



JHSD

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE

PRESIDENTS' LETTER

GERRY RESNICK AND PETER GRUMBACHER, CO-PRESIDENTS

Dear Friends,

The Board of Directors of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware hope that all of you and all of your loved ones are safe and healthy and have not been afflicted with the COVID-19 virus. We also hope that soon the world will return to a more normal lifestyle.

Future generations will look back on these times and see that despite the health crisis, the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware continued to work with partners and the community on the establishment of a new home for our organization's activities and archives. The structural improvements to the Coxe House building are on track to begin this summer and we hope it will be ready for occupancy by the end of 2020. We are extremely grateful to all those who have made contributions to the project.

The Board felt that this new home should have a new name that speaks to its function and so decided to name it "The Delaware Center for Jewish History." The Center will house not only the archives of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, but also those of the Halina Wind Preston Holocaust Education Committee and the Jewish War Veterans of Delaware.

These are trying times medically, emotionally, and financially, but we hope you will consider supporting our campaign to cover the costs of transforming the Coxe House into The Delaware Center for Jewish History. Any amount is welcome. The way to do so is by making a donation, either by check made out to "The Jewish Federation of Delaware c/o Coxe House" or by donating online at CoxeHouse.org.

When we think about our Jewish history in the First State, one name that comes to mind is Yetta Zutz Chaiken, who, we were sad to learn, passed away on April 9, 2020. She witnessed a great deal of history during her 97 years. She dedicated so much of her life to the welfare of Jewish synagogues and organizations and was a wonderful role model for what a committed Jew can accomplish through personal efforts in promoting worthwhile causes. We extend our sincere condolences to her daughters and the rest of her family. *Zichrona l'vracha*, may Yetta's memory be a blessing as were the days of her life.

Many thanks for your support and may all of us be blessed with good health.

JHSD NEWS

The Coxe House project continues apace. The architects have submitted detailed plans for the renovations, which include making the ground floor accessible for all visitors, controlling temperature and humidity for proper storage of archival materials, and even a installing a small freight elevator for moving materials up and down between floors (the staircases of this building are steep, narrow and angular!).

We will hold a grand opening when the building is move-in ready and when Wilmington is COVID-19 restriction-free. A good possibility, if all goes according to plan, is spring 2021 after Shavuot and before Memorial Day.



OPENING SOON

Co-President Dr. Gerry Resnick and all of the board of the JHSD are looking forward to welcoming you to our future home at the Delaware Center for Jewish History in the Coxe House.

With the new location comes added operating costs. The Board has reexamined membership categories and simplified the dues structure. Dues will increase slightly in 2021, with the exception of student membership, which will be free of charge. Jewish organizations and businesses are especially encouraged to support the JHSD's mission by becoming institutional sponsors.

Finally, in light of recent events, members of JHSD's Board of Directors would like to express our support for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color residents of the City of Wilmington, and Delaware as a whole, as they press for equality, economic justice and social reforms. In the spirit of *Tikkun Olam*, we pledge the following: to undertake our work with introspection, to recognize the history of structural and systemic racism in the United States, and to acknowledge and respect the diversity of the communities Jewish Delawareans call home.

IN MEMORY OF YETTA CHAIKEN (1922-2020)

POLLY ZAVADIVKER

The University of Delaware's Jewish Studies Program and its faculty are profoundly saddened to mourn the passing of Yetta Chaiken, of blessed memory. Yetta passed away peacefully on April 9 in Wilmington at the age of 97. Our university will always remain in her debt. In 1994, she and her husband Frank (1921–1995) generously endowed a permanent center for Jewish Studies, named in their honor. With foresight and beneficence, Yetta and Frank provided a foundation for Jewish Studies that has sustained its growth as an integral academic program at the university for over twenty-five years now.

Yetta's generosity was legendary. But she will not be remembered for that alone. She was one in a generation. She lived a century, and not only as a witness to American history but as an engaged witness—a maker of history. As a lifelong resident of Delaware she dedicated nearly eight decades of her life to promoting education, civil rights, historical preservation and community-building in this state. In words and deeds, she inspired and enabled hundreds of people—students, scholars, and many others—to preserve, teach and study the heritage of their own distinct communities.

Even a few snapshots of Yetta's rich life should inspire our awe and humility. The daughter of East European immigrants, she grew up in Wilmington as a first-generation American. At a time when most women did not go to college, her parents encouraged her to do so, even buying a used car so she could drive herself to Newark. She entered the University of Delaware in 1939, a time when the climate on campus was fraught with tension for minority students, and Jews in particular. The university denied admission to African American students at the time; Yetta also recalled that some fraternities denied entry to Jews, while others practiced vicious and anti-Semitic hazing rituals.

In a search to belong, Yetta found an intellectual home in history classes, also earning her degree in that subject. In a course on the ancient world, she said, "my roots took hold," and she embarked on what remained a lifelong commitment to the study of Jewish history.

Throughout her life she engaged in promoting historical literacy of all kinds. She taught American History at Warner Junior High in Wilmington in the 1950s and, in true pioneer fashion, she created and taught the first middle school-level American women's

history course in the state of Delaware. In 2018, when I told her we had offered the first ever "Women in Judaism" course at the University of Delaware, she was proud.

