

## CHAPTER 9

### CURRENT—THE REMAINING STORIES

#### 1940

Burt Jaegar, Alvin Labens, and Irwin Kaufman met with the author to discuss their knowledge of the growth and history of the Clarksdale Jewish community after 1940. They each agreed that it was in the 1940's and 1950's that the Jewish community blossomed because the young men were bringing their mates home to start their families. Irwin Kaufman said he was growing up during World War II and remembered the rationing only "seem[ed] to affect the families that had someone serving in the armed forces."<sup>1</sup> However, Alvin Labens mentioned that the merchants were affected because "there were no hose; they were parachutes, not hose."<sup>2</sup>

#### CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

Corinne said: "We did have a rabbi, but I can't remember his name that was there from 1938 to 1945. He got fired. I can't remember his name. His daughter's name was Ruth. His wife was a sick woman. They lived where Mrs. Carnes' lived on Maple Street, but I can't remember his name. We had him, I guess, around four years. During the war, we had him mostly during the war."<sup>3</sup>

According to newspaper articles, first Rabbi G. J. Feigon, St. Louis, Missouri. However, evidence also shows Rabbi Benjamin Kelson served as senior rabbi when Tolochko left.<sup>4</sup>

#### SISTERHOOD, HADASSAH, B'NAI B'RITH

Corinne said:

About 1940/1941, I was president four years. I was reelected after the end of the 2nd year. Two-year terms...[for] the Sisterhood. That was wartime. That was when things were rationed: gasoline was rationed; food was rationed; everything you know, and at that time they wanted to have the district meeting in Clarksdale. Then entire district, that was Tennessee, Louisiana, (I believe Louisiana, I'm not sure), Arkansas. It was the District, and it was up to me to decide whether to have it or not. I cancelled it because of the gas rationing, and it was wartime. That was no time to have conventions, I mean, in my belief. So, I didn't have it. But we raised money through Union-grams and different little projects. As I said: during my term we bought the organ for the temple.

[Some of the really active members included] Pearl Binder and Cissy Weiss...my treasurer, and Polly Sack no, Lillie Labens, was my secretary. And I don't know what Polly was, but she was something. Pearl Binder was my vice president. Pearl Binder-Cohen then. After me was Pearl, and then when they gave the [convention,] Pearl wanted the convention, the District, convention in Clarksdale. She was president at that time. This was after the war because I was president all during the war, Well, we had a wonderful convention. They came from everywhere all over the state, all over Arkansas. Rabbi Meyerberg, who married me, from Kansas City, was the main speaker at the convention. [It lasted from Thursday or Friday night, and I think Saturday.] I don't remember, but I know, I can't tell you what days it was. [The out-of-town members]...stayed at the hotel. They didn't provide homes. In those days, they didn't have the meals catered. The women/members did the catering. I think the hotel provided the food cause we had the last night, the installation of new officers, was at the Alcazar Hotel. That

was the night that Celeste Orkin will never forget. We had duck. It was half a duck, and it hung over the plate. Celeste will never forget that. They came from everywhere. Oh yea, We had a marvelous crowd—Little Rock. They came from Little Rock; they came from Memphis. They came from the Sisterhoods from Tennessee. It was Arkansas and Mississippi mostly. I believe it was Louisiana also. I'm not sure. I know they took in Louisiana later, but at that time I think it was just Mississippi and Arkansas. We asked Ira to come and speak, and he couldn't. [That was Corinne's first cousin, Rabbi Ira Sanders, Little Rock.] We had a good delegation from Little Rock.

We did things towards the war. We made bandages; we did a lot of volunteer work. We were active with the Red Cross. No we didn't have an USO, but we were active with the training field at our airport.

Passover, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashanah, we took the Jewish boys to our homes, and we had Seders in our home. We didn't have community Seders. Yes, Kline came about 1947 after my daddy died...the year before the war ended,

I kept the Temple going every Friday night. We had minsters or layman to come in or from the congregation to continue the services. We had every Friday night.

