JEWES AND THE CIVIL WAR

PLUS SPECIAL COVERAGE
of the Emma Lazarus Statue of Liberty Award Dinner honoring Machal: North American Volunteers who served in Israel’s 1948 War of Independence.
When General Grant Expelled the Jews

On December 17, 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant issued the most notorious anti-Jewish official order in American History.

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Jewish Confederates

Because Jews in the South accepted Southern customs and institutions, including slavery, Southerners accepted Jews.

When General Grant Expelled the Jews
A JEWISH FAMILY DIVIDED

Abraham Jonas was a personal friend of Lincoln; his six sons and three daughters aligned with opposing sides in the War.

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Web Portal to Jewish History, The American Jewish Congress Papers, a Save America’s Treasures Award and much more.

EMMA LAZARUS DINNER

Pictures from our 2011 Statue of Liberty Award tribute to Machal.
Dear Friends,

As I reflect on my first year as president of the AJHS board, I am extremely proud of what our organization has accomplished. From our 2011 Emma Lazarus Statue of Liberty Award Dinner honoring the brave North American volunteers who fought for Israel during her War of Independence, to our construction of the “Web Portal to American Jewish History” that will enable researchers to access multiple Jewish archives with a click of a mouse, AJHS is working to keep the story of American Jews alive.

This issue of Heritage, inspired by the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, examines Jews’ extensive involvement in that epochal struggle. Fifty years ago my predecessor as AJHS president, the great scholar Rabbi Bertram Korn, spearheaded the effort to educate Americans about the important but little-known role Jews played in the conflict. Heritage presents some of the fruits of more recent scholarship on this fascinating but still somewhat neglected topic. It serves as an appetizer for our major exhibition on this subject, which will be mounted in the spring of 2013.

The American Jewish Historical Society provides scholars, historians, students and the average citizen access to the American Jewish Experience. I want to thank you for your support of the Society. With your contributions and critical help, AJHS will continue to tell our people’s story for future generations.

Shalom,

Paul Warhit
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S LETTER

In the coming year the AJHS will celebrate its 120th anniversary. In Judaism, 120 is the number of years said to comprise a full and blessed life. Hence the Yiddish expression *biz hundert un tsvantsik yor!* (“May you live to be 120!”). Relatively few institutions are privileged to survive that long. AJHS is now poised to be among them.

When the Society was founded in 1892, modern Jewish history was afforded no place in mainstream academia and American Jewish history barely existed as a scholarly field. The AJHS was among the first organizations to support research on this subject, even when no university would. Thankfully, the landscape has shifted dramatically, with Jewish Studies programs thriving at dozens of colleges and universities and hundreds of scholars delving into the rich and complex experience of Jews in North America.

Despite these significant changes, complacency is not an option. There is so much more to do. That is why we are moving forward to make available the archives of the cardinal institutions of recent American-Jewish life, such as the American Jewish Congress and UJA/Jewish Federation of New York. We are granting overdue recognition to Jewish women’s history, housing the records of Hadassah, AMIT (American Mizrachi Women) and the National Council of Jewish Women. We are also newly focusing on American Zionism, with materials on Zionist summer camps and on Machal, the North Americans who volunteered for Israel’s War of Independence.

AJHS would never have survived this long in isolation. It derives strength from its sister organizations at the Center for Jewish History and beyond, including new collaborations with the National Museum of American Jewish History. Our “Portal to American Jewish History” is a partnership of numerous libraries, archives, museums and universities to aggregate in digital form historical records wherever they may reside. In line with this technological innovation, AJHS has modernized the look and feel of its website (www.ajhs.org), each day presenting a fresh “Daily Image” from our vast photographic repository. And in keeping with the importance of social media, we now communicate with our members, fans and acquaintances via Facebook.

Given these and many other exciting prospects for the future, it seems that the world’s oldest Jewish historical society is just getting started.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Karp
American Jewry and the Civil War
Three Perspectives
by Michael Feldberg

This past year marked the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, the bloodiest conflict in our nation’s history. The sundering of the nation pitted brother against brother, sister against sister, father against son. So, too, it divided American Jewry.

