

THE
**JEWISH
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

of **SOUTH CAROLINA**

Register now for
spring meeting
in
Charleston and
Summerville, SC
May 20-21,
2017



Volume XXII Number 1 Spring 2017

171
KING
STREET
by
NORMA
MAZO



THE
JEWISH
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

Dale Rosengarten
editor

Alyssa Neely
assistant editor
and designer

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issues can be found at
jhssc.org

On the cover: 171 King Street
by Norma Mazo Perlmutter,
1934. Sketches of George and
Sonia Mazo's grocery and deli
on King Street, drawn by their
daughter Norma. Courtesy of
Benjamin and Samuel Means.



Right: Aleck Ellison, circa
1930, in Ellison's Dry Goods,
560 King Street, Charleston,
SC, forerunner to Ellison's
Dress Shop. Special Collections,
College of Charleston.

In this issue

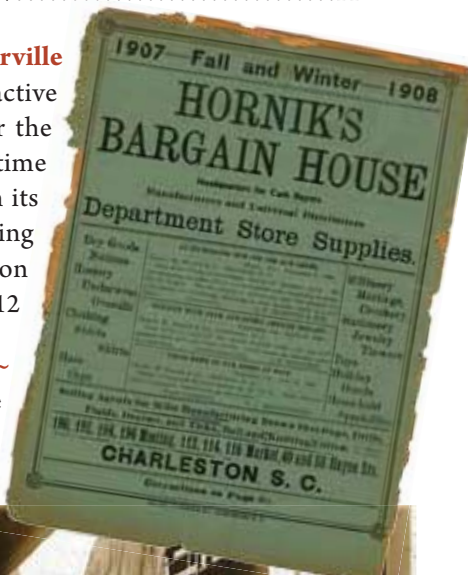
“Little Jerusalem” ~ Alyssa Neely and Dale Rosengarten ~ This photo essay features some of the many Eastern European Jewish immigrants who helped to shape Charleston’s commercial district in the 20th century. It heralds a new online exhibit titled *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, which showcases numerous images of Jewish life in the port city from the era of the American Revolution to the present. 4

“The ‘Kingdom of Israel’ in this town”: Jewish Merchants in Antebellum Charleston ~ Shari Rabin ~ Jewish merchants in 19th-century Charleston, like non-Jews, were subject to the vagaries of running a business. It was important to cultivate relationships and earn a good reputation. Early credit reports not only assessed the soundness of a merchant’s finances, but revealed his standing in the community. Jewish identity also was noted in the evaluations. 8

“The ‘Kingdom of Israel’ in this town”: Jewish Merchants of Charleston and Summerville ~ JHSSC meets in Charleston and Summerville, May 20 – 21, 2017. 11

From Pineland to Flowertown: Jewish Merchants of Summerville ~ Spencer Lynch ~ Summerville, South Carolina, was attractive to Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s for the economic opportunities it offered as a health resort. Over time it proved to be valuable for its proximity to Charleston with its Jewish institutions. This Summerville native describes growing up among the pines, while going to school at the Charleston Hebrew Institute and Porter Gaud. 12

A New Project and a New Endowment ~ Martin Perlmutter ~ The Society sets its sights on broader horizons with the announcement of an ambitious history project and a new means for raising funds. 15



Letter from the President

The Jewish Historical Society’s Fall 2016 meeting in Greenville provided a wonderful opportunity to meet members of Beth Israel Congregation and learn about the region’s rich history. On Saturday we listened as keynoter Diane Vecchio and participants in two panels traced the arc of change in Jewish life in the Upstate since the 19th century—a progression from peddling to retail and manufacturing to professional occupations, and from Old Country ways to Upcountry identities. Our Sunday panel and afternoon tour focused on the life and contributions of visionary mayor Max Heller, who is widely credited with inspiring today’s vibrant urban fabric of downtown Greenville.