[Projects after the war included;] raffles, and we had, I don't think we had dinners, I don't remember having dinners only on the holidays. You know, we would have Seder suppers when Rabbi Kline came in—we had Seder suppers. We didn't have community Seders until he came. I think that is when they started publishing a little pamphlet. I believe that was the period...so much has happened.

I've forgotten half of it. After the war and the girls began coming back with their husbands, like Sylvia, Harriet, and Florine Marks, and Shirley Levine, and all that bunch, and Faye May, they all came in, and they is when the Sisterhood changed.

We began having luncheons; we always had a program. We had speakers to come in; we would have different things; I don't remember what. We had musicals; I provided that other people would come in and sing, or give a program. I had a lot of the Opera Study Club [members] to come over and perform. But we had nice programs; we always had good programs. But the girls began to change things up in a very modern way after Sarah Lurie.

Well, [Sarah] was the last president after Pearl. No Bea Binder was after [Pearl, then] Sarah Lurie was Bea Binder. I think that's when things began to change. Well we're in the 50's now. It became like it is today. Your know, like luncheons, funds to build on, quotas to meet. We never had quotas when I was in, nor Pearl Binder. The main thing was Union-grams. They helped build the Sunday school building. They gave certain books to certain rooms, and all I think we made the curtain on the stage. I'm not certain. I wouldn't say yes. I don't remember. We did a lot for the Sunday school. We spent a lot of money, we raised a lot of money, don't ask me how, I don't remember.

[The author asked: 'You had auctions, jewelry auctions and things like that, didn't you? Or did that have to do with something else?'] We had antique shows with Edith Jacobson...in the 70's, I guess.

Oh, gosh yes, we raised lots of money. That was the biggest thing we ever did. Then those bulbs. Those Holland bulbs. All that was in the 70's. Those girls worked hard Sylvia, and Faye, and Bernice May, and Bebe Binder did what she could. She worked in her store a lot, but she helped. And then there was Dotty Lipson, and Sylvia, and did I say Natalie Ross...It was that group of women. Shirley Levine, they all worked Hermine Basist. They all worked. They supported the organization. They supported the temple.

Hadassah started...when Daisy Aronoff came to town. It became a competitive force with Sisterhood, and it became very competitive with B'nai B'rith Auxiliary. In fact, we had to fold up [because] there were too many quotas. Everybody had a quota. Especially Hadassah had about five quotas to meet. I can't tell you anything about Hadassah. I did participate, I attended some of the meetings. Paid my dues. I was a member.

B'nai B'rith Auxiliary was formed by Dottie Turner, [and] Sylvia [because] we had a very active B'nai B'rith. The men's organization was very active. They wanted an auxiliary to go to the meetings and participate. That's right They were very strong. It was entirely a men's organization.

It started about 1934. Well, I think Jake Fink was a strong member. They were all strong members of the B'nai B'rith until we had a little confusion. [Some of the presidents included Isidor], Harry Magdovitz, Jake Fink, Herman Damsker, Abe Block. They didn't do much. They had dances occasionally. [Isidor] collected money for B'nai B'rith [Home in Memphis]. Took the money up to the home. That's how he got on the Board. He went around and collected for the B'nai B'rith Home when they had their big meeting Then they put daddy on after the 1st year. Then they put daddy on the board.<sup>5</sup>

## **LABENS**

### **ALVIN**

According to Alvin about the social life for the young adults:

Before I left it was very good. I never missed a dance. It was better for the boys than the girls as they had to have dates. The only dances before the war was the La Tova Club which included my mother's contemporaries. Even in the 20's they had the dances for Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. I was born on Thanksgiving in 1923 and my mother had to miss the dance that night. The driving force was Rose Friedman. Because she was a take-charge lady and a shaker. She was very civic.

