

## Chapter 3 The Matriarchs

*Sisterhood. . . is the right hand of the Temple.*  
—Fort Worth Star-Telegram,  
November 25, 1956

*A woman of valor, who can find? For her price  
is far above rubies.*  
—Proverbs 31:1

*Propelled into the boardroom  
through the kitchen.*  
—Jack Wertheimer, *The American  
Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*

Jewish women were not equals. They were not Temple members; only men were. They could not vote on synagogue issues; only men could. A widow was expected to pay family dues yet could not cast a vote at congregational meetings. This was true not only at Beth-El, but at most synagogues, whether Reform or Orthodox. The notion of women's second-class spiritual status permeated Christianity as well.

Still, Beth-El's women had clout. They found ways—often through the kitchen—to raise money and wield influence in religious affairs. Whenever the men abdicated responsibility, the women moved in, filling a need. That was the community's early pattern. For example, when the little Jewish cemetery fell into neglect in the late 1880s, Alsatian-born Babette Carb and her lady friends resuscitated the Emanuel Hebrew Rest Association in 1896, raising awareness and money for its upkeep. When efforts to launch religious schools failed, American-born teachers Sara Carb and Ida Brown tried again and again to gather students and keep Jewish literacy in Cowtown alive. Had these wives, widows, mothers, daughters, and sisters not come to the rescue, the newly chartered Beth-El Congregation might have disintegrated long before its 100th anniversary. It nearly did.

### Collapse

The Reform congregation had seemed to be off to a strong start. At its birth in September 1902, Beth-El had committees setting policies on ritual and bylaws as well as officers collecting monthly dues. By midwinter, these efforts were near collapse. Members bickered with

Rabbi Solomon Philo, the wandering Jew who had seemed so helpful at their initial organizational meetings. Hired at \$100 a month on “approbation” [sic], the rabbi turned out to be quarrelsome and meddlesome. “Unfortunately . . . [he was] unfitted in every respect for that holy office,” concluded Flora Weltman Schiff, writing for *The Reform Advocate*.<sup>11</sup> “Because of the deserved unpopularity of the rabbi,” attendance at Sabbath services dwindled. By the spring of 1903, the undisciplined tribe had fallen apart. No High Holy Days services were held that fall. Fort Worth's Reform Jews once again seemed “beyond redemption.” The 43 founding fathers and sons went back to business as usual.

However, the women remained a cohesive unit. Although second-class congregants at Beth-El, the ladies were assertive members of the Fort Worth section of the National Council of Jewish Women, chartered locally in 1901. The Council's treasury had sufficient funds, from monthly dues and Hanukah balls, to hire a rabbi. The section's executive board included Theodore Mack's new bride, Pauline (Polly) Mack, who hailed from Cincinnati, home of Hebrew Union College. She and her fellow board members contacted the Reform seminary for help. The Reform movement's congregational arm, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, responded, dispatching its field representative, Rabbi George Zepin. During the spring of 1904, Zepin made two visits to Texas and revived the faltering congregation from its “state of lethargy.” He arranged for Hebrew Union

**AFFECTION-  
ATELY CALLED  
“GRANDMA  
CARB”** by Henry  
Gernsbacher, energetic  
Babette Carb was a  
steel magnolia. She  
emigrated from the  
German Rhineland to  
the Deep South,  
watched Yankee  
soldiers burn her  
family farm, and cared  
for a dying  
husband wounded in  
the Civil War. She fol-  
lowed her sons to Fort  
Worth where she  
revived the Emanuel  
Hebrew Rest cemetery  
association.



## Women of Reform Judaism (Sisterhood) Presidents

Sophia Brann	1913–1914	Margaret Steinberger	1954–1956
Anna Wolfson	1915–1917	Bea Groginski	1956–1958
Hattie Simon	1917–1919	Minette Herman	1958–1960
Carrie Brin	1919–1921	Jayne Slatkin	1960–1962
Hortense Fox	1921–1923	Sonja Glazer Gressman	1962–1963
Maggie Rubin	1923–1925	Ceil Echt	1963–1965
Lilli Bogen Morris	1925–1927	Dorothy Resnick	1965–1967
Ernestine Weixel	1927–1929	Margot Schwartz	1967–1969
Amanda Colton	1929–1931	Betty Schoenfeld Baccus	1969–1971
Sarah Horwitz	1931–1932	Ruby D. Kantor	1971–1973
Dena Gressman	1932–1933	Elaine Samson	1973–1975
Ann Friedson	1933–1934	Helen Sherline	1975–1977
Sophia Miller	1934–1935	Sandra Freed	1977–1979
Dora Herman	1935–1936	Adele Niger	1979–1981
Dorothy Rosenstein	1936–1937	Deidra Bihari	1981–1983
Mamie Friedman	1937–1938	Rachel Goldman	1983–1985
Annette Schwarz	1938–1941	Judie W. Greenman & Lynny Sankary	1985–1986
Dorothy Rosen	1941–1943	Carol Minker	1986–1988
Matilda Shanblum	1943–1945	Sue Friedman	1988–1990
Rose Rosenthal	1945–1947	Jackie Bzostek	1990–1992
Marion Lederman	1947–1949	Sandy Hollander & Judy Rosenblum	1992–1994
Natalie Simon	1949–1951	Laurie Kelfer & Faye Slater	1994–1996
Tobia Ellman	1951–1953	Toni Horton & Claudia Rivera	1996–1997
Joy Spiegel	1953–1954	Toni Horton	1997–1999
		Luann Feld & Toni Horton	1999–2001
		Roberta Bellet & Luann Feld	2002–



