinband gave Kennard loyal and open support, Webb noted.

But Kennard was badly outnumbered. He did not realize that his quest attracted the attention of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a secretive and sinister agency that engaged in surveillance. This segregationist, tax-supported *Stasi* tried to find derogatory information on Kennard but came up empty. Then the police, the political order, and the judicial system accomplished what the academic bureaucracy could not indefinitely hope to do. Convicted felons were disqualified from enrollment at any state university or college, so Kennard was framed. In a dry state, police arrested the teetotaler on false charges for possessing two cartons of whiskey in his car, which he had allegedly driven recklessly. More ominously, in 1960 Kennard was convicted—based on perjured testimony—of stealing five sacks of chicken feed (worth about twenty-five dollars) from a warehouse. The all-white jury needed only ten minutes to find the defendant guilty, and the penalty was harsh—seven years (including hard labor) at the notorious Parchman prison farm. Suffering from anemia and then from colon cancer, he was denied crucial medical treatment that might have prolonged and perhaps even saved his life. When the penal system finished him off, Kennard was only thirty-eight years old.

A Slow, Calculated Lynching expands Clive Webb's concise account of Kennard's terrible plight, which represented the cruelty of the racism that pervaded mid-century Mississippi. The author of this superb volume, Devery S. Anderson, is not a historian of southern Jewry. A graduate of the University of Utah, he is primarily a historian of Mormons. But in 2015 he also published what is by far the best book on the murder of Emmett Till, and Anderson's latest work amply displays his remarkable gifts as a researcher. He is exceptionally energetic, thorough, and resourceful. He certainly did not undertake this project looking for Jews, but Anderson evidently cannot help himself. He has identified Kennard's two closest white friends in Hattiesburg—perhaps his *only* real white friends there—and both were Jews. Although Mantinband had moved to Texas shortly



before Kennard died, the prison visits that the rabbi of Temple B'nai Israel made showed an admirable devotion. Mantinband also chaired the Mississippi Council on Human Relations; but because the rabbi did not drive, Kennard sometimes chauffeured him to speaking engagements throughout the state. The rabbi tried to keep Kennard's mind active during his ordeal. One example was the gift of one of the monumental volumes of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

One of Mantinband's congregants also befriended Kennard: Dave Matison, Jr., a merchant.

(This was, after all, the small-town Deep South.) Matison partly owned Hattiesburg's largest department store, Fine Brothers-Matison. His father had immigrated from Minsk half a century earlier, and Kennard became an occasional employee in this family's store in addition to performing household repairs. When he was put on trial, both Mantinband and Matison served as character witnesses and refused to accept Kennard's guilt. Matison nevertheless regarded his friend's effort to desegregate MSC as quixotic and offered to pay for his further education outside of Mississippi. With a bachelor's degree, Matison believed, Kennard would have a better chance to desegregate a graduate or professional school. Webb disapproved of Matison's gesture. Certainly well-intended and generous, it also meant a renunciation of rights. Kennard paid a high price for that principle, which he lived long enough to see vindicated only when James Meredith, who contributes a foreword to Anderson's book, was admitted to Ole Miss in October 1962. (Kennard died the following Independence Day.)

By 1962, a third Jew entered the story that *A Slow, Calculated Lynching* so compellingly presents. After completing his junior year at Brandeis University, Ronald A. Hollander decided to live in Jackson and write for

an independent, pro-civil rights newspaper that militants from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had founded. As an untrained reporter for the *Mississippi Free Press*, the twenty-year-old Long Islander learned of Kennard's unjust imprisonment and worsening health. By early August, Hollander's first story in that newspaper appeared, and he too was nothing if not persistent. By early November, Hollander reached a much larger readership with *The Reporter*, a reliably liberal and influential magazine. It gave Hollander a forum and made the case of Clyde Kennard a national story. Max Ascoli, an Italian-born Jewish philosopher and anti-Fascist activist, was the founder and publisher of *The Reporter*. Ascoli found refuge in New York and married a daughter of Julius Rosenwald, the Sears, Roebuck CEO and visionary philanthropist. Unfortunately, Hollander arrived in Mississippi too late to do the beleaguered subject of his journalism much good. But at least Hollander managed to transfer his full and invaluable files to Anderson before dying in 2022.

Readers of *A Slow, Calculated Lynching* may find it hard to escape the conclusion that the gallant but luckless Kennard was just a little ahead of his time. Only two years after his death, two Black women matriculated without friction at USM. They did not need the legal help that Meredith had required against the recalcitrance of Ole Miss, where he could draw upon two of the very best civil rights lawyers in the nation: Constance Baker Motley and Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. By contrast Kennard felt compelled to reassure MSC and its segregationist supporters that an organization as stigmatized and threatening as the NAACP was not involved in litigation against the university. Medgar Evers offered Kennard unstinting moral support, however, and the NAACP did provide financial aid so that his mother could keep her farm. Kennard recruited R. Jess Brown, and to a lesser extent, Jack Young, as defense attorneys to rebut the false charges in court. The pair constituted exactly half of the state's Black bar. Both lawyers were dedicated and able. But their race handicapped them in court, and their idealistic client would have preferred MSC to admit him on his merits without filing a lawsuit.