I was in and out during the 1920s and 1930s with the poker games. One time Sam Schwartz Sr. pulled a knife on Hymen Kantor and tried to cut his throat when he was called a 'son of a bitch.' They had both pinochle and poker going at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

## **1941-1944**

According to Labens,

Business in the 40's was good but it started [in 1941]. This included both revenue from cotton and the war. Clarksdale had an air base and USO to bring in monies; Strutwear was the first industry that came in during the 50's. Sports included Cotton States League which was well attended. During the war they had a German prison at the ballpark on Fourth Street. The girls met the Italians and Germans. E. J. Mullins, Jr. entertained the Commodore of the German POW in his home. He was using them as house labor because you didn't have to pay a prisoner, but you did have to pay the blacks.<sup>7</sup>

## **CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL**

According to Alvin Labens: "Feigon was orthodox; Tolochko left because he had antagonized one person. If you look at the list of immigrants coming in, there were enough votes in one family to vote him out. Others said it didn't work with the reform rabbi so they went back to the orthodox; then he left and Kelson came in. He was a Harvard graduate; he had a wife who was terminally ill and he didn't have time to give to the community."<sup>8</sup>

Irwin Kaufman said: "Kelson was a very soft spoken man. He lived down by the Isaascons."<sup>9</sup>

January 16, 1941      According to the newspaper article, Rabbi Benjamin Kelson was installed as the senior rabbi.<sup>10</sup>

1945:                      A classified ad shows Rabbi Benjamin Kelson left on August 1.

## LABENS

### ALVIN

In 1941 to 1943, I was going to school. There a large Jewish population. I had an uncle who had gone to school there. I was not in optometry. I had chosen forestry because I wanted a career that was outdoor. [While] I was at LSU, I signed up in Fall 1942 in a special program (A group of us had enlisted in what they the 'Enlisted Reserve.') It took two quarters and they called us up in spring 1943. Training was in Paris, Texas at Camp Maxey. We called it the 'Jap Trap' because they decided it was unfit for the Japanese POW's. They washed out the program and put us in regular army. We were in the 393 Regiment, K Company. Reheler was at LSU with me and was with me through most of this.

Flash Gordon and Ed Allenberg were at Tulane and they did the same thing. I met them because we were the same unit—the same division. Flash Gordon and Ed Allenberg, Allenberg Parking. Ed was killed in the Battle of the Bulge (October 16, 1944). Flash Gordon came back and ran the Allenberg Parking, tested AGC (Army General Classification) 10 miles north of 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

[In] 1944 [we were] sent over Italy Beach blood battle. Trained the 2nd time in regular camp. 3 regiments: 393-394-395 (Third battalion)-K Company Followed with his army experience...in Paris. Tx-Camp Maxey 'Jap Trap'... They decided it was unfit for the Japanese POWs. 1st Jap Trap' \_not fit for others—Adjunct to Maxey.<sup>11</sup>

[In April, 1946: Discharge (2) enlisted Merchant Marines—monies for nines.] By September 1946 back in Wednesdays were closed in the mercantile business. My daddy bought me civilian clothes in Memphis.

## OKUN

### NAT

Louis Rhodin, Nat Okun's son-in-law, reported this about Nat's services during WWII:

Pearl Harbor was in December and [Nat] went into service the following May, I think. He didn't come home until like November after the war ended in April [1945]...He had a rabbit in Europe, two and six, based on the French money or English money. He was in a supply section so he had the ability to take this rabbit around with him. He was under Patton in that particular division. He had that rabbit all the way until he came home. When he was leaving, he gave it to this little French or English girl and made them promise that they wouldn't eat it.<sup>12</sup>

### SENIOR BINGO GROUP

About this time several Jewish mothers decided to join their married daughters living in Clarksdale. These included Mollie Grundfest, mother of Kate Sebulsky, Mrs. Frank, mother of Pearl Binder, Rose Weiss, mother of Corinne Kerstine, Sarah Bloom, mother of Julian Bloom. In addition to these woman, several others participated in this weekly Bingo game that traveled from home to home. They never organized into a club, but membership was understood, and each rarely missed a weekly game because missing a game was considered a serious loss.