**DRESSED FOR A PICNIC**, Sarah Eckert Gernsbacher, Rose Levenson Label, Ida Cohen Fred, Dorothy Hornstein, Dora Eckert Herman, Libby Simon, Fannie Fred Jacobs, Ida Fred Brodsky, and Fannie Katz Baum enjoy an outing in the park, circa 1915.

College to place an energetic young rabbi, Joseph Jasin, in Fort Worth after his ordination in 1904.

Jasin, an idealistic spiritual leader with deep furrows in his baby-faced brow, approached his first full-time pulpit position with vigor. He reorganized the Sabbath School, so-called because classes were held on Saturday. He conducted Friday evening services. Flora Schiff reported that “on his advent, membership increased (from 30) to 60 members.” The rabbi also mingled with the Orthodox Jewish community, for he shared their passion for Zionism.

Still, the women were somewhat discontented. They disliked worshiping in rented rooms at the Spiritualist Temple, an institution that conducted séances. The Council of Jewish Women began “agitating” for

Co-operative Group

Beth-El Sisterhood Has Many Activities

BY MARY SEARS. (PICTURES ON PAGE 1.)

The yearbook of the Sisterhood of Temple Beth-El is the next "next time let Sisterhood do it for you," which reflects to the memorial which actually explains the purposes of the Sisterhood. The yearbook of the organization "call" for many services for Temple Beth-El. The women have charge of a Memorial Day Fund; they have a fund to be used for special occasions or special occasions women have charge of flowers. In addition they sponsor a diversity of activities in connection with the and their own activities. The current season's president is Mrs. P. S. Groginski, first vice president; Mrs. M. Miller, first vice president; Mrs. Jack Greenman, secretary; Mrs. Marion Weil, treasurer; Mrs. Robert Herz, assistant; Mrs. Paul Herz, assistant; Mrs. Herchlin, corresponding secretary; Mrs. E. Weltman, assistant; Mrs. Prinz, auditor; and Mrs. Genger, parliamentarian.

RESIDENTS.

Members are Mrs. M. Groginski, Ben Cohen, Mrs. Arch- and P. Groginski. Past presidents of the group include Mrs. A. B. Friedman of Denver, U. M. Simon of Los Angeles, M. Weixel of Dallas, E. Horwitz, H. H. Miller, H. H. Rosenthal, D. L. Cohn, H. B. Friedman, Ernest Groginski, Harry Gressman of Wichita Falls, Joe Herman of Dallas, Louis Rosenstein, Edwin G. Schwarz, Joel Rosen, Ben A. Shanblum of El Paso, S. R. Lang, Leo Lederman, R. U. Simon, B. E. Ellman, Seymour Spiegel and E. Steinberger. Mrs. David Echt and Mrs. H. J. Schwartz have charge of "uniongrams," one of the services of the Sisterhood; and Mrs. M. R. Carb and Miss Ida Brown are in charge of the Memorial Fund. Mrs. Schwarz has charge of the special fund, and Mrs. Raymond Cohn, of pulpit flowers.

The Sisterhood opened the current season Sept. 25 with a luncheon in honor of Mrs. H. H. Miller and in October held a style show-donor luncheon. Last Tuesday night the group held a Sister-

hood-Brotherhood supper with Mrs. Jerry Murad, chairman.

BOOK REVIEW-TEA.

Mrs. Jack Lande will be chairman Jan. 29 of a morning coffee and in February the group will have a "festival of music" coffee with Mrs. W. D. Rosenberg Jr. as chairman. The March 26 meeting will be a luncheon with Mrs. Archenhold, chairman and on April 30, a book review-tea will be held, with Mrs. Jules Goldstein, chairman. Mrs. David Feld will have charge of a luncheon May 28 in honor of officers. All of the regular Sisterhood meetings are held in the Temple Center, in the lower floor of Temple Beth-El. At present members of the Sisterhood are sponsors of the Chanukah Gift Shop for each Sunday for the month of decorations, toys and various items for temple service. The sale is in preface to the celebration of Chanukah which is one of the red letter days on the Temple calendar and will be celebrated Nov. 28-29. The regular Sisterhood meetings are held the fourth Friday each month, with the luncheons at 12:15 p. m.; coffees at 10 a. m.