Anderson has gained access to trial transcripts as well as to the files of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, and characteristically conducted numerous interviews. A few corroborating details could also have been gleaned from Rabbi P. Allen Krause's 1966 interview with

Mantinband, which is excerpted in *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement* (2016). The rabbi underscored the boldness that was required to serve as a character witness, as he and Matison did, on behalf of a Black citizen who sought to end the segregation of higher education in Mississippi. *A Slow, Calculated Lynching* has everything to do with the mid-century struggle to remedy racial injustice, and ostensibly the fate of Clyde Kennard had nothing to do with the conduct of small-town Jews. Yet their place in this story suggests the difficulty of separating them from the travail of civil rights. From that angle, the reaction of southern rabbis and merchants and their families looks paradigmatic, a token of a larger topic. In Hattiesburg, at least, they partly met the moral challenge.

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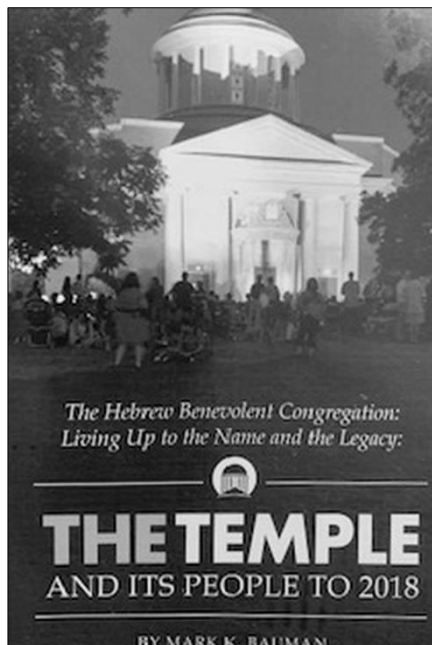
The Temple and Its People to 2018: The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation: Living Up to the Name and the Legacy. By Mark K. Bauman. Atlanta: The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, The Temple, 2023. 280 pages.

The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, better known as “The Temple,” is Atlanta’s preeminent Reform congregation. Officially chartered in 1867, it can be traced back to a society that was founded in 1860. Two events in the congregation’s history stand out: the lynching of congregation member Leo Frank in 1915 and the bombing of the congregation’s building in 1958. Both cases illustrate not only the reluctance of the local government and the legal system to address deeply rooted racism, anti-semitism, and extrajudicial killings, but also the fragility of Jewish acceptance. The Frank case has been extensively covered by scholars and writers. Many readers outside of the South will be less familiar with the other deeply unsettling event. On October 12, 1958, The Temple made national news when several white supremacists who called themselves the “Confederate Underground” detonated fifty sticks of dynamite, causing considerable damage to the congregation’s edifice. Due to several fortunate circumstances, no one was injured in the attack. The bombing was motivated at least in part by Rabbi Jacob Rothschild’s courageous

advocacy of civil rights. The bombing occurred, not quite coincidentally, when Atlanta was reinventing itself into an international business center. In contrast to 1915, the city's establishment, led by Mayor William B. Hartsfield, quickly condemned the attack. Yet no perpetrator was ever convicted.

In 1996 the writer Melissa Fay Greene published *The Temple Bombing*, a detailed history of this episode. She provided some background about the congregation's history. A detailed history of The Temple, to add to Steven Hertzberg's historical survey of Atlanta Jewry, *Strangers within the Gate City* (1978), remains a desideratum. In 2017, several years before The Temple celebrated the 150th anniversary of its founding, Mark K. Bauman began collecting material about the congregation's history. The result is not a historical overview. *The Temple and Its People to 2018* is instead an extensive and detailed chronology of major events in the history of the congregation.

Houses of worship have formed an essential component of American society from the earliest days of the European settlement. Many religious congregations have published accounts about their history, sometimes repeatedly. These range from handwritten reports and small pamphlets to beautifully bound and richly illustrated volumes. Some are simple timelines; others are longer narrative accounts. Only a tiny number of these histories can be characterized as critically informed academic studies. Most book-length histories of congregations have been commissioned by their boards, usually on the occasion of an important anniversary. These internal histories tend to sidestep problematic aspects of congregational history and usually aim to reach a readership consisting of the members of these religious communities. Not surprisingly, internal histories devote much attention to leaders at



the expense of inclusiveness. Quite a few internal congregational histories nevertheless contain valuable information and can be put to good use by scholars of American religious history. *The Temple and Its People to 2018* belongs to this category.

Published by the congregation, this volume is a rather unusual hybrid. Longer narrative passages are organized along a chronology of the congregation's history. The book lacks illustrations other than a couple of photos on the front and back covers. A recognized specialist in southern Jewish history, Bauman has assembled much useful detail about Atlanta Jewry, about the city itself, and about events on the national and even international level. Unfortunately, there is no index, which would have been helpful in looking up specific events and figures. A three-page bibliography sheds light on works about Jewish history in Atlanta and the South. The timeline is divided into six time periods. For each period Bauman provides a very brief overview. Each section contains dozens of dates (only years, not months or days), each with a brief summary of events. For some years up to twenty events are discussed. Some events and appointments receive several paragraphs, others barely a sentence. It remains unclear whether these events are listed in chronological order for each year.

No statistics or tables are provided. For some years Bauman shares a few numbers about Atlanta's Jewish and general population. But the reader cannot track the development of the congregation's membership over the last century and a half. This lacuna is a pity because one important question is how a prominent urban congregation coped with suburbanization and with the coexistence of Conservative and Orthodox congregations—in a city that became a major center of Jewish life beginning about six decades ago. Did Jews who moved from the Northeast and Midwest join The Temple, or did they mostly affiliate with the newer suburban congregations? Moreover, it remains unclear whether The Temple became a metropolitan congregation that has been able to attract younger members from the suburbs. A brief discussion of these changes on page 189 does not provide answers to these questions. I also wondered what relationships The Temple fostered with other Atlanta congregations, not least with the famous Ebenezer Baptist Church, which Martin Luther King, Jr., and his father served. These unanswered questions point to the shortcomings of the encyclopedic timeline approach that Bauman adopted.