JHSSC’s board and officers warmly invite you to our Spring 2017 meeting, **“The ‘Kingdom of Israel’ in this Town”: Jewish Merchants of Charleston and Summerville**, May 20th and 21st. The weekend will begin with a walking tour of Charleston’s King Street and continue, after lunch, with a lecture by Steve Litvin, a professor in the College of Charleston School of Business, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Dr. Litvin will describe the transformation of King Street over the past century, setting the stage for two panels of local experts: “Kings and Queens of King Street” will present eye-witness experiences of merchants who remember when King Street was something of a Jewish Mecca. “The New Royalty” will bring us into the present, as Upper King evolves into an upscale shopping and entertainment district, with bars and restaurants replacing dry-goods and furniture stores.

Between these two panels, College of Charleston faculty Shari Rabin, Harlan Greene, and Dale Rosengarten will introduce the audience to *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, an online exhibition created under the auspices of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. The afternoon will wrap up with a reception at Norman’s Patio, behind the College’s kosher dining hall, which surely represents one of the latest of Charleston’s Jewish “firsts.”

On Sunday the conference moves 25 miles west to Summerville, popularly known as “Flowertown in the Pines.” Famous for its azaleas and the invention of sweet tea, Summerville emerged in the 1890s as a world-class health resort, attractive

especially to patients with respiratory problems. Jewish-owned shops once peppered picturesque Hutchinson Square in downtown Summerville. In partnership with the Summerville Dorchester Museum, we have arranged to meet for lunch just off the Square and hear from members of families who were among these early merchants. Together we will unveil a state historical marker, a permanent reminder of the significance of Summerville’s Jewish community, and take a walking tour of nearby sites. The program will conclude—you guessed it—with sweet tea, served at the former home of storekeeper and philanthropist Saul Alexander.

The May meeting is designed to launch a research project now on the Society’s drawing boards—an effort to document



Congregation Beth Israel of Greenville celebrated its 100th anniversary with the dedication of an historic marker, October 22, 2016. Photo by Jeri Perlmutter.

Jewish-owned stores, past and present, across South Carolina. We propose to collect written memoirs, oral histories, and photographs of businesses and the people who ran them, and artifacts such as account books, lay-away ledgers, advertisements, invoices, and correspondence. Once compiled, the information and images will be presented on JHSSC’s website. Archival material, if donated, will be housed and catalogued by the College of Charleston’s Jewish Heritage Collection.

Why make this particular subject a centerpiece of our work? The history of Jews in the South, indeed, throughout the Diaspora, is dominated by the narrative of immigrant peddlers selling their wares in rural backwaters. After some level of success, peddlers would open stores in small towns or a neighboring city and become part of the civic fabric of that place. The Jews of South Carolina in the 19th and 20th centuries follow this characteristic pattern, including my family, which at one time or another operated at least 16 stores in the state, from the cities of Columbia and Charleston (including three businesses on King Street) to Abbeville, Greenwood, Kingstree, Manning, and other small towns. My siblings and I spent years working in Marcus Department Store in Eutawville, established in 1901 by my peddler grandfather, Morris Marcus. The importance of family stores in the economic and social history of Jewish life in South Carolina is hard to overstate, and I am delighted to help document this story.

Hope to see you in May!

Ernest L. Marcus

“The ‘Kingdom of Israel’ in this town”: Jewish Merchants in Antebellum Charleston

by Shari Rabin

In 1845 pharmacist Philip M. Cohen (1808–1879) was described as “a Jew . . . doing a large fine bus[iness who] has made [considerable] money. In[dustrious] and indefatigable.”¹

This evaluation comes not from a letter or a newspaper article, but rather, from America’s earliest credit reports. In 1841 the Mercantile

medical degree and was well connected in the city. His wife was Cordelia Moïse (1810–1869), a member of a prominent local family, and his uncle—also his wife’s step-father—was Hyam Cohen (1788–1850), Charleston’s city assessor.³ Yet, despite his status, by 1855 his business had failed.

Jews were prominent in many aspects of Charleston’s public life, and a number of them were fabulously wealthy. But Jewish merchants were a diverse lot, including men and women, immigrant and native born, well-to-do and of modest means. Their businesses ranged from pharmacies and groceries to hardware shops and dry goods stores. Through these various activities, Jews made their way in the city, although success was neither easy nor guaranteed. No matter their background or line of business, Jewish merchants discovered that what mattered most were relationships and reputations.