Every Friday night after Temple services, members of the Sisterhood are hostesses at informal receptions in the Center. Their other activities include a desire to co-operate with other organizations in working with the youth of the community; an attempt to celebrate or commemorate outstanding anniversaries of various members at informal receptions; and a desire to work with welfare projects of special import to their people and in the community.

HEAD OF GROUPS.

Committee chairmen include: Mrs. Steinberger, budget; Mrs.

P. H. Ackin, revision of by-laws; Mrs. Melvin Adler, district federation; Mrs. Richard Simon, publicity; Mmes. Jack Frost, telephone; Ben Sandler, house; Morris Lipshitz and Leo Lipshitz, co-chairmen of luncheons; Sol Weinstein and A. M. Herman, decorations; Jesse Baker and Roy Seglin, serving; Henry Mack, interior decorations; J. Gernsbacher, hostesses; Joel Rosen and E. L. Gilbert, luncheon recipes; Frank Appelman and Leo Lederman, means; B. E. Ellman, New Year's greetings; Mrs. Appelman and Leo Lederman, donor; Marcus Lopin and Mrs. Goldstein, book review;

Rosenthal, and Arnold Rubin, Sabbath reception-hostess.

Ben Ellman, president of the Temple Beth-El congregation, has said that every president since the beginning of the congregation in 1902 has considered that the Sisterhood is "the right hand of the Temple." The women concern themselves primarily with helping the Sunday School and the Temple in all its activities, and in community work and the men agree that the women make valuable contributions to the Temple and community that they just could not do without.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Nell Hall, Ruth Sandler, Ceil Echt, and Rolly Schur enjoy good times and great tastes in the Temple kitchen, November, 1975.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram Photograph Collection, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries



construction of a Reform synagogue. The men did not share their concern. But, with the backing of the rabbi, in 1906 the women created a sinking fund to raise money for the congregation's first house of worship.

To augment the fund, they cooked their best dishes and served potluck dinners for three consecutive nights during the biggest event of the year—the Annual Fort Worth Fat Stock Show. The bill of fare, judging from recipes published in Jewish newspapers of the era, must have ranged from traditional to *treyf*. Apple *floden*, a Hungarian strudel, was a local favorite. So was the Brin family's recipe for beef à la mode—a six-pound roast, slow-cooked in an iron skillet and topped with onions and a glass of claret. Another sophisticated company dish among some Fort Worth Jews was French egg with *pâté de foie gras*—a dish requiring one poached egg, aspic jelly, a spoonful of *pâté*, and a bottom layer of ham.

Regardless of what graced the menu, the potluck suppers were a success. The Council of Jewish Women, in which Reform women predominated, received community-wide recognition and a profit of \$320 to augment Beth-El's building fund. Combined with previous savings, the sinking fund totaled \$500. Credit for the smorgasbord went to eight women—Pheenie Alexander, Elfrieda Brann, Sarah Brown, Carrie Friend, Polly Mack, Blanche Mayer, Mary Miller, and Mrs. Lucius G. Schenk.

Seeing how easily the women had raised \$500, the men of Beth-El began sharing the vision of a house of worship. They opened their wallets. By spring, the congregation had purchased a \$7,700 lot on the corner of Fifth and Taylor streets. More money was pledged. Addie Levy and Blanche Mayer each raised an additional \$900, a "very handsome and unexpected sum." When the High Holy Days arrived in October, the congregation moved into a \$6,000 wood-and-stucco building at 601 Taylor Street. The inscription over the front entrance said in Hebrew, *Y'hee Or*, meaning *Let there be light*.

"While the building is not spacious, it is sufficiently large to accommodate the congregation and Sabbath School," Flora Schiff wrote. Forty students, including youngsters whose parents *davened* at Ahavath Sholom, enrolled in Beth-El's Saturday Religious School. Besides classrooms, Beth-El's first building had "memorial windows finished in art glass, . . . a minister's study, . . . a perpetual lamp and Bible [donated] by the Sabbath School children, . . . a very handsome and costly chandelier" from the Levys, and, last but not least, a "tastily" furnished office for the Council of Jewish Women.

Sisterhood Emerges

Rabbi Jasin, who worked in partnership with the matriarchs, remained four years, from 1904 to 1908. He was followed by the return to Fort Worth of Rabbi George Zepin, the respected rabbi who had rescued the congregation from oblivion. Zepin's heart, however, was in national organizational work. He departed in 1910, returning to Cincinnati's Union of American Hebrew Congregations with a keen understanding of what made a Temple tick—mainly, its women.

Zepin was determined to empower women within Reform Judaism, to upgrade their status from marginal to mainstream. He wanted

to harness and institutionalize their participation so they would remain a constant in congregational dynamics.