To mark the occasion, the American Jewish Historical Society invited three leading scholars to reflect on aspects of Jewish participation in the nation’s great conflict. Robert Rosen summarizes the experiences of Southern Jewry, what he calls “Jewish Johnny Rebs.” He offers fresh views of Jews and slavery, Southern anti-Semitism and Jewish loyalty to the Southern cause. Drawing on newly available documentation, Cynthia Gensheimer’s study of the Jonas family poignantly illustrates how the war could divide even a close Jewish family whose patriarch was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln. Finally, Jonathan Sarna previews his forthcoming book on one of the darkest pages in American Jewish history: General Ulysses S. Grant’s General Orders No. 11 expelling Jews from all the territory under his command.

Despite this and other occasional incidents of anti-Semitism, the Civil War broke new ground for American Jewry, dramatically hastening their pace of assimilation into, and acceptance by, American society. An example: When Congress declared war in 1861, it passed a law authorizing chaplains in the United States army and navy who were of “any Christian denomination.” A year later, after organized protest by the American Jewish community, Congress passed a second act allowing Jews to serve as chaplains. For the first time, Congress recognized Judaism as an American religion.

Although the Civil War offered Jews unprecedented opportunities for Americanization, it never captured its deserved place in Jews’ historical memory. In the spring of 2013, the AJHS will join with the Yeshiva University Museum to mount an exhibition that reveals the complex nature of Jewish involvement in this national trauma. Debuting at New York’s Center for Jewish History, a traveling version of the exhibition will tour the country. We hope you enjoy this edition of Heritage and that you will support the efforts of the AJHS to bring this important chapter of American Jewish History into public view.
In March 1865, Samuel Yates Levy, a Confederate captain and a prisoner of war, wrote his father J.C. Levy of Savannah, “I long to breathe the free air of Dixie.” Like the Levy family, Southern Jews were an integral part of the Confederate States of America, having breathed the free air of Dixie for two hundred years.

In 1860, the United States had approximately 150,000 Jews, one fifth of whom lived in the South. New Orleans had the seventh largest Jewish population in the United States. Charleston was home to three congregations, where “Israelites occupy the most distinguished places.” The Jews of Savannah organized K.K. Mikve Israel in 1735. There were Jewish communities in Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia; Atlanta, Macon, and Columbus, Georgia; Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee; in Galveston and Houston, Texas; and many small towns throughout the South.

Southern Jews accepted Southern customs and institutions, including slavery. Oscar Straus reflected, “As a boy brought up in the South I never questioned the rights or wrongs of slavery. Its existence I regarded as matter of course, as most other customs or institutions.” Jews also adopted the Southern view of states’ rights.

Southern Jews did not support slavery because of fear of reprisals. Some rabbis both North and South argued that the Hebrew Bible allowed for slavery. Rabbi Morris J. Raphall of New York criticized abolitionists and defended slavery. Solomon Cohen wrote his aunt Rebecca Gratz, “God gave laws to his chosen people for the government of their slaves, and did not order them to abolish slavery.” Most Jewish Southerners were petty merchants and craftsman. Those few Jews who owned slaves utilized them as domestic servants, workers in their trades or hired them out.

Because Jews accepted Southern institutions, Southerners accepted Jews. The Fundamental Constitution of Carolina (1699) granted freedom of religion to “Ye Heathens, Jues [sic] and other Disenters.” Jefferson’s Virginia Act of Religious Freedom (1786) said, “No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever.” The South attracted few immigrants; any white minority was welcome. Finally, Southerners respected their Jewish neighbors’ knowledge of the God of the Old Testament.
There was anti-Semitism in the Old South. Anti-Semitism was a fact of life everywhere. Jews came into conflict with the Christian majority on conducting retail businesses on Sunday. And, of course, Southerners often found Jewish customs strange. Maria Bryan Connell of Hancock County, Georgia, had a Jewish houseguest. “I did not at all comprehend the trouble occasioned by their notions of unclean and forbidden food until I had a daughter of Abraham under the roof,” Connell wrote. “She will not eat one mouthful of the finest fresh pork or the most delicate ham.”

When in April 1861 the Jewish Messenger of New York City called upon American Jewry to “rally as one man for the Union and the Constitution,” the Jews of Shreveport responded with a resolution denouncing the newspaper and its editor. “[W]e, the Hebrew congregation of Shreveport,” the resolution began, “scorn and repel your advice... we solemnly pledge ourselves to stand by, protect, and honor the flag, with its stars and stripes, the Union and Constitution of the Southern Confederacy, with our lives, liberty, and all that is dear to us.”