Nor is it clear which criteria he used in determining which events and other features to include. For instance, readers will find much information about women and women's organizations, but very little about members who fought in World War I and World War II. The names of dozens of board members are mentioned, as well as the dates of their service and the offices they held. For members of the congregation that published this volume, such information matters. But it also overloads the text with much that will not pique the curiosity of other potential readers. Bauman could have moved some of this material into appendices or placed it online. No map of the city is provided. It takes considerable time to figure out when the congregation moved in its long history, because that information is buried in the timeline. For basic facts, readers may find the congregation's website easier to navigate. There already exists an account of the rabbis who served The Temple, as well as major events in its history.

One major challenge for any author seeking to write the history of a congregation is the availability of historical records. Most American congregations are highly mobile. Older congregations have frequently relocated, following their members to new neighborhoods. Repeated moves, the lack of space for documents, indifference to the value of appreciating the past, and transitions in leadership explain why few congregations maintain adequate archives. Bauman's timeline indicates that he pulled a lot of material not from The Temple's archive (if it actually exists) but from Jewish and other periodicals. Here energy and ingenuity met necessity. He sometimes provides dates (although only calendar years) and quotations, but unfortunately, he provides no citations.

The encyclopedic timeline approach of this volume comes with yet another downside. Less than a page is devoted to the 1958 bombing, which made national headlines. The Frank case also receives remarkably limited attention. According to the timeline, Frank was a member of The Temple and married a local woman in 1910. One of his attorneys also belonged to the congregation. In passing, Bauman remarks that many members of The Temple fled the city after the lynching. Most readers would undoubtedly be curious to learn more. Despite the limitations of this volume, it constitutes a valuable contribution to southern Jewish history and to the genre of congregational histories. Bauman's achievement will hopefully inspire a critical history of this major American congregation. The Temple has

offered a unifying vision in a city (and a nation) still struggling to overcome the bitter legacy of bigotry.

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Jewish Historical Societies: Navigating the Professional–Amateur Divide.

Edited by Joel Gereboff and Jonathan L. Friedmann. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2023. 288 pages.

With this new volume, Joel Gereboff and Jonathan Friedmann have sparked an important conversation about and for American Jewish historical societies. It is a call to action, of sorts. Although, as the coeditors rightly state, more unites these organizations than divides them, rarely do they come together and learn from each other. Perhaps this volume will change that.

A study of six of the nation's forty regional Jewish historical societies, the book tells a collective story of perseverance spanning more than six decades. In his introductory essay, Gereboff, associate professor of religious studies at Arizona State University, provides scholarly context for the field of American Jewish history – namely, the major players and the important publications – and the place of historical societies in it. Many of the societies, however, were built by committed amateur historians and advocates. Their ranks suggest, as the volume's subtitle makes clear, a divide between academically trained historians and amateurs. According to Gereboff, this has been largely in the “standards, tools, methods, analysis, and contextualization” used in the presentation and construction of the Jewish story in America but can also be seen in the missions and directions of the societies. An underlying question in the book is whether the gap can be bridged. The activities of all six historical societies featured show the myriad ways in which bridges have been built and are being imagined for the future.

The second chapter, by George M. Goodwin, longtime editor of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Society's (RIJHS) publication, *The Notes*, analyzes the ups and downs of that society's evolution and provides insights on the history and politics of the region. For example, what he calls

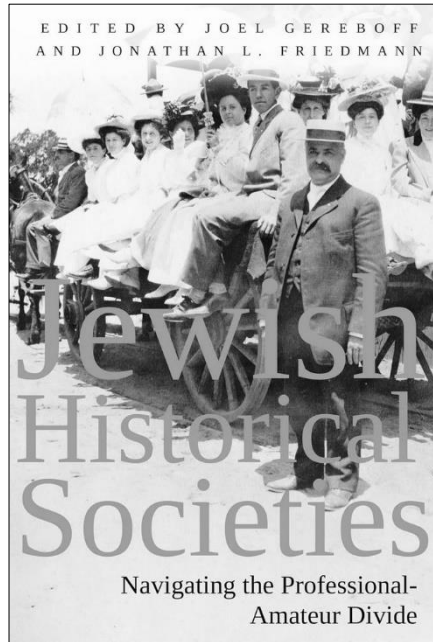
the “state’s Jewish tug of war between the condemnation of hatred and the celebration of freedom” (93) makes for an interesting read. Friedmann’s subsequent chapter on the Western States Jewish History Association (WSJHA), which he now directs, is a well-researched and thorough account of its split with the older Southern California Jewish Historical Society (SCJHS) and the battle over their shared journal, *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*. Unfortunately, at triple the length of the other essays, Friedmann’s piece creates a significant imbalance in the volume.

Long associated with the Southern Jewish Historical Society and its well-respected publication, *Southern Jewish History*, Mark K. Bauman takes deserved pride in the SJHS and how it continues to act on its mission and successfully reaches out to different groups. He writes: “The Scott and Donna Langston archival grant program, active participation of numerous archivists and museum professionals, the encouragement of individuals to donate materials to archives, and publications in the journal have fostered the development and expansion of archives and museums in the region” (180). The final three essays cover more recent history in far fewer pages: Jeanne Abrams discusses the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society (RMJHS) and Beck Archives; Catherine Cangany writes of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan (JHSM); and Lawrence Bell highlights the Arizona Jewish Historical Society (AZJHS).