According to the credit reports, in the late 1840s Cohen was worth \$20,000, had a good reputation, and owned a home and “several negros.”⁴ Slave-owning marked Cohen as a typical, if relatively well-off, Charleston Jew. Members of Charleston’s Jewish merchant community regularly owned slaves and several worked with much success as slave traders.⁵ Whatever their “commodity” of choice, however, Jewish merchants’ economic status was not certain to rise. Many Jewish merchants, especially immigrants, floated into town, failed to achieve economic stability, and left soon after.

Even for a native Charlestonian like Cohen, business was not easy. Mounting debts, robust competition, and disasters all could trouble economic life. By 1853 Cohen was working with a Jewish partner named Philip Wineman and was falling behind on payments to their creditors.⁶ Next, a fire broke out at his place of business and though they had insurance, it did not cover their costs. Popular opinion held that “even if he [should] recover the insurance money (wh[ich] is somewhat

doubtful) he will be worth, when ‘boiled down to cash’ about one dollar.” This turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

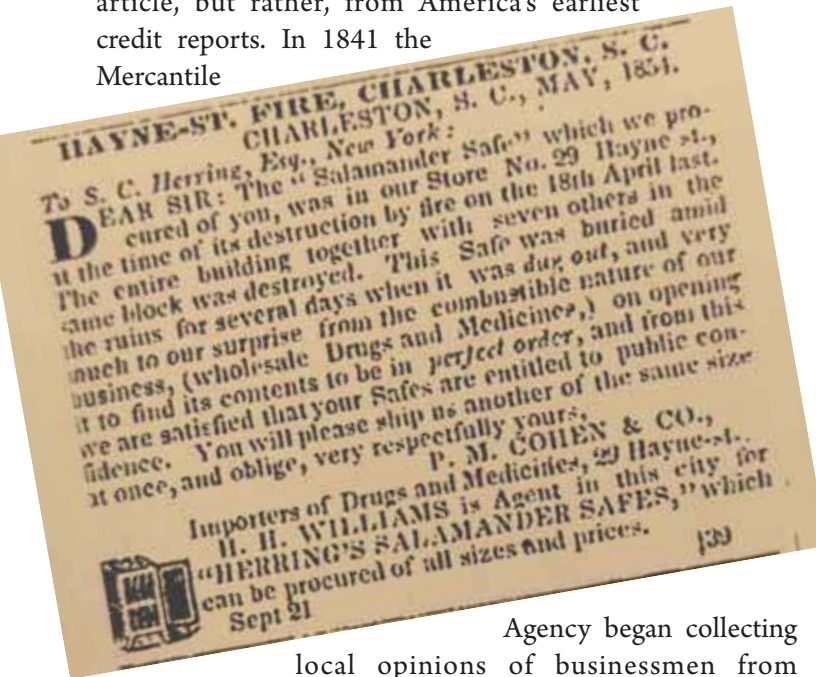
By February 1855 the store had failed.⁷ The following year, with backing from friends, Cohen opened a more modest drugstore and operated it under his wife’s name to avoid association with his previous failure.⁸ While it is unclear how active Cordelia was in this new business, other women did enjoy an independent status as “feme sole” or “sole trader.” These were single women, widows, and wives whose husbands gave permission for them to conduct business and own property.⁹

Jewish men and women alike entered into business with non-Jews, though they often worked with co-religionists, if not relatives. Philip M. Cohen’s brother Lawrence L. Cohen, also a Medical College graduate, joined him in the business; by 1841 their uncle Hyam—with whom Philip and Cordelia lived, first on Broad Street and later on Tradd—moved his

cousin, Edwin, was an auctioneer and grocer who rented space at 28 Vendue Range, an address with a history of occupation by Jewish merchants.¹² He had entered into business as a clerk for a Jewish firm and in 1853 went into business on his own.¹³

Whether between Jews and non-Jews or among Jews, business relationships were not always harmonious. When his business failed, Cohen’s stock was purchased by Benjamin Mordecai, a fellow Jew who later became a prominent supporter of the Confederate cause.¹⁴ Mordecai was a wealthy slave trader, and the credit reporters estimated that he purchased the store’s stock at half of its actual value.¹⁵ He turned the store over to J. H. Ashurst, the former bookkeeper, and kept Wineman on as clerk, pushing Cohen out.¹⁶