Jewish Confederates fought for liberty and freedom, including the right to own slaves. They fought to preserve the Southern racial caste system. They fought invaders of their hearth and home. Private Simon Mayer of Natchez wrote his family, “I sympathize with the poor victims of abolition despotism...” Jewish Johnny Rebs were motivated by duty and honor. Social pressure to enlist motivated many a young Confederate’s decision to enlist. Simon Baruch, a Prussian from Schwersenz (and Bernard Baruch’s father), immigrated to Camden, South Carolina, as did his younger brother Herman. When Simon enlisted he admonished Herman to stay out of the war. But Herman joined the cavalry because, as he told Simon, “I could no longer stand it. I could no longer look into the faces of the ladies.”

A staple of anti-Semitism was that the Jews were unpatriotic, cowardly profiteers. Many a Southern Jewish boy set out to disprove these calumnies. Jewish tradition also played a part. Judaism taught obedience to established government. The traditional Jewish prayer for the government, dating to the sixteenth century, calls upon God to bless the sovereign and inspire his benevolence “toward us and all Israel our brethren.” As historian Bertram Korn put it, “The Jews of the Confederacy had good reason to be loyal to their section. Nowhere else in America – certainly not in the ante-bellum North – had Jews been ... complete equals as in the old South.”

JewishJohnny Rebs served as privates, cooks, sharpshooters, orderlies, teamsters, and foragers. They dug trenches, cut trees, guarded prisoners, kept picket duty. The majority enlisted in their home towns with men they knew, often fellow Jews. There were seven Rosenbalms in Company H of the 37th Virginia.

Philip Rosenheim of the Richmond militia wrote, “Charley Marx and David Mittledorfer, Julius Straus, Moses Hutzler, Sam and...”
Herman Hirsh, Simon Sycles, Gus Thalheimer, Abr. Goldback, and a good many other Yuhudim all belonged to the same company, which I did.”

Unlike Irish and German immigrants, who formed ethnic companies, Jews did not form distinctively Jewish companies. They were equal citizens of their state and nation, not a separate nationality. They refused to stand out as a group as they were forced to do in Europe.

Jewish Confederates turned to their faith during the war. Rabbi Max Michelbacher of Beth Ahabah Synagogue in Richmond, the Confederate capital, led the Jewish community in assisting Jewish boys in the army. He requested furloughs on their behalf for Jewish holidays and even published a “prayer of the C[onfederate] S[tates] Soldiers.” Beginning with the Shema, it called on God to “Be with me in the hot season of the contending strife; protect and bless me with health and courage to bear cheerfully the hardships of war… Be unto the Army of this Confederacy, as thou wert of old, unto us, thy chosen people!”

The freeing of the slaves, the collapse of the ancien regime, especially the impoverishment of Southern cities, devastated Southern Jewry. Like their neighbors, Jewish Southerners licked their wounds, rebuilt their lives and memorialized their honored dead. The Jewish women of Richmond, sent and appeal “To the Israelites of the South” seeking funds for a cemetery and monument to the fallen Jewish Confederates. The circular concluded, “In time to come, when the malicious tongue of slander, ever so ready to assail Israel, shall be raised against us, then, with a feeling of mournful pride, will we point to this monument and say:

“THERE IS OUR REPLY.”

[Robert N. Rosen, an attorney and historian in Charleston, SC, is the author of several books, including The Jewish Confederates. He served on the Board of the American Jewish Historical Society and as President of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.]

A Jewish Florence Nightingale

Recently widowed and childless, Phoebe Yates Levy Pember left her parents’ home in Charleston, SC in December 1862 when the wife of the Confederate Secretary of War invited her to serve as a matron at the Chimborazo Military Hospital in Richmond. At that time, Chimborazo was the largest military hospital in the world, eventually serving over 76,000 wounded and sick Confederate soldiers. It had 150 wards holding 40 to 60 patients each.