A student of history, the rabbi agreed with 19th-century theologian Abraham Geiger, who lamented "the spiritual minority of woman as though she were incapable of grasping the deep things in religion." In 1837, Geiger had railed: "Let there be from now on no distinction between duties for men and women unless flowing from the natural laws governing the sexes . . . Our whole religious life will profit from the beneficial influence."<sup>12</sup> In 1851, Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise, pioneer of American Reform Judaism, instituted a revolutionary change in that direction. He abandoned segregated seating, replacing it with the "family pew." The innovation, criticized by Philadelphia editor Isaac Leeser as a "Gentile fashion," was an early step toward women's equality in the Temple. "Allowing women into the main sanctuary entailed a willingness to revise fundamental assumptions of what it looked like to . . . pray as a Jew."<sup>13</sup> The Reform movement also discarded the notion that only men constituted a minyan—the 10 worshipers required to hold a service.

Still, by 1910, when Zepin departed Fort Worth, few Reform congregations extended voting membership to women. Zepin favored this advance but could not dictate it. The best he could do to empower Jewish women was to unite all Temple auxiliaries into a "mighty weapon in the service of Judaism . . . [and] congregational life." In 1913, he became executive secretary of the newly created National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS). As the organization's administrator, he was present in Chicago, January 19–21, 1915, for Sisterhood's First Biennial Meeting, when delegates from 104 synagogues convened.

Among those attending was Hortense Fox, the delegate from Fort Worth—and the lone representative from Texas. Her attendance was probably due to Rabbi Zepin and his close ties to Beth-El.

That Fort Worth had the first Sisterhood chapter in Texas has gone unheralded. It was two years before a second

SACRED MOMENTS  
WOMEN AND TORAH

Adina Gatt

Rayon Thread on Gaberdine Fabric  
30" x 15" x 8"  
Photo by Rafi Levinson

Adina Gatt's *me'il*, or mantle, was created especially for *Torat Nashim* ("women's Torah"), commissioned by Women of Reform Judaism. It brings to life the long-awaited, sacred dream of full recognition of the presence and the significance of women in the Bible. Women's names, appearing in various *parshiot*, stand out in bold, golden Hebrew letters, against an unusual white-on-white background.

WOMEN OF  
REFORM JUDAISM  
*Art Calendar*

5762/2001-2002

Note: The page numbers in parentheses that appear after the Torah and Hattarah portions refer to *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1981).

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WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM  
633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6778  
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Calendar prepared by Dr. Richard S. Sarason  
Designed by Helayne Friedland



**WOMEN'S WEDNESDAY SEWING** Group, circa 1946. Seated, left to right: Bella Blumenthal, Ida Rubin, Sweetie Goldstone, Mae Davidson, Rose Rosenthal, Fanny Ginsburg, Reggie Gernsbacher. Standing: Ruth Sandler, Lillian Adler, Jennie Baker, unidentified woman, and Ida Brown.

Bob Abery Photo Co.

Texas congregation—Corsicana's Temple Beth-El—joined the Sisterhood movement. El Paso's Temple Mount Sinai followed in 1919. The Reform women of Dallas Temple Emanu-El did not affiliate with NFTS until Sisterhood's Fourth Biennial Meeting in 1921. By then the Dallas Reform congregation had hired Dayton, Ohio, rabbi David Lefkowitz, whose wife, Sadie, was already serving on Sisterhood's national board. She apparently brought the Dallas Temple into the national fold. Houston and Waco also affiliated in 1921.

By then, Fort Worth's Sisterhood chapter was well established. It had begun in 1913 with a half-dozen women, all of them active in the Council of Jewish Women. The Creation of the Temple Auxiliary allowed the Council to focus on the social service arena and the new group to concentrate on Beth-El. The Temple Auxiliary's first president was Elfrieda Brann; its secretary, Flora Schiff. Its 1915 roster was 39 members strong. In 1917, when Hattie Simon was president and Hortense Fox secretary, the Temple Auxiliary's membership had increased to 50. By the Third Biennial in 1919, the auxiliary had increased its numbers to 55 and renamed itself Sisterhood. (In the 1990s, Sisterhood affiliates were renamed Women of Reform Judaism.)

At its inception, Sisterhood's national board established two fund-raising projects that continued into the 21st century: uniongrams, to congratulate fellow Jews upon special occasions, and art calendars, later sold in the Beth-El Congregation Gift Shop. The first Sisterhood calendar, dated 1904–5674, illustrated each Jewish holiday, including a *Shavuot* print of Michelangelo's marble sculpture of Moses, complete with horns.