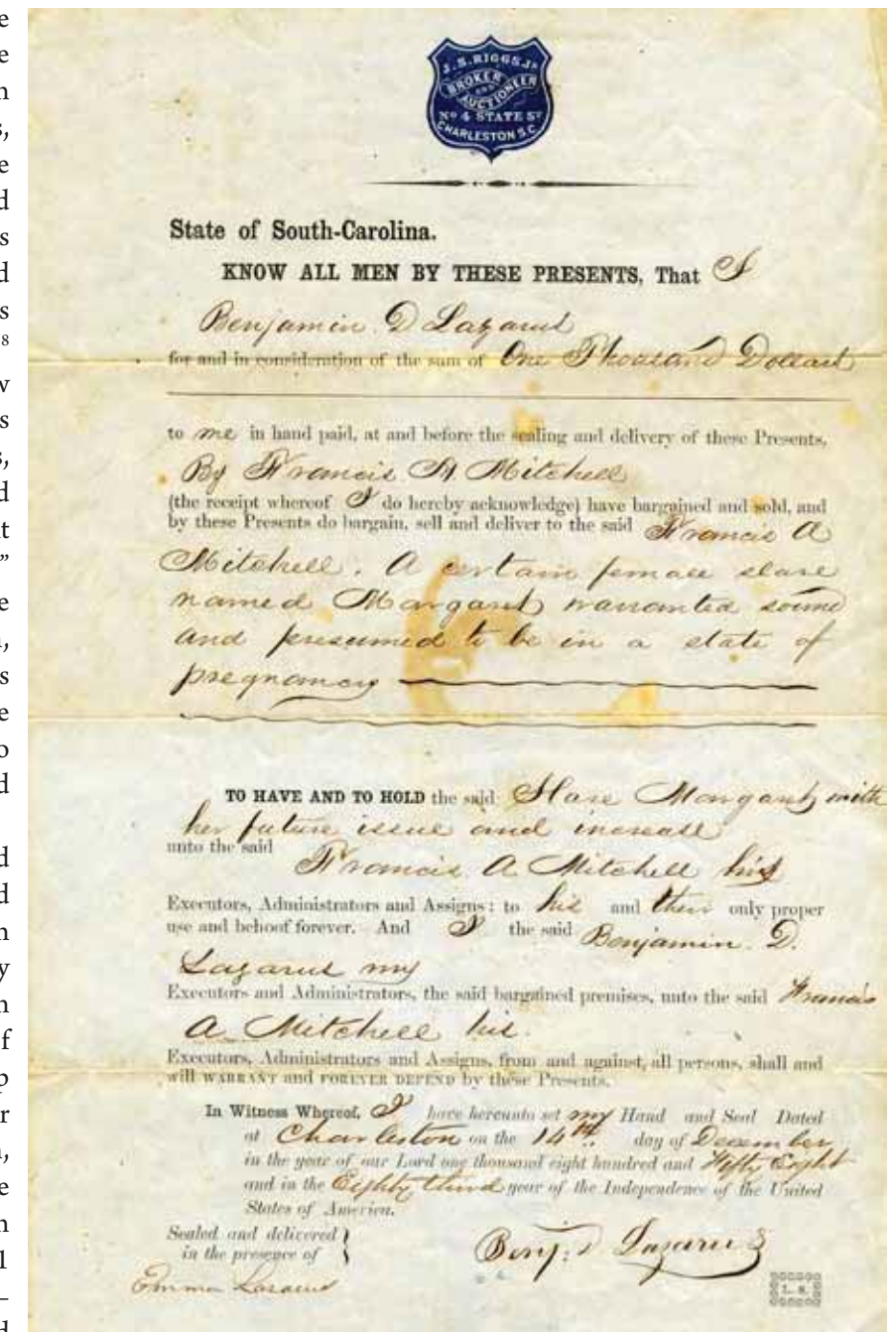
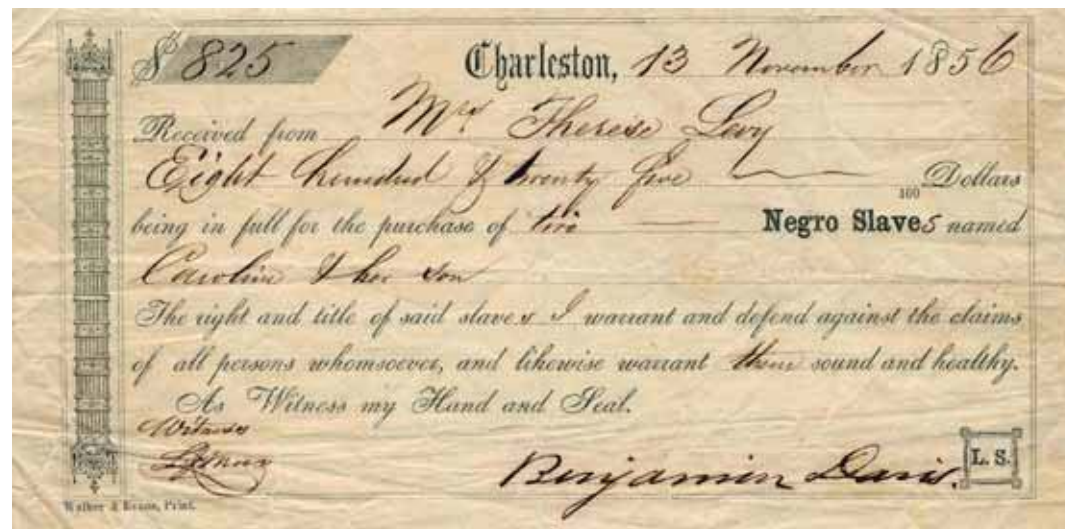
While these relationships determined access to capital, reputation shaped access to credit, which was becoming increasingly important in the mid-19th century.¹⁷ Moïse and Grierson were deemed “steady and temperate” although Moïse’s “style of living”—considering that he owned no property—seemed to the credit reporter “unsuit[able].” Potential creditors, he determined, should thus be “very cautious.”¹⁸ Of Edwin Moïse, in 1853 one credit reporter could “see 0/0 [nothing] to prevent him from getting