Flora Okun Hirsberg talked about the friendship between her mother, Rose Weiss, and Mollie Grundfest:

You probably knew Mama better because of your grandmother. There were very close friends. Mama's friendship with your grandmother was as dear as anything could possibly be. Their friendship—I don't know how to tell you except that they were together as much as possible. They

were the friends. If Mama had another friend, well sure she did, and probably Mrs. Weiss did too, but they were inseparable. They were constantly together at Mama's. As soon as she'd walk into Mama's house, she'd get that coffee out. Get the coffee going and Mama—if she didn't have a cookie, she had crackers and jelly, she had to serve something with the coffee. And that was the way Mama was, and I mean Mrs. Weiss would come in, and they'd go into that breakfast room, sit down, Mama would pour that coffee or pour that tea, and they'd talk all afternoon. It was a wonderful friendship...The other ladies I don't think was were as close, and this is no reflection on anyone, because at their age, I would say Mrs. Grundfest was one of Mama's very closest friends... Well, she was very close, there were three of them, and I think that Mrs. Grundfest and Mrs. Weiss were jealous, because Mama would maybe favor one over the other or something like that.<sup>13</sup>



### **Members of the Bingo Group**

**1945-1947**

### **CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL**

January 2: According to the local newspaper,

Rabbi Alexander S. Kline held his first Shabbat Service. He was ordained at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati and also holds degrees from the University of Cincinnati. He has served congregations in Asheville, North Carolina; Port Arthur, Texas; and El Paso, Texas. He is well known in the South as a lecturer on World affairs and on the history of art. [He] has been a teacher of art appreciation in addition to his other activities and hopes ultimately to organize an art class in Clarksdale.<sup>14</sup>

### **LABENS**

#### **ALVIN**

Alvin explained the way he became an optometrist: "I came back to LSU; I had a fraternity brother that had not gone in the service. I was in engineering. He had gone to Memphis and became an optometrist. I went back to LSU in fall, 1946. I went to optometry in 1947. I liked the social life. I dated. Burt Jaeger said every time someone's name comes up, I said I dated them."<sup>15</sup>

Alvin remember the books for meat, you would only allowed a certain amount. I don't remember the mechanics of it because even during the height of the depression, we had food on the table, [as well as] sugar, gasoline.<sup>16</sup>

According to a local newspaper article on February 8, 1942, the congregation [gathered] to honor the six men joining the armed service. The six men included: "Max Binder, Irvin Jacobson, Lois Jacobson, Sam Wasserman, Leo Gronaeur and Nat Okun...Rabbi Benjamin Kelson [directed] the service."<sup>17</sup>

Alvin attended Boston College—"The stadium would seat 45,000 and sleep 4,500 under the stands in August 1947 to September 1949. One of my dates ask me to hold on her glasses. I tried her glasses on and saw better."<sup>18</sup>

## **CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL**

### **HARRY JACOB MAY**

According to the Clarksdale Press Register in a ceremony held on May 4, the Harry Jacob May Award was announced to be initiated this year and given yearly

to the most deserving member of the confirmation class. It was designed to cover a period of ten years." Sidney and Abe May donated this award in memory of their father, the late Harry Jacob May... "[In addition, the other donations officially presented at this service included:] a handsome Parochee or cover for the Holy Ark given by Mrs. Sarah May and her children. And a velvet cover for the alter was given by Mrs. Morris Baker and her children in memory of Ida Frank Baker"<sup>19</sup>

## **1950**

### **JAEGAR**

### **BURT**

March 8: Burt moved to Clarksdale in 1948 from Jamaica, New York, as he married Harriet Damsker. He served two years in World War II.<sup>20</sup>

We were asked to join the Chavurah Club. Harriet named them off.. Abrams, Binder, Bloom, Brownsteins, etc. Every Tuesday night it was, the guys would play poker at the old B'nai B'rith Club, and the girls would play Bridge or mahjong. Then the young group came in, like the Labens, Kaufman, Levine, Bacharach, Bassist, Kantor, Cohen, Ehrichs, Bloom. They were the young group. Harriet and I were in the old group.

In addition to that, we had Shankerman, Woolberts, the Ehich, May. We had about thirty young couples.

Every holiday, like Valentine's, Thanksgiving, or New Year's Eve, we had a party; Alvin, Irwin, and I put on the party. Any excuse for a dance. Your father would like to dance with all the ladies.<sup>21</sup>

All three interviewees believed the activities were mostly local. [It was a private party when] maybe four or five couples would come up to the Peabody for a birthday party or something.