The calendars augmented one of Sisterhood's goals: "Judaizing homes" with reminders "of things Jewish." Reform Jews had abandoned many, many religious rituals, adopting American and Christian customs in their place. For example, well into the 20th century, it was not uncommon, particularly in the South, for Reform Jews to place Hanukah presents beneath a Christmas tree. To reverse the trend, Sisterhood encouraged Jewish women to celebrate "the feast of lights in the home." The reasoning was clear: "Our children need to know the heroic stories and to be made to feel a sense of pride in the Maccabean victories, in order that we may in a measure counteract the Christmas atmosphere that they must encounter on the outside."<sup>14</sup> Amen.

**Winds of War and Change**

The United States' entry into World War I in April 1917 broadened Sisterhood's focus. The NFTS formed a National War Emergency Committee. It instructed local Sisterhoods to devote one day a week to Red Cross work.

In Fort Worth, that dictum gave rise to Women's Wednesday Clubs. These began as small sewing circles of friends and relatives, regardless of their affiliation with the Temple, Shul, Sisterhood, or Council. Wednesday was chosen because in Fort Worth none of the major women's groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, held membership meetings at midweek. These subgroups or cliques of patriotic women gathered in living rooms or met at the Temple to knit garments, sew hospital gowns (from oversize men's shirts), and roll bandages for overseas. The country was at war, creating shortages at home and abroad.

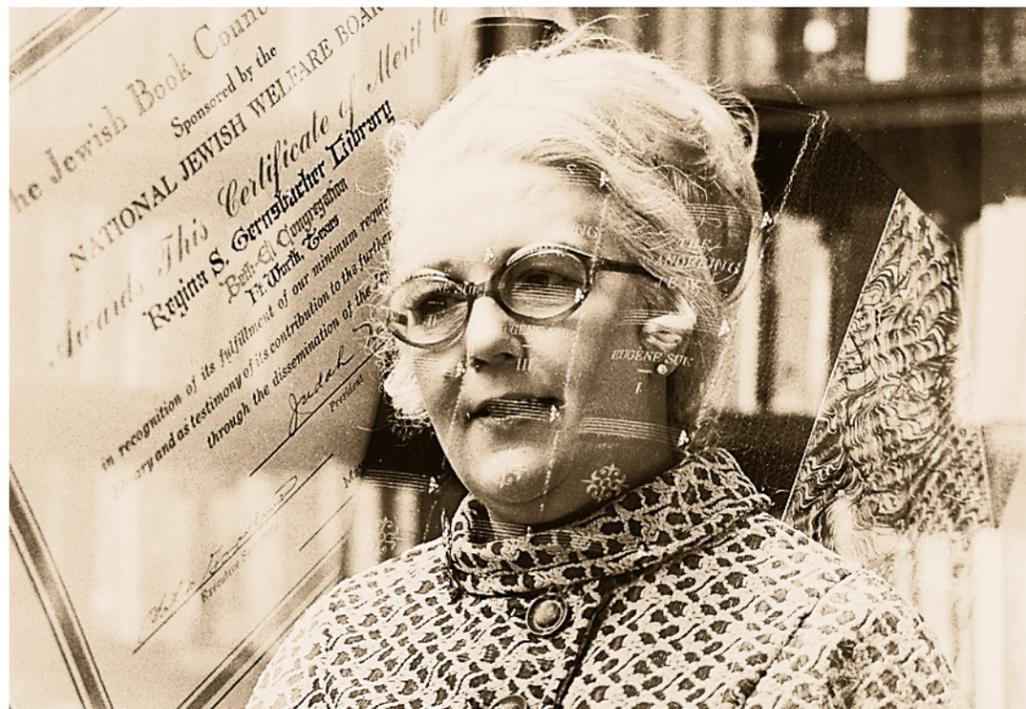
After the war, the work of the Wednesday Clubs continued, with efforts redirected to benefit the Free Baby Hospital, forerunner of Fort Worth Children's Hospital, which opened in 1918 thanks to the efforts of Polly Mack and the Council of Jewish Women. "My mother (Ruth Sandler) and my grandmother made booties for the babies . . . and bandages for cancer patients, using white sheets and tearing them up," recalled Sonya Stenzler. By the early 1940s, Sisterhood had its own sewing room at the Temple, replete with Singer sewing machines. During World War II, seamstress skills again helped the war effort. Members of the Women's Wednesday Clubs sewed, kibitzed, and fixed lunch in the kitchen. As the years passed and there was less need for their sewing skills, at least



Evelyn Siegel

**SISTERHOOD'S DONOR LUNCHEON** in 2002 honored past presidents. Seated, left to right: Toni Horton, Betye Schoenfeld Baccus, Ruby Kantor, Natalie Simon, Sonja Glazer Gressman. Standing: Carol Minker, Sandra Freed, Joy Spiegel, Elaine Samson, Laurie Kelfer, Faye Slater, and Luann Feld.