Agency began collecting local opinions of businessmen from correspondents across the country, with an eye toward determining their creditworthiness. These records are a remarkable and largely untapped source for exploring the businesses and reputations of Charleston Jews. Further evidence of their activities can be found in newspapers, census data, city directories, and archival collections, which have been explored anew by historical researcher Sarah Fick as part of *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, an ambitious digital project from the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. Philip M. Cohen’s activities are particularly well documented in these sources, which makes his story a useful one for understanding the broader world of Jewish business in antebellum Charleston.

Cohen, who sold wholesale “drugs, chemicals, perfumery, paints, oils, dye stuffs, brushes, surgical instruments, patent medicines, and fancy articles,” was hardworking, but also relatively privileged.² He was a native son with a

Receipt dated November 13, 1856, for the purchase of two slaves, “Caroline and her son,” by Mrs. Therese Levy from Benjamin Davis. Special Collections, College of Charleston.



Bill of sale for the slave “Margaret with her future issue and increase,” dated December 14, 1858, purchased for \$1,000 by Francis A. Mitchell from Benjamin D. Lazarus. Courtesy Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

office to their building at 63 Broad.¹⁰ They later moved to 29 Hayne Street, where among Cohen’s customers was one of his wife’s Moïse cousins, Philip Augustus. He operated a drug store at 221 King Street with two gentiles, John J. Ward, who eventually left the firm, and John J. Grierson.¹¹ Another Moïse

his share of 'plunder' out of this wide world." By March 1856, however, he had quit business and was described as "character below par."¹⁹