Labens added: "We had enough of our own there...just like the 30's, we had enough Jewish kids there we didn't have to go look down in Greenville or somewhere for something to do."<sup>22</sup> "They would come to

Clarksdale for something to do. In fact someone not Jewish told me that when we were growing up, it was a big thing to go to the Delta (Greenville) for the summer.”

Jaegar said: “After it died out, three of us got together: Turners, Pachter, Harriet and I and started the Delta Dances again.”<sup>23</sup>

## **1951**

### **LABENS**

#### **ALVIN**

According to Alvin, he met his wife Rebecca “Becky” Rose Novick, Ensley Alabama, in September 1946 and double dated her in August, 1947 with a good friend from Birmingham (Norma Mendelson) Reva Wagner's cousin. They married in 1951, at the Parkview Hotel, Memphis.<sup>24</sup> They had three children:

#### **CHILDREN BORN**

- 1) **Steven Eric** 1953
- 2) **Valerie Sue** 1956
- 3) **Daryl Paul** 1960

## **1953**

Alvin Labens said: “I remember an evening around 1953 when Burt Jaeger and a few of us sat at the Alcazar Hotel with Tennessee Williams, Eli Wallach. Williams was visiting his grandfather who was the Episcopal Church.”<sup>25</sup> (Note: I learned later that the grandfather left Clarksdale about 1932.)

## **1954**

### **JAEGAR**

#### **BURT**

According to Jaegar,

Around the summer of 1954, when was the Brown vs the Board of Education? The year the Freedom Riders were coming in. I was invited to a meeting in Jackson and we knew that they were being trained in Oberlin University in Ohio. We knew to the date when they would be arriving in Mississippi. People at that meeting were asked to go back to our towns and see what we could do to avoid any problems. I met with newspaper editor, Joe Ellis, Bob McIntosh, the radio station owner, and went to the ministerial association to ask to brief all the ministers that this was going to occur and to urge moderation and no violence. I think we avoided most of it because Aaron Henry, President of the NAACP, was living in Clarksdale. We didn't have too many extremists or problems there. We had one when they threw the firebomb in Henry's picture window. Guy who was visiting from Michigan was a legislature. By the time he got to Memphis and briefed all the newspaper people and everybody in radio, you would have thought they was blood flowing in the streets. When he got back to Michigan, it was an insurrection. I know it didn't happen that way because I was at the Lyon's club and sitting at the same table with the sheriff, LA. They had already caught the guy who threw the firebomb. The fire chief was married

to my secretary. They had reported it took them hours to get there but she said it took them 10 minutes. It was one of those things that happened.<sup>26</sup>

Jaegar answered the author's question about whether or not Jews were separated out in any way—e.g. bombing at the temple in Jackson:

We only had one incident that I know of: someone put a [swastika] on the pavement up the stairs of the Temple. By the time I found out about it, a couple hours later, one of the members of our congregation had scrubbed it off. I went to him and told him he was wrong that he should have called the newspaper and the radio station and given it some publicity. That was the only incident. They also found a 'Merry Widow' at the front door of the Temple. I was able to pick it up and put it in an old sock or something and stuck it in a bag or something. I was going to take it to the police station. I parked at the bank and someone stole the bag.

According to Jaegar, Labens and Kaufman regarding education leading up to and including the first years at Lee Academy: Kaufman said: "It started in the middle of the year in January."

Jaegar added: "They wanted big money for that."

Labens concluded: "It was a movement of the white students that went to Lee. They had some good teachers and some lousy teachers to go to Lee."<sup>27</sup>

Labens remembered:

Valerie was a year behind. You don't remember the different plans to be submitted to the court. I remember every time they would come up with a plan, Becky and I would decide to do this: if they approved of Plan A we are going to do this with Steve and this with Valerie and this with Darrell. We would do the same with Plan B. It looked like the Notre Dame shift. Then, one night at two in the morning, she punches me and says: 'we didn't decide what we are gonna to do with Darrel on one of the plans'... Valerie went to Lee to start with; Bobo High in the 9th grade... Steven stayed in the public schools. Steve and Valerie finished in the public schools. Darrel went to Lee Academy.<sup>28</sup>