Chimborazo suffered from severe shortages of medical supplies, food and doctors. Pember administered medication, changed bandages, assisted surgeries and comforted the sick and dying. One contemporary described her as a “brisk and brilliant matron” with “a will of steel under a suave refinement.” She once confronted hospital staff stealing whiskey and food with a pistol.

Pember was one of the first women to perform military nursing duties. The code of chivalry declared women too sensitive to view wounds and amputations. Pember would write in her 1879 memoir, “In the midst of suffering and death, hoping with those almost beyond hope in this world; praying by the bedside of the lonely and heart stricken; closing the eyes of the boys hardly old enough to realize man’s sorrows, much less suffer man’s fierce hate, a woman must soar beyond the conventional modesty considered correct under different circumstances.”
On December 17, 1862, as the Civil War entered its second winter, General Ulysses S. Grant issued the most notorious anti-Jewish official order in American history: “The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.”

Known as General Orders No. 11, the document blamed “Jews, as a class” for the widespread smuggling and cotton speculation in Tennessee, Mississippi and Kentucky, the area under Grant’s command. It required the Jews to leave.

Less than 72 hours after the order was issued, 3500 Confederate troops led by Major General Earl Van Dorn raided Grant’s forces at Holly Springs, MS. Grant’s lines of communication were disrupted for weeks. As a consequence, news of his order expelling the Jews spread slowly and did not reach army headquarters in a timely fashion. This spared many Jews who might otherwise have been banished.

A copy of General Orders No. 11 finally reached Paducah, KY – a city occupied by Grant’s forces – eleven days after it was issued. Cesar Kaskel, a staunch Union supporter, and all the other known Jews in the city received papers ordering them “to leave the city of Paducah, Kentucky, within twenty-four hours.” Devastated, Kaskel and several other Jews dashed off a telegram to President Abraham Lincoln describing their plight.

Lincoln, in all likelihood, never saw that telegram. He was busy preparing to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. The irony of his freeing the slaves while Grant was expelling the Jews was not lost. Some Jewish leaders feared Jews would replace Blacks as the nation’s stigmatized minority.

Kaskel decided to appeal to Abraham Lincoln in person. Paul Revere-like, he sped to Washington, spreading news of General Orders No. 11 wherever he went. With help from a friendly Congressman, he obtained an immediate interview with the President, who turned out to have no knowledge of the order, for it had not reached the capital. According to an oft-quoted report, Lincoln invoked biblical imagery in the meeting, a reminder of how many nineteenth-century Americans linked Jews to Ancient Israel, and America to the Promised Land:
The Jews... are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.
“And so,” Lincoln is said to have declaimed, “the Children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?”

“Yes,” Kaskel responded, “and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham’s bosom, asking protection.”

“And this protection,” Lincoln declared, “they shall have at once.

General-in-Chief of the Army Henry Halleck, ordered by Lincoln to countermand General Orders No. 11, chose his words carefully. “If such an order has been issued,” his telegram to Grant read, “it will be immediately revoked.”

In a follow-up meeting with Jewish leaders, Lincoln reaffirmed that he knew “of no distinction between Jew and Gentile.” “To condemn a class,” he emphatically declared, “is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad. I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners.”

Anti-Jewish prejudices during the Civil War were likely heightened by the prominence of several Jews, notably Jefferson Davis’ right hand man and cabinet secretary, Judah P. Benjamin, in the ranks of the Confederacy. In addition, smuggling, speculating, price gouging, swindling, and producing “shoddy” merchandise for the military – all were laid upon the doorstep of “the Jews.” Indeed, “Jews” came to personify wartime profiteering. They bore disproportionate blame for badly produced uniforms, poorly firing weapons, inedible foodstuffs and substandard merchandise that corrupt contractors supplied to the war effort and sutlers marketed to unsuspecting troops. In the eyes of many Americans (including some in the military), all traders, smugglers, sutlers, and wartime profiteers were “sharp-nosed” Jews, whether they were or not. The implication was that Jews preferred to benefit from war rather than fight in it.