**RUBY KANTOR** (1920–2002) was larger than life. Big hair. Big glasses. Big jewelry. Big heart. She served throughout the community as a trailblazing leader and energetic follower, always looking for volunteer roles to fill. Within Sisterhood, she was local and regional president. At the Temple, she was the first Outreach Committee chair, welcoming, educating, and supporting Jews by Choice. Innovative and positive, Ruby Kantor made the world a better place.



Paul Schwartz

two Women's Wednesday Clubs remained tight-knit circles, with the women gathering for luncheons, birthdays, and anniversaries.

**Stereotypes**

Beth-El's women were certainly stereotyped. They remained a secondary support battalion. Nevertheless, they raised money and asserted themselves from kitchen, pew, and classroom. While ostensibly staying in their place, they wielded influence.

They governed their own organizations as they saw fit. For the Temple Sisterhood, that meant opening the group's membership to all Jewish women, regardless of where they worshiped and whether their families paid dues to the Temple, the Shul, or no synagogue at all. This open-door policy displeased the Temple trustees. In March of 1923, Beth-El's all-male board passed a motion advising Sisterhood to refuse membership to ladies unless their spouses paid dues at the Temple. Sisterhood balked. Women lobbied their husbands to defeat the measure. Two months later, at the congregation's annual meeting, the proposal was put to a vote of the men. They backed Sisterhood, voting down restrictions.

The time was ripe to push for more women's rights. Women's suffrage had become the law of the land with a constitutional amendment ratified in 1920. The men of Beth-El were not ready to go that far in synagogue affairs. At the congregation's annual meeting of 1923, the men took a half measure, extending voting rights to widows and single women who paid dues. In a final concession to the times, the oligarchy that governed

the Temple agreed that women could occupy up to three seats on the Board of Directors.

The first to so serve were Hattie Simon, Julia Pincus, and Maggie Rubin, the Sisterhood president. Two other women were tapped for the finance committee: Sophia Miller and Ida Goldgraber. These women still had no vote at congregational meetings, but on the board they had a voice and a vote. Progress. For the next 12 years, two or three women at a time served board terms. Finally, at a board meeting on October 8, 1935, Temple President Isadore E. Horwitz made a motion, that "wives of those members of the congregation who are in good standing be given a vote in all matters the same as the members themselves." The motion carried and was ratified at a congregational meeting. Full suffrage for women at Beth-El had finally come, 15 years after passage of the 19th Amendment.

With their voting rights secured, the women relaxed. Nominating committees ceased recommending women for board seats. The female presence in the boardroom diminished, then disappeared. A right, if not exercised, fades from memory and ceases to exist. Periodically, a woman would be nominated to the board amid proclamations that she was the "first" to so serve. Then the supposed precedent would again be forgotten.

In 1949, when the Sisterhood had 228 members, Jake Gernsbacher moved that the group's president, Natalie Simon, become a nonvoting member of the board. The practice continued for a term or two, then lapsed. When Ruby Kantor became Sisterhood president in 1971, she increased the membership roster to 334 and lobbied to give the Sisterhood president an ex-offi-

**Sandra Freed Named 'Outstanding Man Of the Year' By Shanblum B'nai B'rith**



Texas Jewish Post, May 19, 1983

Sandra Freed, one of Fort Worth's outstanding communal leaders, received the L. F. Shanblum B'nai B'rith "Man of the Year Award" at a Sunday evening dinner at Cong. Ahavath Shalom. Freed, who was presented the prestigious award by last year's honoree, Burnis Cohen, was cited for her tireless energy in support of Israel as well as all Jewish causes. Freed, who has devoted a life time of activity to the fort Worth Jewish community has served on the boards and as president of both the Ft. Worth Section, National Council of Jewish Women and Temple Beth-El Sisterhood, as well as in various executive capacities at Beth El Congregation including vice-president.

A frequent visitor to Israel, she has served on the Boards of the Dan Danciger Jewish Community Center and the Fort Worth Jewish Federation and is serving her second term as General Fund Raising Chairman. She and her husband, Buddy, are parents of three daughters, Monica, Shari and Leslie. The daughter of Charles Miron of Fort Worth and the late Frieda Miron, she is the seventh woman to be honored with this significant recognition.

**CONSERVATIVE FORT WORTH** was so reluctant to adopt the gender-neutral language of the feminist revolution that B'nai B'rith found itself in the predicament of awarding its "Man of the Year" prize to women. Outstanding Beth-El women recognized as "Jewish Man of the Year" include Sophia Miller, Madlyn Barnett, Ceil Echt, Marcia Kornbleet Kurtz, Sandra Freed, and Ruby Kantor. B'nai B'rith began calling the award "person of the year" in the 1990s.