The RMJHS provides an interesting model in that it combines a historical society with an archive (Beck) and ties them both to a university (Denver). Its minijournal ceased publication in 2008, while the JHSM’s journal, *Michigan Jewish History*, was relaunched in 2020 as a peer-reviewed publication in order “to attract higher-quality work and academic authors’ consideration” (198). In this case, a deliberate effort is made to bridge the divide. Finally, the AZJHS appears to be the least bothered by the professional–amateur divide; its *raison d’être*, as articulated by its executive director, harkens back to some of the earliest (nonacademic) missions of these societies. “We are not primarily interested in ‘problematizing’ the Jewish experience but rather in cultivating Jewish identity and presenting a positive image of Jews to those outside our community,” Bell claims. “There is plenty of self-critique and infighting to go around. I want people to feel good about being Jewish” (223).

Since a small cadre of people started many of these societies, and much of their work focused on publishing journals (a venue where the professional–amateur divide is most apparent), the volume disproportionately concentrates on these older and some might say drier stories. As someone who works in publishing, I found these histories fascinating; it is not clear, however, precisely what the discourse is intended to encourage. The volume includes an appendix of all local and regional Jewish historical societies, along with the year of their founding, the names of their journals, their websites, and missions. In what ways are the six chosen for this volume representative of the group? Thanks to the list, we know how many are now inactive, but how many others hover on the brink of dissolution? What does this trend mean? How do the societies measure short-term and long-term success? Their stories also involve issues that plague most legacy nonprofit organizations. Their challenge is finding ways to reach out to a younger audience, as well as funding for staff and resources, and continued relevance (both physically and virtually) in an ever-changing landscape.

Given our current digital age, the subject receives surprisingly scant attention in this book, particularly considering this professional–amateur divide. As the editors suggest, “In all cases, accessibility of archival material has become central, with digitization and online cataloguing playing increasing roles” (8). In short, everybody wants to digitize and have an online presence. But what that online presence looks like is a contested subject between professionals and lay people. The level of curation, for example, that online sources might receive offers but one example. Even regarding conventional publishing, the authors must know the connection between a journal’s digital availability and frequency of citation.



Addressing access and cost to these initiatives impacts the professional-amateur divide, particularly if they are too costly or require subscriptions.

Despite the bumps in the road these societies have faced, the general tone of *Jewish Historical Societies* remains optimistic. Goodwin nevertheless calls the future of the RIJHS, the oldest of these organizations, a “mixed bag” (100). Its endowment has nearly doubled, and it has moved into a more visible and adaptable space, but its membership has declined considerably. The WSJHA has relaunched and revamped its history journal, *Western States Jewish History*, and maintained its online Jewish Museum of the American West. But Friedmann thinks it is too soon to tell if they are successful. Meanwhile, Bauman concludes that the SJHS enjoys an enviable position, with a “dramatically growing endowment and stable organizational structure” (188). With her article titled “Our Star is Rising,” Cangany’s vision for the inclusion of a new museum in the JHSM is both bold and inspiring. It aims “to protect and preserve Jewish Michigan’s material culture, to offer engaging and relevant histories for today’s diverse audiences, to partner with high-profile organizations within and beyond the Jewish community, and to hold on to our core while also stretching our reach” (204).

The RMJHS is charting a new course with the recent retirement of longtime director Jeanne Abrams and the hiring of Joshua Furman as her successor. A search for a new curator of the Beck archives recently resulted in the hiring of David Fasman. Finally, the youngest of the societies discussed, the AZJHS (est. 1981) has plotted its own path with the building of a new Holocaust education center, increased interfaith partnerships, a diverse range of programming, and use of its space. “The more we diversify and get away from the Arizona Jewish story,” executive director Bell concludes, “the more Jewish transplants and non-Jews are attracted to our offerings” (225). This assessment records a shift in how to define the agenda of a Jewish historical society, which others may replicate, and is a story worth following.

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The Life and Letters of Samuel Ellsworth Fleet: An Immigrant's Tale. By Jerome Novey. Independently published via Amazon, 2023. 270 pages.

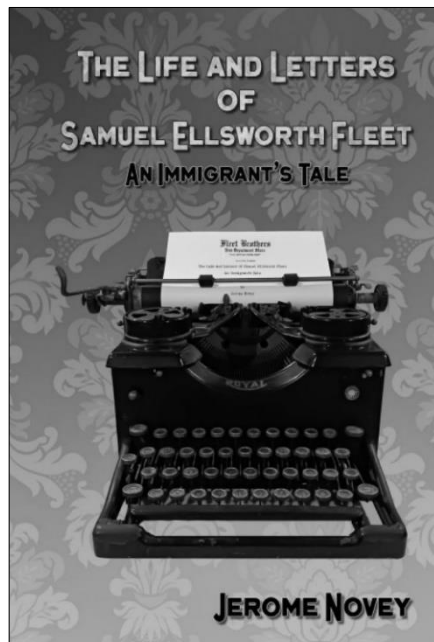
We are like cut flowers; we die without roots, which are our collective memories. Some southern Jews do not have the benefit of learning much about their ancestors. Only a tiny percentage left any paper trail for their descendants to recover and consider and reproduce. The Fleets are not among those unlucky families, because Jerome Novey has reconstructed the past of his kin, and this “immigrant’s tale” constitutes a microcosm of the experience of many Jewish families. This vivid volume rescues one family from the obscurity to which so many others have been consigned. An attorney based in Tallahassee, Novey has lovingly chronicled his family’s story through a selection of 10 percent of 1,500 letters that his grandfather Samuel Fleet wrote mostly to relatives between 1917 and 1984. Because “his handwriting was illegible,” Novey mentions that Fleet typed the letters on a manual typewriter and saved carbon copies. Happily, his grandson provides some political and geographical context as well.