Jaegar added: "I remember, Mickey and Leah because of Peggy and Lisa... We left it up to Peggy. We couldn't come up with which way to go. She said: 'Daddy, I will be going off to college before too long, I just as well learned what it is all about now.'<sup>29</sup>

## **1955-1962**

### **CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL**

May 15, 1955: According to a newspaper article, the dedication of a plaque with honor roll of the boys in service and members of the congregation.<sup>30</sup>

According to the local newspaper, Rabbi Schorr became the Senior Rabbi when Rabbi Kline left.<sup>31</sup> Schultz came after [Schorr], the last full time rabbi that was there sixteen years and passed away. Schlager came after Schultz.<sup>32</sup>

The author remember the Rabbi when Patsy Binder got married in June 1961, the rabbi wouldn't let them play the wedding march because Wagner was anti-Semitic.

Burt Jaegar said:

Freedom riders came by my office one day. She pulled up and had a Negro driver. She came in and said ‘I understand you are active in the Jewish organizations.’

I said ‘Yes, I am.’

She said: ‘My name is ‘so & so’. She was a Jewish psychiatrist from Brooklyn.

I said: ‘What are you doing here?’

She said: ‘We have come here to see that the black people are getting the proper medication and treatment at the hospital.’

I said: ‘I can assure you that they are. We have Dr. Levy, Dr. Forman, Dr. Ehrlich. We would have known if something was going on as the hospital.’

She said: ‘I am going to be here Friday night. I guess you won’t let me come to Temple.’

I said: ‘Yes ma’m, you can come to Temple, you are welcome to Temple.’

She said something else so I said: ‘Doctor I don’t mind telling you that I object to your being here. You are causing the Jewish community a problem. We are taking care of our problems. We don’t need any outside help...Are you married?’

She said: ‘Yes, I have two children.’

‘Then, I would suggest you go home and take care of your children.’

She stomped out of my office and got in her car. From the Rose Seed Co., her driver went through a red light at Crossroads; went through the second red light at Fourth Street. I was on my way to the bank, and I happened to be behind them; they were speeding. It just so happened that she stopped the car and went into the bank. She was probably going to cash a check or something. I walked up behind.

I said: ‘Dr. if you want trouble, just tell me. I will call the police chief and the sheriff, and we will settle it right now. But, you are making trouble.’

She said: ‘How am I making trouble?’

I said: ‘Your driver went through two red lights and speeding. He was speeding on the street. If you want trouble you can have it.’

Again, she turned her back and walked out and didn’t come to Temple.<sup>33</sup>

July 13, 1962: According to the local newspaper article, “A national leader in the anti-Communist movement has been named rabbi of Beth Israel Temple here. Rabbi Benjamin Schultz comes to Clarksdale from Brunswick, Georgia, where he was pastor of Temple Beth Tefiloh. He will deliver the sermon at Sabbath services...He succeeds Rabbi Irwin M. Schur as pastor of the local synagogue.”<sup>34</sup>

## **1970**

1970: Lee Academy starts.

### **SISTERHOOD**

#### **ANNUAL ANTIQUE SHOW AND SALE**

According to the Clarksdale Press Register, the first annual show was held on March 17 and 18, 1970, at the Civic Auditorium. The Brookhaven Junior Auxiliary, Brookhaven, Mississippi, had been advertising their antique shows since 1966, which may have help with the promotion of the one starting in Clarksdale. This was the first one to be held in Clarksdale. Edith Jacobson and Becky Labens were co-chairman. One of the preliminary articles prior to the show said: “Dealers from Virginia and the Carolinas.”<sup>35</sup>

Then, in March 1970 on the second day of the show, the local newspaper reported: “Mr. and Mrs. Edward Geist of Memphis, managers of the two-day Antique Show and Sale...[were] impressed by the big

advance sale of tickets, numbering around 1,400...Everybody in town, plus some visitors, was enjoying the wonderful corned beef lunch served by the Sisterhood and then making the circuit of fascinating displays by twenty-five dealers from many states.”<sup>36</sup>

Edith Shainberg Jacobson recalled her memories of the first three years in which she was co-chairman:

I really can't remember. I don't think we ever made the potential that we should have, but the thing that happened is, I was the chairman of it for the first three years and then Irvin had this severe heart attack and I couldn't do it anymore. It kind of lost momentum as the years went on, but it was a happening in Clarksdale, the people—The events of the year and everybody in town just came down there. [We didn't] didn't go find them, we had a manager who brought [the] dealer in. This also happened in later times when antiques became more difficult to find, and people didn't need to travel with them as much. It affected the show, but in the early days, we had people come down from Memphis for the show, we had busloads of people, and we served, I can't remember, 600 lunches. We served corned beef sandwiches that the Sinai Co. in Chicago sent us. We had cakes that came from Starkville from the pure dairy bakery at Mississippi State, and it was quite an event.

it was always in March, early March...This is why the number 600 comes to me. I woke up that morning and looked out the window and there was a big snow on the ground, and I said, 'What do you do with 600 corned beef sandwiches?' And lo and behold, we had as big a crowd as we ever had. The people came out in the ice and snow for that lunch. I can't remember what year, it wasn't the first year, I know.

There are a million stories with the antiques. Irvin could tell stuff that would write a book because he was like a comedian when he started talking about things, but I never got any of it down or anything.

[I] accepted the chairmanship, that's how [the Sisterhood] agreed to it. I didn't get the dealers; I had a manager. We had a food committee, Joanne Bloom did that. We were very fortunate to have someone like that to take it over. We had fabulous publicity. I can't remember who did the publicity. In the years that I was chairman, we would have people go up to be on TV about it, and we had newspaper and posters, and out of town, we had it publicized in all the out of town papers around here. It was a fantastic success.

[It continued] at least fourteen years, or fifteen, I'm not real certain how many years it went. I couldn't do it anymore, and the different chairmen that took it over had their plans as to how they wanted to do it. Then as the years went on, our manager, I can't remember if they changed managers, or what happened. No, we didn't change managers, but the quality of the antiques went down. As they did at every show in the country, because people that did these shows that had quality, fine things wanted to go to a place where there was a larger show, and better security. Then the main reason it fell through...[is because] our Sisterhood got so small there were really not enough people. It took a tremendous amount of people and tremendous amount of work to put [into] that. We did not have the manpower to do it, because that lunch, if somebody would put on that corned beef sandwich lunch down there today, they'd still have a mob coming down there.

The people still talk about those corned beef sandwiches...I don't know if they flew it in; sent it in, in those days it came from the Sinai Co. [Chicago]. We called up the man the first year and told him what we were going to do, and every year he saved us special corned He pickled it especially for us. I think I told Joanne to do it. I don't know how I did, I can't remember it. It was an idea that came to me that bore fruit.

Well, I had been interested in antiques for years and years, even before I had been collecting, before the antique show even started. Oh, I ran into a man out in California that went to the Orient and he started sending me things and that's how I got into it I don't think I ever went soliciting because I never advertised. It went by word of mouth. I only did that Oriental for a couple of years. I didn't do it very long. I had some good things that I knew couldn't be replaced, and so I decided not to sell them, and I still have them.<sup>37</sup>

## 1972

### CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

June 2, 1972: According to the local newspaper, “Yankee Rabbi Finds The South Is ‘Home’ because he is celebrating his tenth year of service.” Rabbi Joseph Gallinger, Birmingham, Alabama, editor of the Jewish Monitor and a close friend of the rabbi’s conducted the service.<sup>38</sup>

## 1974

### CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

Rabbi Benjamin Schultz died in April 1974. Afterwards, Irwin Kaufman remembers: “We had one that was a homosexual that came after Schultz... That's right; he came after Schultz; then Schlegger came.”<sup>39</sup>

## 1990-1997

### LABENS

#### ALVIN

During the 1990s Alvin participated in a private men’s-only coffee group that met at the Alcazar Hotel Coffee shop and sold the coffee three times a day. They used a thirty-cup percolator for seven and a-half years. They kept their snacks in the old hotel refrigerator. Once they had a catfish fry. At the time, E. M. Doyle was the property manager and K&A remained the owner. The patron included: Leon Bramlett, Rosetti, Gerard, Swindler, Willie Young, T.G. Powell.