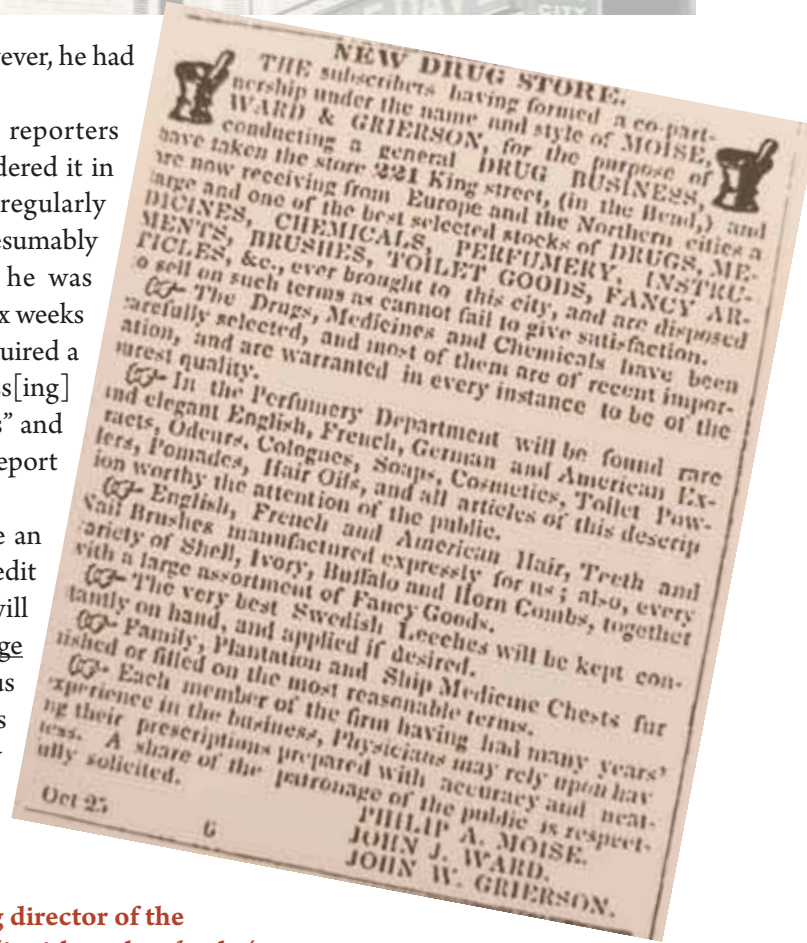
Besides noting financial and personal attributes, credit reporters often mentioned the Jewish identity of the merchant and considered it in evaluating creditworthiness.²⁰ Descriptions of Philip Cohen regularly mentioned he was a "Jew," sometimes differentiating him as a (presumably more trustworthy) "Native Jew." After his failure, however, he was described as "an Israelite indeed but not without guile."²¹ Within six weeks of Benjamin Mordecai's takeover of Cohen's business, it had "acquired a very smutty reputation." The new owner was described as "possess[ing] of a large share of the qualities so generally attributed to Israelites" and the new firm as a "Jew Concern" and "JEWS from A to Z." The report elaborated, "If paying is profitable + politic they will pay."²²

Jewish identity could be a liability, then, but it could also be an asset. When Moïse and Grierson opened for business, the credit reporter noted that competition was fierce, but predicted they "will get the patronage of the 'Kingdom of Israel' in this town, a large Kingdom."²³ In the first half of the 19th century, even as religious reform and sectional politics were on the rise, Charleston Jews were working to put food on their tables. Many of them did so by buying and selling commodities, work in which their Jewishness shaped their business relationships, their financial identities, and their economic trajectories.

Shari Rabin is assistant professor of Jewish Studies and acting director of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture, <http://jewishsouth.cofc.edu/>