Both an author and editor, Novey employs a narrative approach to the book. He usually prints entire letters (complete with dates and salutations); some of the primary sources are excerpts. The family name had been Pasinik under the tsars, although when it was changed to Fleet, or by whom, is unclear. The family was hardly exceptional in fleeing from the horror of pogroms to seek religious freedom and economic opportunity in the *Goldene Medina*, yet unusual in seeking refuge and a better life in Florida. From the state’s early history, hospitality to Jewish immigrants could not have been easily predicted. Spain had taken possession of Florida in 1513, and until 1763 when the Treaty of Paris transferred possession to Great Britain, only Catholics—among European immigrants—were allowed to live in the colony. By the nineteenth century, Jews began settling in the tiny towns below Georgia. In 1845, when Florida achieved statehood, fewer than a hundred Jews lived there. By 1900 six Jewish congregations existed. Fourteen years later, the state housed fewer than eight thousand Jews, of whom the largest number lived in Jacksonville.

Samuel Fleet, the eldest of Sarah and Jacob Fleet’s six sons and two daughters, was conceived in Balta, Ukraine, but born in a Philadelphia tenement in 1892. A strong-willed wife encouraged her husband to move

to the South to maximize the benefits for a growing family. With two hundred dollars and eleven-year-old Sam, Jacob took a Clyde Line steamship in 1903 to Florida and landed among the tiny Jewish community of Live Oak, about eighty-five miles west of Jacksonville. Seven years later, after the rest of the family arrived, Jacob and Sarah had accumulated enough resources from washing and pressing laundry to open a small retail shop. Theirs illustrates the typical saga of the emergence of Jewish merchants on the main streets and crossroads of southern villages and towns. What started as a small dry goods store in 1910 became a department store four years later. An expanding business enabled the Fleets to acquire real estate, a goal of many immigrants because Jews were usually forbidden to own land in the Old World. Live Oak prospered primarily because a local lumber company provided materials for the prefabricated home catalog business of Sears, Roebuck of Chicago.

Yet even in this remote town, Sarah and Jacob Fleet gave their children a strong Jewish life. Along with other Jewish families settled in Live Oak, they hired a *shochet* who also taught Hebrew and Judaism to the children. Lacking a separate synagogue, worship services took place at the Masonic Temple. In 1914 Sam married Minnie Mendelson of Jacksonville, a sign of adherence to tradition. In my efforts to document Florida Jewish history, I was amazed to discover that even in small Jewish communities, Jews found other Jews to marry. Jacob also took pride in his acquired citizenship. When he died in spring 1945, Sam was sitting shiva for Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sam Fleet balanced a business career with an active civic life in his adopted town. His letters reflect resourcefulness, adaptability, political acumen, and a sense of humor, as well as consciousness of his Jewish identity. Although bigotry characterized communities like Live Oak, Sam claimed not to fear the Ku Klux



Klan. He knew most of its members, “having sold them their sheets—seconds with the holes already in place.” Novey admits that “Sam may have embellished the tale with the ‘seconds’ flourish,” the lower-quality sheets.

His letters are poetic, full of wisdom, and not sparing of advice to his relatives, of whom Sam was sometimes critical. The themes of resilience, Jewish continuity, education, family loyalty, and friendship stand out. The topics range from God to taxes, but his basic message seems to have been the unknowable character of life, its ultimate mysteriousness. In letters to Novey’s parents, Sam conveys his understanding that the biggest obstacle to happiness resides in “our own emotions.” The body nevertheless makes its own claims. Beginning in 1962, his wife Minnie suffered the first of several strokes that left her bedridden until her death eight years later. At the age of eighty, Sam married Dora Sugarman Kusnitz of Rome, Georgia, whom he met while attending a bar mitzvah in Atlanta. Prior to his second marriage in 1972, he visited Israel—a destination about as different from Live Oak as one could imagine. Upon his return, Sam wrote that the visit “gave him an additional reason for being most happy to live in the U.S.A.” He reflected that Israel is a haven for those “folks” who have been deprived of their freedom, that anyone who wants to work hard can survive there without fear, and that socialism had deprived most of any incentive to accumulate an estate.

The letters, spanning six generations, faithfully reflect the southern Jewish experience. Sam’s voice comes across with immediacy, “as if he was sitting across the kitchen table, as we often did during his lifetime,” Novey remarks. His grandfather exuded confidence and optimism throughout his life. He exhibited curiosity about people and deeply cared about those around him. Whatever the uncertainties and challenges of life in the twenty-first century, Novey points to the precariousness of Jewish life when the family fled Ukraine—the baseline of this “immigrant’s tale” and its consequential southern chapters.

I first learned of Samuel Fleet through Maynard Abrams, an attorney who lived in Hollywood, Florida. He served as mayor and was president of the *MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida* project that evolved into the Jewish Museum of Florida on Miami Beach. Abrams married Gertrude Mendelson, whose mother Bessie Fleet was Sam’s sister. Gertrude’s father Louis was a brother of Sam’s first wife. Abrams wrote a history of Gertrude’s

family that included extensive family trees. The earliest items that he gave me for the *MOSAIC* project included a detailed front-page Live Oak newspaper article about the 1916 brit milah of Joel Fleet, a son of Sam and Minnie. The 1940 ketubah of Joel and Margaret Fleet and many family photos were donated to the collection of the museum. Thus I have known of the Fleet family for four decades. But not until this book did I grasp the durability and tenacity of its patriarch.