If that was the cause of Grant’s order, it does not explain its timing. That was linked to a visit Grant received from his sixty-eight-year-old father, Jesse R. Grant, and members of the prominent Mack family of Cincinnati, significant Jewish clothing manufacturers. The Macks had formed a secret partnership with the elder Grant. In return for 25 percent of their profits, he agreed to accompany them to his son’s Mississippi headquarters and act as their agent to “procure a permit for them to purchase cotton.” According to an eyewitness, General Grant waxed indignant at his father’s crass attempt to profit from his son’s military status, and raged at the Jewish traders who “entrapped his old father into such an unworthy undertaking.” In a classic act of displacement, according to Grant scholar John Y. Simon, he “expelled the Jews rather than his father.”
Subsequently, Ulysses S. Grant never defended General Orders No. 11. In his *Personal Memoirs*, he ignored it. His wife, Julia, proved far less circumspect. She characterized General Orders No. 11 as nothing less than “obnoxious.”

General Orders No. 11 came back to haunt Grant when he ran for President in 1868. Following his victory, he released an unprecedented letter that told Jews just what they wanted to hear: “I have no prejudice against sect or race, but want each individual to be judged by his own merit. Order No. 11 does not sustain this statement, I admit, but then I do not sustain that order.”

During the remainder of his life, Grant demonstrated that his apology was genuine. He appointed more Jews to public office than all previous presidents combined, and spoke out for Jewish rights on multiple occasions. As a result, when he died of cancer in 1885, Jews mourned him deeply. Kaddish was recited in his memory in many synagogues.

Subsequently, of course, Grant’s reputation sank like a stone. Historians of the South’s “Lost Cause” criticized his benevolent policy toward African Americans and ranked him among the country’s worst presidents ever. A reexamination of Grant’s career makes clear that he deserved better. His transformation from enemy to friend, from a general who expelled “Jews as a class” to a president who embraced Jews as “individuals,” reminds us that even great figures in history can learn from their mistakes.

[Jonathan D. Sarna is the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University. His *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* will appear in Spring 2012 from Schocken/Nextbook]

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**Lincoln’s Jewish Footman**

When asked in 1863 whether he would support a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, President Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “I myself have high regard for the Jews. My chiropodist is a Jew, and he has so many times ‘put me on my feet’ that I would have no objection to giving his countrymen ‘a leg up’!”

The chiropodist in question was Isachar Zacharie, Lincoln’s foot doctor and confidante. Born in England, Zacharie came to the United States in the mid-1840s and settled in Washington in 1862. Lincoln sought out Zacharie’s ideas as he worked on the president’s feet, and he came to trust the doctor completely. In late 1862, he asked Zacharie to travel to New Orleans to assess the mood of the Southern city recently occupied by Union troops. A year later, Lincoln secretly sent Zacharie to meet with Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, a fellow Jew, to explore possible peace negotiations. While Benjamin was favorable to holding talks, Lincoln’s cabinet opposed the plan.

In 1864, Zacharie abandoned diplomacy and moved to Philadelphia. On his death in 1897, the *New York World* wrote that, during the war, Zacharie “enjoyed Lincoln’s confidence more than any other private individual.”
In 1864, Abraham Jonas, whom Abraham Lincoln called one of his “most valued friends,” lay dying at his home in Quincy, Illinois, longing to see his eldest son, then a Confederate prisoner of war held by the Union Army.

As soon as Lincoln got word of the situation, he issued a handwritten order: “Allow Charles H. Jonas, now a prisoner of war at Johnson’s Island, a parole of three weeks to visit his dying father.” Charles arrived the day of his father’s death, in time for his father to greet him. He then returned to the prison camp, where he was held nearly another year.

Like many other Jewish families, the Civil War divided the Jonas family. Four sons fought for the South, one fought for the North, one served both South and North. The Jonas’ three daughters also found themselves on opposite sides — one married and living in the South, the other two remaining at home with their parents in Illinois.

Abraham and Louisa Jonas reared their children in the border state of Kentucky and on the Illinois frontier. Both parents were from prominent, observant Jewish families and kept in touch with relatives in the North and South. Louisa Block was a native of Richmond, Virginia, while British-born Abraham had arrived as a teenager in Cincinnati in 1819, becoming a merchant and then a lawyer.