New officers of the B'nai B'rith lodge, installed at the dinner were Dr. Barry Bzostek, president; Martin Schwartz; Barry Schneider and Tsalik Nayberg, vice presidents; Alan Kottler, recording secretary; Max Kaye, treasurer; Herbert Berkowitz, assistant treasurer; Allen Hendelman, chaplain; and Leroy Solomon, warden.

service. At the first Sisterhood Sabbath, December 8, 1972, five women finally led the Shabbat worship. Those on the *bimah* along with Kantor were Selma Krauss, Livia Levine, Louise Lipshitz, Edie Yentis, and Rolly Schur, the rabbi's wife.

Feminism was sweeping the country, even reaching Fort Worth, a far corner of the American Diaspora. Egalitarian participation was close at hand. Elsewhere in the Jewish world, women had been making major inroads. Golda Meir was prime minister of Israel. The first female rabbi, Sally Priesand, a classmate of Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger's, was ordained in 1972. Theologian and historian Abraham Karp observed: "The most significant development in Jewish organizational life in the '70s and '80s has been the entry of women into positions of leadership in national organizations and local federations and synagogues which had traditionally been male preserves."<sup>15</sup>

At Beth-El, more and more women routinely served on the Temple board and its executive committee—although usually as secretary. Sandra Miron Freed remembers receiving a telephone call in 1979 from the nominating committee asking if she would consider serving as Temple president if the position were offered. Freed, having just completed a term as Sisterhood president, hesitated. She recalled being surprised and honored, and she promised to think it over. In the end, she was nominated for first vice president.

A woman finally became congregation president in 1987 when Louise Kuehn Appleman took the mantle. She had already held multiple leadership positions in Fort Worth, Tarrant County, and Texas and was

cio seat on the board. This time around, the measure stuck.

Women were still denied seats on the *bimah*. Rabbi Robert J. Schur, an advocate of equal rights for racial minorities, opposed women ascending to the pulpit and leading services. Yet there was a precedent for this practice. In 1942 and 1943, a previous rabbi, Samuel Soskin, had allowed Council Sabbaths during which NCJW women led Purim services. Unaware of this precedent, the women, so to speak, reinvented the wheel. A determined Ruby Kantor instituted an annual Sisterhood Sabbath, during which women conducted the



**THE FIRST WOMEN** to serve as Temple president were Louise Appleman, right, in 1987 and Judie B. Greenman in 1999.

honored at being tapped to serve her congregation. Appleman's father-in-law, Frank Appleman, was a past president at Beth-El. Her own father had been president years before at Corpus Christi's Temple Beth El. Gender no longer prevented her from following in their footsteps.

A decade later a second female president, Judie B. Greenman, followed. She served during construction of the congregation's \$11 million synagogue. In 2002, Beth-El's centennial year, the president-elect was Maddie Lesnick, a former classroom teacher, religious school director, and management team member at RadioShack Corporation.

Finally, the hopes of Abraham Geiger, voiced in 1837 and repeated at the opening convention of the NFTS, have come to pass: "Let there be from now on no distinction between duties for men and women unless flowing from the natural laws governing the sexes; no assumption of the spiritual minority of woman as though she were incapable of grasping the deep things in religion . . . Our whole religious life will profit from the beneficial influence which feminine hearts know how to bestow on it." 🌟

### "Belles of the Ball"

Sisterhood's treasury was low. The Temple was in debt. What to do?

"We had a ball," recalled Tobia Miller Ellman describing a 1917 fundraising dance that netted \$500. The tradition of having a good time to fill the Temple treasury was revived in 1936. Sisterhood's Depression-era party, dubbed Presentation, was a Jewish debutante ball held over Thanksgiving weekend in the Venetian Ballroom of the Blackstone Hotel. The gala was so successful that it was reprised annually—except during the war—for the next 17 years.

At the holiday ball, young ladies in floor-length taffeta gowns descended a dramatic, two-tiered, **Gone With the Wind**-style staircase then made a deep curtsy to the community. Cradling bouquets of long-stemmed chrysanthemums, the debbs—who were high-school juniors and seniors—posed for group pictures published in the next day's **Fort Worth Press and Star-Telegram**.

"The bow didn't worry me like the stairs," recalled Frances Weltman, a deb during the 1940 season. "Walking down the stairs at the Blackstone, I was scared to death I was going to fall. You were not permitted to hold onto the railing."

Following their elegant descents, each deb danced in the limelight with a tuxedoed escort, fox-trotting to a favorite song. Rosabelle Letwin Tann, on the arm of Sylvan Fox selected, **A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody**. Ruth Gilbert Nierman and her date Leonard Samson danced to **Lovely to Look At**. Ed Lally's Orchestra provided the music.

Thirteen local Jewish organizations nominated Presentation debutantes. Eleanor Klotzman Gachman represented the Ladies Auxiliary to the Hebrew Institute. Annette Bockstein Taylor was tapped by the Council of Jewish Juniors, while Madlyn Brachman Barnett was the "sweetheart" of AZA. Louise Klar Lipshitz represented the Temple Sisterhood and Cecile Gilbert Price, the Temple Brotherhood. Helen Ginsburg



LIVIA SCHREIBER LEVINE, 1947  
Presentation deb with her date, Louis Weltman.