As a cultural anthropologist focusing on Florida Jewish communal history, I wish that Novey had supplied his readers with a family tree, so that they could identify more fully the recipients of the letters and their relationship to Sam. One grandchild of Minnie and Sam is Adele Fleet Bacow, the wife of Lawrence “Larry” Bacow, who became the twenty-ninth president of Harvard University. I was amused to read Sam’s birthday letter to Larry, enclosing five dollars, a sum that the patriarch sent annually to all of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well as their spouses. The grandchildren reciprocated with correspondence that paid tribute to Sam’s estimable character and charming personality. *The Life and Letters of Samuel Ellsworth Fleet* thus constitutes a glowing contribution to the family records that enhance southern Jewish historiography.

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Most Fortunate Unfortunates: The Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans.

By Marlene Trestman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023. 336 pages.

Marlene Trestman approaches her subject with passionate interest born of her own experience. As related in the preface to her study of the Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans (hereafter referred to as the Home), she lost both of her parents by age eleven and was placed with a loving foster family. She attended day camp and ballet classes at the Jewish Community Center that was housed in the Home’s former building. The author also attended the Isidore Newman School that the Home had established. Acknowledging her personal connection to the Home and its

history, Trestman celebrates its accomplishments, but she does not shy away from its shortcomings. Hers is the first complete history of this influential institution.

Trestman's comprehensive and engaging study is enhanced by photographs and the recollections of Home alumni. Her book chronicles the development of the Home against the backdrop of American and Jewish history, conditions in the city of New Orleans, and the evolution of theory and practice in the dependent childcare field. In many respects, the Home's story resembles those of other American—and specifically American Jewish—orphans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Trestman also highlights some unique features of the Home, expanding knowledge of the history of both child welfare and southern Jewry. Her study addresses issues of race, class, and gender as they factor in the Home's story.

The association that created the Jewish Orphans' Home of New Orleans was formed in March 1855 in response to the recurring yellow fever epidemics in the city. New Orleans was a propitious site for such an institution. There Ursuline nuns founded the first orphanage in what became the United States as early as 1726. Other Christian groups established childcare institutions in the city, which boasted a number of Jewish charitable societies. The Home was not the first Jewish orphanage in the country. The South Carolina Hebrew Orphan Society had been formed in 1801 to place Jewish orphans in private homes, and the Jewish Foster Home of Philadelphia was established in 1855, six months before the New Orleans institution was built. However, the New Orleans Home was the first American Jewish orphanage to have its own building. The Home's founders and early leaders—including Gershom Kursheedt, James Gutheim, Meyer Simpson, and Joseph Marks—were prominent members of the city's Jewish community.

From its founding through its closing in 1946, the Home cared for a total of 1,623 full and half orphans, as well as twenty-four adult women, mostly widows. After 1924 the admission policy expanded to include any child "without adequate means of support" or "proper care or supervision" (188). Although half of the Home's residents were between the ages of five and ten, the New Orleans directors were unusual in accepting children under age two. Dues paid by association members and voluntary donations funded the orphanage. Beginning in 1875, District Grand

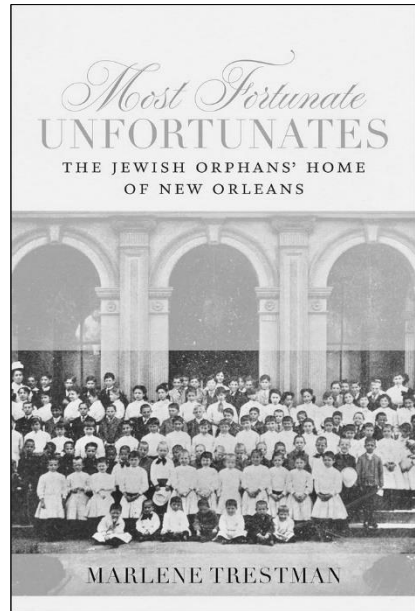
Lodge #7 of the International Order of B'nai B'rith also made annual contributions. A regional institution, the orphanage served seven mid-South states -- Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Compared to the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York and the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum, for instance, the New Orleans Home was small. Its largest enrollment was 173 in 1915.

Like other American orphanages in the nineteenth century, the Home had a regimented atmosphere in its early decades. Children were summoned to meals and other activities

by a clanging bell, slept in barracks-style dormitories, and ate at long tables. However, the Home's small size softened some of these features, allowing for more individual attention.

In the early twentieth century, childcare experts began to criticize institutional settings. Increasingly, they advocated for home care for dependent children, either with their families (subsidized by mothers' pensions) or in foster homes. Orphanage directors experienced mounting pressure to make their institutions as home-like as possible. They were encouraged to nurture children's individuality, to provide more social and recreational activities, and to promote their wards' greater integration into the larger community. The New Orleans Home's board and staff responded by introducing smaller bedrooms to replace the dormitories and family-style dining. Youngsters attended synagogues and enjoyed clubs, team sports, musical instruction and performances, overnight summer camp experiences, birthday celebrations, and more visiting opportunities with parents and relatives.

Like many other American Jewish orphanages, the Home's religious program reflected Reform Jewish practice as favored by the founders. Despite a bylaw that required adherence to Jewish dietary laws, the orphanage served shrimp and ham to its young charges by the early



twentieth century, and the children enjoyed both Passover matzo and Easter eggs. After 1880, when more eastern European immigrant children gained admittance to the Home, they received the same Reform-style religious training, which sometimes distanced them from their more observant immigrant parents.