## 2002

### CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

An article published in the local newspaper summarized over a hundred years of Jewish family life and how it was declining, but not terminating. It is not reported here in full, but some of the facts reported included:

1. Gloria Himelstein remembers...we used to have 100 families in the 1950s...At this point there nothing here for the children—not just being Jewish, I’m talking Clarksdale as a whole.”
2. Three other small Mississippi Delta cities—Cleveland, Greenwood and Greenville—each have synagogues, all with declining congregations and no full-time rabbi. Jackson’s Beth Israel Congregation has the largest membership in the state with about 200 families.
3. Mississippi’s Jewish population reached an estimated peak of 6,400 in the 1920s and has dropped to about 3,000 today, and Stuart Rockoff, the historian for the Goldring/Weldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life in Jackson.

4. The institute is working with the Clarksdale congregation to try and find the best way to dispose of the synagogue's artifacts.
5. The original congregation in Clarksdale was established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an.
6. The 1968-69 [total] class was the largest with fifty-eight students including adults. By 1993, confirmation was held for a single student.<sup>40</sup> However, the 1939 Religious school photo shows as many. We have no records to show which were the teachers and which were the student.

In 2002 the Catalpa Street Temple was put up for sale. Jennifer T'isdale, a student rabbi at Hebrew Union College, prepared and officiated the final service.

## **CHAPTER 9: 1940-CURRENT THE REMAINING STORIES ENDNOTES**

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1 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, 2004

2 Ibid.

3 Corinne Kerstine, interview, October 1, 1989.

4 Rabbi Feigon of St. Louis Named Temple's Pastor, *Clarksdale Register and Daily News*, September 16, 1940, 1.

5 Corinne Kerstine, interview, October 1, 1989.

6 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Irwin Kaufman, interview, 1993.

10 "Rabbi Samuel A. Rabinowitthatz Will Deliver Address," *Clarksdale Register and Daily News*, January 16, 1942, 1.

11 Alvin Labens, interview, November 10, 2004.

12 Louis Rhodin, interview.

13 Flora Okun Hirsberg, interview, September 30, 1993.

14 "Rabbi Alexander Kline to Conduct First Service Here Friday Night," *Clarksdale Daily Register and Daily News*, January 2, 1947, 1.

15 Alvin Labens, interview, November 10, 2004.

16 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

17 "Beth Israel To Honor Boys Who Enter the Service," *Clarksdale Register and Daily News*, February 2, 1942, 1.

18 Alvin Labens, interview, November 10, 2004.

19 "Beth Israel Temple Receives Memorial Gifts Last Friday," *Clarksdale Daily Register*, May 4, 1948, 3.

20 "Miss Harriet Elinor Damsker Becomes Bride of Mr. Jaeger in New York Thursday Morning," *Clarksdale Register and Daily News*, March 3, 1948, 3.

21 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Alvin Labens, interview, November 10, 2004.

25 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 "Plaque Will Be Dedicated Here Sunday," *Clarksdale Register & Daily News*, May 19, 1955, p1, 6.

31 "New Rabbi Appointed at Temple Beth Israel," *Clarksdale Press Register*, July 13, 1962, 1.

32 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

33 Burt Jaegar et al, interview, November 28, 2004.

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- 34 “Jewish Congregation Acts: New Rabbi Appointed At Temple Beth Israel,” *Clarksdale Press Register*, July 7, 1962, 1.
- 35 “Sisterhood Reveals Plans for Big Antique Show Next Spring,” *Clarksdale Press Register*, October 17, 1969, 3.
- 36 “Visit The Antique Show And Start Your Own Collection,” *Clarksdale Press Register*, March 18, 1970, 2.
- 37 Edith Shainberg Jacobson, interview, November 9, 1993.
- 38 “Yankee Rabbi Finds The South is ‘Home’”, *Clarksdale Press Register*, June 7, 1972, 3.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 “In rural South, once thriving Jewish congregations dwindling,” *Clarksdale Press Register Weekender*, July 20, 2002, 6B.