Abraham Jonas was Grand Master of the Masons in Kentucky and Illinois and elected to both of those states’ legislatures. Presidents Taylor and Fillmore successively appointed him postmaster of Quincy. First a Whig, then a Republican, Jonas was an early Lincoln supporter. He was the Republican Chairman of Arrangements when Lincoln and Douglas debated in Quincy in 1858. At the 1860 Republican Convention, Jonas was instrumental in winning Lincoln’s nomination. Jonas stumped throughout Illinois for Lincoln, once to a crowd of 10,000. Jonas’ son Edward remembered that on one occasion while Jonas spoke and Lincoln sat on the dais, Lincoln tickled 13-year-old Edward’s ear with a piece of straw when the boy wasn’t looking. Soon after his election, Lincoln rewarded Jonas with his old job of postmaster.
Charles H. Jonas (Confederate) portrait and a parole note written by Lincoln allowing Jonas to leave prison to visit his dying father; Isaac Markens Collection; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

Allow Charles H. Jonas, now a prisoner of war at Johnson's Island, a parole of three weeks to visit his dying father, Abram H. Jonas, at Dixon, Ill., on June 21, 1864. Abraham Lincoln.
In December, 1860, after Lincoln’s election, Jonas wrote to Lincoln warning of an assassination plot. Jonas explained that he acquired this information through reliable sources in New Orleans: his six children and other close relatives. The six eldest Jonas children had gone south in a chain migration for jobs, schooling and matrimony, later lending their support to the Confederacy. In this respect, the Jonases were typical of American Jews; they supported North or South depending on where they lived when hostilities broke out.

Days after shots were fired at Fort Sumter in April of 1861, the Jonas family in Quincy rallied to the Union cause. Initially, a newspaper reported that Abraham Jonas would head a military unit of forty Jewish volunteers, but in fact he led a home guard unit of mixed religion. At the same time, local women, mostly representing leading Protestant families, joined together to form the Needle Pickets, a soldiers’ aid society, which counted five Jews—including two Jonas daughters—among its 102 members, and elected nineteen-year-old Annie Jonas treasurer. In 1863, at one of the group’s many fundraisers, one thousand people watched Abraham Jonas accept a flag presented by the Needle Pickets. The flag was to demonstrate “to all who saw it up and down the [Mississippi] river . . . that nothing but loyalty would be tolerated [in Quincy].” Jewish women toiled for the war effort North and South, but Annie’s leadership in a nonsectarian soldiers’ aid society was unusual.

At the age of seventeen, Edward Jonas, the youngest son, enlisted in an Illinois regiment and possibly on two occasions found himself facing his Confederate brothers on the battlefield. In 1862 at the Battle of Shiloh, Edward was captured and may have been escorted to a Georgia prison camp by his brother, Julian, a Confederate cavalryman. Later, in May, 1864, Lieutenant Edward Jonas, part of General Sherman’s campaign to take Atlanta, fought in Tennessee against three of his brothers whose units had massed there. Despite being on opposite sides, the Jonases managed to communicate across enemy lines, perhaps because several were officers. Two days after the fall of Atlanta, in September, 1864, Julian wrote to assure Edward that brothers Frank and Alroy were with him, alive and well. On the front of the envelope, someone later wrote: “Sent by one of Sherman’s Officers through to Savannah—reached us, after Sherman’s arrival there.”
While his brothers were engaged in battle in Tennessee and Georgia, Charles remained imprisoned in Ohio, where during his nineteen-month stay he was able to correspond with relatives on both sides of the conflict. He wrote home to Quincy regularly, requesting boots, a soft black hat, and reading material, and begging his family to use its pull to effect his exchange for a Union officer of comparable rank. As tender as these letters are, they acknowledge the tension that existed within a family divided by the conflict. In December, 1864, Charles wrote to his “dear sister” Annie: “It is really cruel for you all to tell me continually how sorry you will be when I am exchanged—if you have any love for me you ought to wish my exchange as speedily as possible – and to do all possible to effect it, but I’m afraid you don’t try very hard.” Annie’s reticence may have reflected her opposition to Charles fighting for the South, or simply her desire to keep him from returning to combat.

Meanwhile, another Jonas brother, George B., who had served the Confederacy briefly, had made his way to New York, where he wrote Lincoln to request a brief furlough before his enlistment in the Union Army. By this time, the patriarch Abraham Jonas had died, and Lincoln had appointed his widow Louisa to serve as Quincy’s postmaster in his stead. George B. cited “the recollection of the friendship existing between my Father and yourself, for so long a time.” There is no record of whether Lincoln responded, but military records show that George B. did serve in the Union Army for nine months near the end of the war.