Some aspects of the Home's history distinguish it from the experience of other American Jewish orphanages and enrich our understanding of the New Orleans Jewish community. At least fourteen of the Home's thirty founders owned slaves, including children. Trestman describes this situation as "moral dissonance" (17) with their support for the home. Other founders, even if they did not own slaves, profited from slavery in some way because it was intertwined with the city's economy. During the bitter Civil War years, the Home's leaders provided food and clothing to Confederate troops. Four of the leaders (including Rabbi Gutheim and his family) were expelled from the city because they refused to swear allegiance to the United States, as the occupying Union forces required in September 1862. The Home later hired Black staff members as housekeepers, custodians, cooks and, most commonly, nursery workers for its youngest children. As Trestman notes, middle- and upper-class white families in New Orleans often employed Black women as caregivers for young children at the time. She comments that "while segregationist laws and societal norms precluded public interactions between the races . . . close relationships between Black staff and white children flourished in the Home's private spaces" (182).

Moreover, unlike some other nineteenth-century general and Jewish orphanages, women were not among the founders of the New Orleans Home and did not have decision-making authority in the early years. They donated funds to the institution and served as paid matrons and teachers, and also as volunteer "honorary matrons" who helped supervise the matrons. Only in 1914 were women finally accepted as voting members of the Home's association and as members of its board.

The New Orleans Home experienced its share of challenges and accomplishments. In 1865, an Orleans Parish Grand Jury report deemed the orphanage to be dirty and "badly managed" (57). A serious episode occurred in 1886, when a superintendent was fired after an accusation of sexual assault of a fifteen-year-old female ward. Yet Trestman notes that the Home's leaders and staff were generally devoted to the children they

served. The institution always provided quality medical and dental care. As early as 1883, the directors introduced a kindergarten soon after that educational innovation arrived in New Orleans. And in 1904, the Home created the Isidore Newman School, a unique coeducational, nondenominational school that served Home wards as well as children from the general community. The school originally offered manual training along with regular subjects and later evolved into a premier private college preparatory school that still exists.

Trestman notes that the Home's directors were slower than their counterparts in other Jewish childcare institutions around the country to recognize noninstitutional care as the wave of the future. She points out that their preference for institutional over foster care typified New Orleans institutions at the time. But by the 1940s, the Home's enrollment declined sharply due to new governmental programs that provided support to impoverished families, consistent with expert advice. The financial difficulties of maintaining an aging building with a dwindling resident population, as well as the death of the long-time superintendent Harry Ginsburg, forced the Home to close its doors in 1946. In its place, the Jewish Children's Regional Service (JCRS) was created to support dependent children and their families, referring only those with particular emotional or behavioral needs to institutions. Today, the JCRS serves at-risk, dependent, and financially challenged Jewish children and families in Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee.

Many alumni had fond memories of growing up in the orphanage and believed that the Home provided them excellent care. According to Trestman, while some alumni "expressed sadness or bitterness about a policy or practice, such as the regimented schedule and discipline, . . . the vast majority . . . expressed gratitude for the care and opportunities the Home provided and the strong bonds they forged with fellow residents and staff" (3). Quite a few alumni went on to higher education and to illustrious careers in various fields. Trestman takes the title of her book from alumnus Louis Peters, who declared in 1980: "Fortunate unfortunates. That's what we were—we kids who were raised in the Jewish Children's Home in New Orleans."

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Peddlers, Merchants, and Manufacturers: How Jewish Entrepreneurs Built Economy and Community in Upcountry South Carolina. By Diane Catherine Vecchio. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2023. 202 pages.

Diane Catherine Vecchio has made an important contribution to Jewish immigration and economic history by explicating the movement of Jews into South Carolina's Upcountry, a ten-county region located in the state's northwestern section. By showing how Jews successfully negotiated its social, cultural, and economic environment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she fills in an important missing piece of a larger, better-known picture. While this story has many similarities with Jews living elsewhere, there are overlooked aspects, particularly the mostly neglected Jewish contributions to the Upcountry's economic development. As Vecchio observes, "Jewish garment manufacturers have gone unnoticed" and more broadly "the Jews of the Upcountry have gone unnoticed" (4).

Focusing on the Upcountry's Jewish peddlers, merchants, and manufacturers, Vecchio combines her extensive experience in immigration history with oral histories, memoirs, and other primary and secondary sources. She demonstrates that these entrepreneurs left the country's northern and southern regions, as well as Russia and other European locations, and intentionally came to the Upcountry. It offered business opportunities and kinship networks, shaped by larger economic forces. Less familiar features match these familiar patterns. Upcountry Jews, like many in the South, rarely belonged to the working class, unlike their counterparts who settled in larger cities such as late nineteenth-century New York City. Instead, they lived as middle and upper-middle-class merchants and manufacturers, steadily using the resources and opportunities of their stature to make further advances and contributions. These, however, were not without serious economic challenges and setbacks, accompanying sporadic yet persistent antisemitism.