Archenhold was sponsored by Hadassah. Their escorts were usually good friends, not beaux, and included cousins or brothers of the other girls. Each nominee sold tickets, with proceeds benefiting Sisterhood. The deb who sold the most tickets was crowned queen.



1936 PRESENTATION DEBS. Front row, left to right: Charlotte Miller Mehl, Eleanor Klotzman Gachman, Bertha Samson Shanblum, Annette Bockstein Taylor, Shirley Ginsburg Anton, Betty Joe Drescher Silberstein, Louise Klar Lipshitz. Escorts, back row, left to right: Nolan Glazer, David Samson, Phil Hurwitz, Willard Glazer, Irving Rosenthal, Mitchell Victor, Joseph Shanblum.

For the Presentation ball, practically every young lady wore a new gown. Eleanor Gachman's aunt in Baltimore sent her a floor-length formal. Livia Schreiber Levine got hers at Reuben and Rose Fuller's boutique located in their Pennsylvania Avenue home. "I remember when I got that dress. It was a deep green," Levine recalled. "Mrs. (Daisy)

Landman gave each of us a set of pearls, a double strand. I still have mine."

Fort Worth's Presentation ball was similar to Atlanta's Jewish society gala called Ballyhoo and to Birmingham's Fourth of July fete called Falcon. Across the South, annual social gatherings for young Jewish adults occurred in Columbus, Jacksonville, Mobile, Memphis, and Louisville (during the Derby).

These upscale Jewish galas mimicked social affairs that excluded Jews. "There were no Jews in Steeplechase then," recalled Fay Rosenthal Brachman, a 1937 Presentation deb, referring to a local club that began hosting debutante parties in 1912. "This was the equivalent." Social exclusion was a two-sided coin. The Jewish community denounced intermarriage, although parental disapproval did not stop it. Presentation balls encouraged dating and mating within Jewish circles.

Presentation and similar Jewish socials throughout the South waned in the early 1950s as more young adults left home to attend college. In

Texas, the Austin campus of the University of Texas became the main meeting ground where young Jewish men met and partied with young Jewish women from across the state. The idea of a hometown ball became quaint and dated. Sisterhood's last Presentation ball was in 1953.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM Wednesday Morning, November 21, 1947

## El Sisterhood's at Ball

MISS JAYNE MYERS wore a strapless pale green gown of nylon net with pale green sequins on the bodice and full length skirt, with matching slippers. She carried yellow roses and wore rhinestone jewelry and long white gloves. Jackie Laves was her escort and her entrance song "Estrellita." She is the daughter of Mrs. Edgar Myers, 2319 Warner Rd.

MISS REALENE MEHL, who entered with David Rubin to "Because of You," wore a soft blue nylon net gown with swirls of gold sequins and rhinestones on the strapless bodice and at the top of the bouffant skirt. She wore long white gloves, a blue net stole, blue slippers and rhinestone jewelry. Her flowers were yellow mums tied with blue ribbon. Mr. and Mrs. Myer Mehl, 3727 Bellaire Circle, are her parents.

MISS LA RUE GLICKMAN wore a Henri Bendel model of white nylon net trimmed with rhinestones and pearls on the strapless bodice and full skirt. Her slippers were silver and her bouquet red roses. She wore rhinestone accessories and long white gloves. The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hyman Glickman, 2548 Kent, she was escorted by Gary Luskey. "I Only Have Eyes For You" was her song.

MISS GLORIA LAVES, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. L. Harry Laves, 2225 Wilshire, wore a strapless gown of pale yellow nylon stiffened embroidered metallic net sprinkled with tiny silver drops over taffeta, with a matching stole draped from the back of the shoulders. Her escort was Arthur Ungerman of Dallas and her song "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody." She wore silver slippers, rhinestone jewelry and long white gloves. She carried red roses.

MISS SANDRA ZAETLER, who entered to "Blue Moon," wore a samsa taffeta gown with a tiered net skirt and folds of the net on the bodice. She wore matching slippers, long white gloves and rhinestone jewelry.

THIRTEEN GIRLS HONORED by the Sisterhood of Temple Beth-El Tuesday night at Blackstone Hotel were, first row, left to right, Misses Barbara Walensky of Dallas, Esther Rosenthal, Gloria Laves, Dorothy Prager and Sara Rashti; second row, left to right, La Rue Glickman, Sandra Rashti, Realene Mehl and Sandra Zaetler; third row, left to right, Jayne Myers, Sonya Sandler, Sandra Miron and Yvonne Greene.

—Star-Telegram Photo by Dub McPhail.

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