After the war, Louisa Jonas and her children, save for Annie, settled in the South. Several of them achieved fame—Benjamin Franklin Jonas became the third Jew elected to the U.S. Senate, and Samuel Alroy Jonas became editor of a Mississippi newspaper and a Confederate folk hero as author of “Lines on the Back of a Confederate Note,” a poem lamenting the fall of the South. Most of the Jonas children drifted away from Judaism. Annie married an Episcopal minister in 1869. Julian wrote to Annie saying he was surprised by her engagement but felt that religion did not matter much. He wrote, “nothing would give me more pleasure than for all of us to get together again if it was only for a day.”

Alas, Julian’s wish was not granted. The family divided by the war would never reunite.

[Cynthia Francis Gensheimer, an independent scholar, holds a doctorate in economics and is studying the history of American Jewish women’s benevolence. She is completing a biography of Annie Jonas Wells.]
Massive American Jewish Congress Collection Now Researchable

After a multi-year effort by AJHS archivists, the monumental collection of American Jewish Congress records is now available to researchers. Established in 1918 in support of European Jewish victims of World War I, the AJCongress championed a Jewish state in Palestine and civil liberties at home. In the 1930s, the AJCongress raised awareness of the Nazi threat through mass rallies, publicity campaigns and boycotts. Perhaps its greatest achievements were in civil rights, human rights, and the separation of church and state. The AJCongress allied with other organizations to use the courts to fight discrimination in employment, education, housing, and for women’s rights and women’s health.

Work on the collection was made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which awarded a “We the People” grant to AJHS for the arrangement, description, preservation and researcher access to the AJCongress records. NEH Chairman Jim Leach noted the collection’s historic importance. A Finding Aid to the collection is available online and portions of the collection – text, photographs, and recorded sound – will soon be available to the public in digital format.

Soviet Jewry Collection Planning Grant

The grassroots movement to free Soviet Jews was one of 20th-century American Jewry’s proudest accomplishments. Soon this extraordinary effort will be the subject of a major exhibition of the AJHS and the Yeshiva University Museum (YUM). It will feature original artifacts, documents, photographs and audiovisual materials. Plans for the exhibition received a boost when the National Endowment for the Humanities provided a planning grant this past summer. The Center for Jewish History (CJH), Manhattan home to AJHS and YUM, will be the initial venue in 2014, before the exhibition travels to four other sites nationally. With the assistance of the American Library Association, a companion panel show will travel to public libraries and community centers across the United States. AJHS will also host a public conference on Soviet Jewry at its Center for Jewish History headquarters.

Portal to American Jewish History

AJHS is creating a website that has the potential to move online research to a new level. The “Portal” will allow researchers to explore the archival collections of multiple libraries through one simple search, as if the disparate holdings were in a single online catalog. Eventually, the Portal will include collections from research institutions nationwide, enabling users to find related collections in separate repositories and access digitized collections more efficiently. With the help of our initial partners – the Center for Jewish History, Temple University Libraries, the Feinstein Center at Temple, and the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society at the Penrose Library of the University of Denver – AJHS has created a test site that allows researchers to locate collection records and images of the founding partners. In the next, or “Beta” phase of the Portal, partners will include the University of Pennsylvania, the College of Charleston, UC Berkeley-Bancroft Library, the Jewish Women’s Archive, and the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington. For now, try out our fully functional Alpha test site at http://jia.cjh.org and ask us questions through our on-site feedback form. Funds for planning the Portal were provided by the Righteous Persons Foundation.
AJHS Helps “Save America’s Treasures”

A grant from the Save America’s Treasures Program allowed AJHS to successfully preserve the papers of Mordecai Sheftall, Jewish merchant and Commissary General to the Continental Army in the War for Independence. Sheftall’s papers are of fundamental interest to historians of the Revolutionary America. Over three thousand receipts in the collection specify the quantity and nature of the food he supplied to the army and its dependents in the southern colonies. Sheftall kept every receipt, whether he was rationing beef for hospitalized soldiers, outfitting a brigade, or hiring a dance teacher for his daughter. Few military archives from southern colonies survive, and fewer still from Jewish patriots. These records have been stored for decades at the American Jewish Historical Society, but scholars could not use them because of their poor condition. The pages were first damaged around 1779, when the British captured and imprisoned Sheftall and his family hid his records in a swamp for safekeeping. In the 1940s, well-meaning WPA ‘restorers’ taped them to acidic paper in no particular order. AJHS cleaned, restored, microfilmed, and digitized each receipt – and mounted a comprehensive Finding Aid to this collection online with digital images of the receipts.