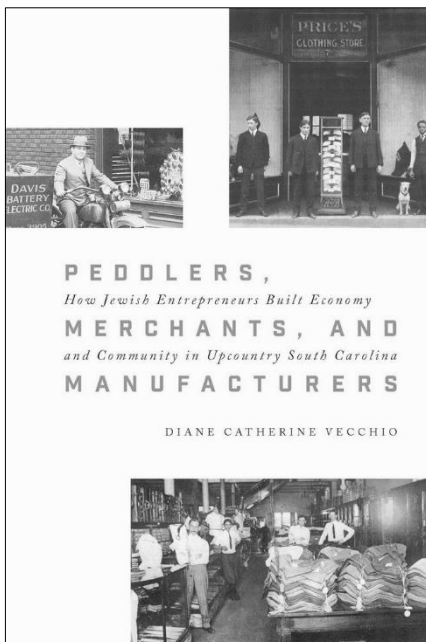
Vecchio progresses in a largely chronological fashion. After over-viewing the Upcountry's broader colonial context in South Carolina and the South, she details how the Upcountry's shift after the Civil War from an agricultural to industrialized society created better transportation networks and increased urbanization, which in turn attracted Jewish "risk-

takers." As in other places, Upcountry Jews commonly began as peddlers. They were welcomed for the needed goods they could provide their White and Black customers. While many peddlers prospered, success was not guaranteed, often leaving erstwhile entrepreneurs decades to establish themselves in communities. Nonetheless, these successful Jewish merchants formed a foundation for their ranks to grow.

With the coming of the twentieth century, a growing textile manufacturing industry, which had been gradually moving from New England to the South, attracted more Jews into the Upcountry. The cities of Spartanburg and Greenville, along with some smaller cities, became the area's industrial centers. Many Jewish entrepreneurs focused on retail clothing merchandising, providing the latest fashionable styles from New York to customers and securing jobs for Jewish families and friends. Despite such valued services, discriminatory practices prevented merchants from obtaining much-needed credit from traditional sources. Nonetheless, the region's Jewish social networks and communities responded by offering alternative credit sources.

Vecchio's third chapter demonstrates the residual impact of the growing Jewish population in the Upcountry and the business success that

followed. Not surprisingly, as Jewish communities grew, they began creating religious organizations and self-help associations, with the Spartanburg Jewish community organizing the area's first congregation in 1905. Jews also increasingly interacted with non-Jewish populations by joining fraternal organizations and civic life, which, according to Vecchio, "were a crucial means for Jews to fit into southern communal life" (64). They accrued social benefits by virtue of work as businesspeople, rather than as factory and sweat shop laborers. Capitalizing on the positive associations of



business with progress and the New South, Upcountry Jews encountered fewer social divisions between Jews and non-Jews than their counterparts nationally. Participation in World War I, including Jewish women's involvement in the Red Cross and War Bond campaigns, furthered positive perceptions. Finally, the ability of Jews to afford houses in better neighborhoods helped them to avoid establishing ethnic enclaves, in part because there were too few Jews to do so, but also due to favorable attitudes toward them.

In the decades between the world wars, Upcountry Jews continued to exhibit characteristics found in other Jewish communities but also varied in other ways. As New England textile companies looked to states where wages were lower and where labor unions were unwelcome, employers increasingly moved to the South. Foreign-born and American-born Jews alike increasingly came to the Upcountry and established companies, particularly in apparel manufacturing. Many were successful but not all, which, like Jewish communities elsewhere, led to a fluid population. Some families remained for decades, while others moved on after brief stays. Most of the successful businesses demonstrated an "intergenerational family business succession" (81), which allows Vecchio to challenge the claim that southern Jewish fathers built businesses for the sons who did not want them. During this period, Jews in the Upcountry, like Jews elsewhere, continued to assimilate primarily through home ownership, citizenship, and education. This integration, however, occurred more rapidly than in other parts of the country, largely due to the continued absence of distinctive Jewish enclaves.

After World War II, the Upcountry became an "industrial powerhouse" and entered "a golden decade of prosperity" (119). Jewish entrepreneurs in textiles and apparel manufacturing benefited from and contributed to a period of corporate consolidation and technological innovation. This process reflected Jewish involvement in the relocation of capital from the North to the South that Vecchio contends has been overlooked. Astoundingly, at least thirty or more Jewish-owned garment factories opened in the Upcountry between 1940 and 1970. The Teszler, Nachman, and Lowenstein families, as well as Shepard Saltzman, Max Heller, David Krieger, and Max Shore, were among those building successful companies. Divisive labor issues, however, continued to challenge these companies. Vecchio concludes that the area's Jewish manufacturers

were generally more open to labor unions than their non-Jewish counterparts. At the same time, Jewish-Black relations followed patterns typical in the region. While Upcountry Jewish businesspeople may have had friendly relations with their Black clientele, they rarely offered public support for civil rights and desegregation.

Beginning in the 1970s, technological developments and foreign competition made it difficult for textile and garment manufacturers to compete, and many of them went out of business. Jewish merchants in small towns, however, often survived longer than those in cities. At the same time, Jewish business owners frequently became involved in local politics. Vecchio focuses on Max Heller, who was elected mayor of Greenville, and his counterpart in Spartanburg, William (Bill) Barnet. Their political successes in office merit the attention that Vecchio gives them. A comparable treatment of small-town Jewish mayors, however, would provide valuable points of comparison and deepen our understanding of the connections between Jewish business activities and political activity in the Upcountry.

Jewish entrepreneurs there operated in a context of larger economic and social forces over multiple generations. These businessmen employed multiple strategies to build their companies and, by extension, to enhance their Jewish and local communities. Not unique either as businesspeople or as southern Jews or as American Jews, yet they effectively responded to local, regional, and national conditions and deserve the scholarship that Diane Vecchio has lavished upon this topic. Depicting the interplay of Jews with the South Carolina Upcountry ranks as her most compelling contribution to the study of southern Jewry.

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