NOTES

1. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 28, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.
2. *Charleston Courier*, January 13, 1845, 3.
3. Sarah Fick, 1833 Research for *Mapping Jewish Charleston*, Special Collections, College of Charleston, 2016.
4. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 28, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
5. James William Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 91-106.
6. *Ibid.*, appendix p. 411.
7. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 187, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
8. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 238. Ads described him as "P. Melvin Cohen of 'Cohen's Medical Depot,'" *Charleston Mercury*, February 12, 1857, 2.
9. Fick, 1833 Research for *Mapping Jewish Charleston*.
10. *Ibid.*
11. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 218, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes; Ads, *Charleston Courier*, October 28, 1854, 3.
12. Fick, 1833 Research for *Mapping Jewish Charleston*.
13. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 189, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
14. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 187; Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 41.
15. South Carolina, Vol. 7, p. 457, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
16. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 259.
17. Josh Lauer, "From Rumor to Written Record: Credit Reporting and the Invention of Financial Identity in Nineteenth-Century America," *Technology and Culture* (April 2008), 301-324.
18. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 218, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
19. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 189.
20. Rowena Olegario, "'The Mysterious People': Jewish Merchants, Transparency, and Community in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," *The Business History Review* (Summer 1999), 161-189; Gerald Tulchinsky, "'Said to be a very honest Jew:' The R. G. Dun Credit Reports and Jewish Business Activity in Mid-19th Century Montreal," *Urban History Review* (February 1990), 200-209.
21. South Carolina, Vol. 6, pp. 28, 238, R.G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes.
22. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 187, 259.
23. South Carolina, Vol. 6, p. 218.



"The 'Kingdom of Israel' in this town": Jewish Merchants of Charleston and Summerville

May 20-21, 2017 ~ Charleston and Summerville, South Carolina

Saturday, May 20 ~ Charleston Sat. events take place in the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, 96 Wentworth St.

- 10:00 A.M.** King Street Walking Tour – meet at 96 Wentworth Street
- 11:30** Registration
- 11:45 – 12:30 P.M.** Lunch
- 12:30 – 1:30** **The Transformation of King Street: The Price of Success** – Steve Litvin, Professor, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Charleston
- 1:30 – 1:45** Break
- 1:45 – 2:45** Panel discussion – **Kings and Queens of King Street**
Moderator: Dale Rosengarten
Panelists: Steve Berlin, Nicky Bluestein, Rosemary "Binky" Read Cohen, Harold I. Fox, Leonard Goldberg, Barry Kalinsky, Sam Kirshtein, Allan Livingstain, Eileen Rabin Sorota
- 2:45 – 3:45** **Mapping Jewish Charleston** – presentation by Harlan Greene, Shari Rabin, and Dale Rosengarten
- 3:45 – 4:00** Break
- 4:00 – 5:15** Panel discussion – **The New Royalty**
Moderator: Randi Weinstein
Panelists: Ben D'Alessandro, Joe Fischbein, Eli Hyman, Joseph Jacobson, Jerry Scheer
- 5:15 – 6:30** **Reception** – Norman's Patio, behind Marty's Place, 96 Wentworth Street

Sunday, May 21 ~ Charleston and Summerville

- 9:00 – 10:30 A.M.** Open JHSSC board meeting, 96 Wentworth Street, Charleston—everyone is invited!
- 11:30** Lunch at **Eclectic Chef**, 125 Central Avenue (Short Central), Summerville – parking available on W. Richardson Avenue or in the town parking deck (free) on Short Central, off of W. Richardson
- 12:30 – 1:00 P.M.** Dedication of marker – Central Avenue, across from Eclectic Chef
- 1:15 – 2:30** Panel discussion – **Jewish Life in Flowertown** – Summerville Downtown YMCA, 208 W. Doty Avenue
Moderator: Spencer Lynch
Panelists: Sallie Wolper Boyles, Jane Barshay Burns, Marjorie Levy Lynch, Paul Lynch, Rosalyn Kramer Monat-Haller, Vivian Rose
- 2:30** Walking tour of downtown Summerville Jewish heritage sites or driving tour of historic Jewish homes
Immediately following the tour, attendees are cordially invited to tea at the Saul Alexander home, 409 Central Avenue, Summerville, now the residence of Vivian and Mike Rose.

Hotel reservations

Francis Marion Hotel

387 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403
(843) 722-0600 or (877) 756-2121

Special rate: \$269 per night + tax

To get the special rate, make your reservation by midnight on April 19 and mention "Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina."

Meeting registration

Online at: jhssc.org/events/upcoming
with Visa, MasterCard, OR Discover, or American Express

By check, payable to JHSSC c/o Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program – 96 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29424

Meeting fee: \$50 per person

Questions: Enid Idelsohn, idelsohne@cofc.edu
Phone: (843) 953-3918 ~ fax: (843) 953-7624