A Civil War Seder

While stationed in Fayette, West Virginia in 1862, a group of Jewish soldiers from Ohio’s 23rd Regiment led by J. A. Joel held an impromptu Seder. One of the unit’s Jewish men on leave had shipped matzot and Haggadot to Fayette, but there were no other supplies. The men went foraging and found cider, a lamb, several chickens and eggs. Joel wrote, “Horseradish or parsley we could not obtain, but in lieu we found a weed whose bitterness, I apprehend, exceeded anything our forefathers ‘enjoyed.’ … The necessaries for choroutzes we could not obtain, so we got a brick which, rather hard to digest, reminded us, by looking at it, for what purpose it was intended.”

The Seder went perfectly until the men ate the bitter herb. Joel reported, “It was very bitter and fiery like Cayenne pepper, and excited our thirst [such] that we forgot the law authorizing us to drink only four cups.” Some of the men got roaring drunk. Joel noted, “One thought he was Moses, another Aaron, and one had the audacity to call himself a Pharaoh. The consequence was a skirmish, with nobody hurt, only Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh had to be carried to the camp, and there left in the arms of Morpheus.”
The annual award goes to an individual who has demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment to strengthening the American Jewish community. The award dinner also honored all the North American volunteers—nearly 1,500 from the U.S. and Canada—who fought in the war or who served on ships that brought Holocaust survivors and other Jewish refugees to Palestine. Forty-one Americans and Canadians gave their lives in the war or on the ships transporting refugees. The dwindling band of surviving volunteers now numbers about 250. Thirteen of them attended the ceremony and received a standing ovation.

After his service in Israel, Lowenstein came back to the U.S. He later became an author, a journalism professor and dean of the journalism school at the University of Florida-Gainesville. Since the early 1980s, he has devoted his energies to documenting the story of the American and Canadian Machalniks (“volunteers from abroad”) who fought in Israel’s War of Independence. In 2010 the archive he created to document their contributions moved from the University of Florida to the AJHS in New York, where it will be permanently housed. An exhibition on the subject was mounted at the Center for Jewish History in February of 2011 and will be on display until early 2012.

The volunteers, many of them World War II veterans, were typically motivated by strong Zionist sentiment, anger or revulsion at what the Holocaust had wrought. Most, but not all, were Jews. Upon their return, many of the volunteers said little about their service in Israel for fear of running afoul of U.S. neutrality laws. Until recently, the government of Israel refrained from trumpeting their contributions. Three of the volunteers were eventually prosecuted for their efforts to ship weapons to Israel in 1948. One of those was Al Schwimmer, an ex-TWA flight engineer who played a key role in creating the Air Transport Command that delivered planes and arms to Israel in 1948. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, called Schwimmer’s efforts “the Diaspora’s single most important contribution to the survival of Israel.” Schwimmer received an AJHS Legacy Award for his accomplishments.

Dan Rather, former anchor of the CBS Evening News, hosted the event. Uzzi Rozzen, president of IAI North America, and Brigadier General Eyal Eisenberg presented the awards to Schwimmer and to Lowenstein, respectively. Schwimmer’s son Danny and grandchildren accepted on his behalf; Schwimmer, who was in his mid-90s, was unable to attend because of poor health. Schwimmer passed away on June 10, 2011 at the age of 94.
...AJHS National President, Paul Warhit

Jonathan Lewis, Josh Landes, Laura Daniels

Event Chair, Toni Young with husband Stuart, and Sally, Louise and Eric Rosenfeld

Dan Rather, Uzzi Rozzen, President & Chief Executive Officer of IAI North America and the Schwimmer Family accepting the Legacy Award on behalf of Al Schwimmer

Machalniks

AJHS Co-Chairman, Sid Lapidus and AJHS Executive Director, Jonathan Karp

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