Yetta also conducted fifteen oral history interviews for the University of Delaware in the late 1970s. Among them is a 1977 interview with Pauline A. Young, an African-American activist and author of the first comprehensive history of the black community in Delaware. Thanks to Yetta's effort and vision, the transcript and audio files of these historic treasures are preserved in Special Collections at Morris Library.

It has been my honor to know Yetta since joining the faculty in 2015. In every conversation with her that I can recall, she always mentioned two things: first, how excited she was to be talking about teaching and studying history; and second, that "getting old sucks." Yet even after her vision declined, she continued to regularly travel from Wilmington to attend Jewish studies classes and programs. Two months ago, in February, I saw her at the premiere of the musical *Shanghai Sonatas*. As we sat together in the lobby of Mitchell Hall before the show, she said she had enjoyed a long and good life, and was grateful to see Jewish Studies thriving at the university. How can one respond to such a statement?

In her absence, her words sustain me and give me purpose. All of us who have benefited from her presence in the world can and must carry on the work to which she committed her life. That is her legacy. Through these times of uncertainty and transition, it can provide us with a roadmap, a north star, a moral compass.

Polly Zavadivker is an Assistant Professor of History and Director of the Jewish Studies Program at the University of Delaware.

JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALT THOU PURSUE

The JHSD is pleased to offer this informative, illustrated, 112-page paperback that covers the impact Delaware's Jewish judges have had on jurisprudence in the First State. Please call (302) 655-6232 or visit our website to order a copy for \$10.00.

JHSD also has video recordings of the presentation by Richard Levin at our 2019 annual meeting. This presentation, and others from past annual meetings, are well-researched and informative.

Please contact us about obtaining video recordings of these programs for your library or organization.

CONTINUING OUR ORAL HISTORY MISSION

DR. ROGER HOROWITZ, BOARD MEMBER

Over the summer of 2019, University of Delaware student Dalia Handelman interviewed eleven members of the Delaware Jewish community in a project funded by the University of Delaware in conjunction with the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware (JHSD). As an adjunct professor teaching history and Jewish studies at the university, I was her faculty supervisor. The university was so pleased with the outcome that they featured the project in the university's online publication, UDaily: <https://www.udel.edu/udaily/2019/august/driven-to-discover-dalia-handelman-oral-history-jewish-seniors/>.

The university funded Handelman again in 2020 to conduct more interviews—but the dangers presented by the COVID-19 virus, and the need for social distancing to contain its spread, has made conducting oral interviews this summer unwise. Instead, Handelman will work with the JHSD under my supervision to expand access to and use of the interviews already conducted.

She will transcribe the interviews and then create audio segments of one to five minutes in length that can be accessed on the JHSD website. Audio clips from several interviewees will be arranged under topics such as “growing up in Wilmington,” “Jewish experiences in Delaware public schools,” “holiday observance,” etc. We hope with this project to make it easy for our members and friends to appreciate the JHSD's collection of oral history interviews and to learn about the history of our community.



Dalia Handelman at the University of Delaware Summer Scholars Symposium, August 15, 2019.

Dalia Handelman's poster presentation at the 2019 Summer Scholars Symposium captured insights from her interviews.

I hope people will listen to my interviews and learn from our elders about what's really important in life and understand a little bit about how different our world is today from 50+ years ago. Each interviewee left me with advice and/or life lessons that I had never thought about before. At every interview I found myself writing down specific quotes that really stuck with me. Here are a few highlights of those special quotes:

“I feel I have lived in this crucible of history where I was a part of the old and have stepped forward into a whole new world.”

“I think being Jewish is a gift.”

“Belonging is a source of happiness.” — **Yetta Chaikin**

Yetta was explaining how being Jewish provided her with a sense of belonging and why that was so important.

“It is not going to be easy, but Judaism is a way of life and to disregard it would be a crime.” — **Connie Kreshtool**

Connie was explaining that she thinks the biggest threat to Judaism today may be the lack of connection from the younger generations.

“Our heroes were Chaim Weizmann and Theodore Hertzl!”

Faith was explaining the kind of people who she and her friends looked up to as children.

“Treasure your traditions.” — **Faith Brown**

“You will ruin your life if you walk around hating other people, they don't know that you hate them, it will only destroy you.” — **Ann Jaffe**

Ann was describing the advice her father said to her right after their family was liberated from the Nazi's control.

“But I will not give up as long as I can stand on my own two feet.” — **Ann Jaffe**

Ann was explaining how she will never stop telling her story about surviving the Holocaust and sharing her ideology of living a life without hatred.



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VOLUNTEERS WELCOME

The JHSD Oral History Project conducts interviews documenting the Jewish community in Delaware.

Interviewing a community leader or chatting with family members about their life and experiences can be a most rewarding and enjoyable

way to get involved and explore the history of Delaware's Jewish community.

Please contact the JHSD to learn more about the Oral History Project and other ways you can share in preserving the history of the Delaware Jewish community.

We have other volunteer opportunities and invite you to contact the archivist to discover how you can help. Email us at jhsdel@yahoo.com or phone (302) 655-6232 for more information.

VISIT US ON FACEBOOK AT <https://facebook.com/JHSDel/>



LEND US YOUR SUPPORT! If you have not already made your 2020 membership contribution, or if you want to lend your financial support to this vibrant, active organization, please return this coupon with your check to: Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, 505 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801

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☐ Please do not publish my name as a member.