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Honoring Madison Pioneers and Celebrating the Next Generation

Dear friends,

The spring semester was an emotional one at the Center for Jewish Studies. Professor Rachel Brenner’s passing in January came all too quickly, robbing us of a beloved teacher, valued colleague, and prolific scholar at the peak of her powers. I will never forget the warm welcome Rachel gave me when I came to the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 1998. She took me out for coffee, and within a matter of minutes we were engrossed in conversation, agreeing and disagreeing about all sorts of subjects the specifics of which I can no longer recall, but I will always fondly remember Rachel’s hospitality that day. As you will read on the following page, Rachel inspired admiration and respect from her students at the UW and from fellow scholars around the world. To honor her legacy, the Center will offer a lecture this fall by one of those distant colleagues, Shoshana Ronen at the University of Warsaw. We also plan to sponsor an online gathering of her former students. If you would like to participate, please contact our office at jewishstudies@acjs.wisc.edu.

We also mourn the recent loss of Marv Conney, an extraordinarily generous supporter of CJS who, with his cherished wife, Babe, established the Conney Project on Jewish Arts almost two decades ago. One of the first such programs in the country, the Conney Project has greatly enriched the Madison community and will continue to thrive for years to come. A visionary in philanthropy and business, Marv was also a deeply humane person: kind, thoughtful, eydl. May his memory be a blessing.

Marv and Babe reflected the finest values of Madison’s vibrant Jewish community. In this issue of the newsletter, CJS is proud to present an historical portrait of another Madison institution, the city’s Hadassah chapter, which was one of the first in the country. The group’s civic-mindedness and devotion to Jewish causes are impressive, not least because the Madison women who sustained and advanced Hadassah also helped pave the way for Jewish Studies at UW. Their record of accomplishment reminds us of the Center’s roots. We owe a permanent debt of gratitude to them and all those who came together to bring Jewish learning to Madison.

That legacy is visible in the students featured on these pages. As you will see from their profiles, the Class of 2021 is an impressive group. During their college careers, these students combined their interest in Jewish Studies with a wide array of fields and disciplines, including history, political science, economics, journalism, social work, community and non-profit leadership, psychology, and microbiology. Their educational achievements and hopes for the future testify to the great value (I would say necessity) of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin.

It is to the pioneers and their young inheritors that the current issue of the newsletter is dedicated.

Tony Michels, Director
Mosse/Weinstein Center or Jewish Studies
George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History

Please Consider Giving to CJS

The Center for Jewish Studies depends on your generosity. Please consider making a gift by mail or online. Your donation will go to programs that enhance the understanding and appreciation of Jewish life for students and the public.

By mail: Use the pre-addressed envelope inside this newsletter. Make your check payable to “UW Foundation” and write in the memo line “Jewish Studies Excellence Fund.”

Online: Visit supportuw.org/give-to/cjsspring

Director’s Report

Tony Michels, Director
Photo: Snitow-Kaufman Productions
Remembering Rachel Feldhay Brenner

Rachel Feldhay Brenner, the Elaine Marks WARF Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, passed away on Thursday, February 4 in Madison. She was 74.

Born in Zabrze, Poland, Brenner moved to Israel with her family in 1956. She studied at the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and the University of York in Toronto before coming to Madison, where she joined the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies in 1992. In addition to chairing the department from 2004 to 2007, Brenner was an active member of CJS, the Middle East Studies Program, and the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia.

An internationally recognized scholar of Hebrew, Polish, and Canadian literatures, Brenner published on a wide range of subjects, including the literature of the Holocaust, the ethical challenges of witnessing atrocity, and relations between Israeli Arab and Jewish writers. Shoshana Ronen, the chair of the Hebrew Studies Department at the University of Warsaw, describes Brenner as “an interdisciplinary scholar par excellence,” whose writings deal with crucial questions about “the ethical and psychological outcomes of the Holocaust, resistance versus indifference in time of terror, the collapse of the ideas of the Enlightenment, ethics and politics, and whether the art of writing can be a spark in the process of tikkun olam (mending the world) after the shatter of the human world during the Holocaust.”

In the classroom, Professor Brenner was known for her energy, enthusiasm, and intellectual rigor, and for the genuine interest she took in her students. “She loved to see students engage with one another,” remembers Hilary Miller (BA 2019), “to exchange ideas and offer insights. She wanted her students to honor their backgrounds and personal history while setting the expectation that, when entering her classroom, all preconceived notions could be challenged and subject to scrutiny.”

Brenner was the author of seven books and no fewer than eighty articles. Her 2019 book, Polish Literature and the Holocaust: Eyewitness Testimonies, 1942–1947, examines literary responses of Poles to the genocide of Jews during the Nazi occupation. Her book The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers’ Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945 received the University of Southern California Book Prize in Literary and Cultural Studies. In recognition of her distinguished publishing record, she was awarded the Max and Frieda Weinstein-Bascom Professorship of Jewish Studies, which she held from 2009 to 2014. In 2020, she was selected to be the inaugural Harvey L. Temkin and Barbara Myers Temkin Professor in Hebrew Language and Literature.

A dedicated teacher and scholar, Brenner remained active to the end. In December, she participated in a live-streamed panel on the uses and abuses of art in representations of the Holocaust at the meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies. At the start of the spring semester, she was preparing to teach two of her mainstay courses: “Holocaust: Testimonies and Expressions” and “Jerusalem: Holy City of Conflict and Desire,” which explored the role that Jerusalem played from the emergence of the modern Zionist movement in Europe to current political events in the Middle East.

“She showed that writing is an act of resistance in a violent and coercive world. I think that Rachel's writings, and also teaching, were an act of resistance in front of the absurdity of existence. In her work she bestowed meaninglessness a meaning.”

—Shoshana Ronen, University of Warsaw

Shira Goldenholz (formerly Yuchtman, BA 1999) speaks for countless other students when she describes her memories of Professor Brenner’s classroom: “I remember to this day the high standards she set for her students and her commitment to making sure each of us truly achieved our highest potential in her class. She expected a lot, but she gave no less.”

On November 9, CJS will be sponsoring an online lecture by Professor Ronen in Brenner’s honor. For details about this event, please check the calendar on our webpage this fall.

Thanks to the generosity of donors (see p. 10), CJS has recently established the Rachel Feldhay Brenner Student Support Fund for Research and Study of the Holocaust. If you would like to make a gift, please visit this webpage: supportuw.org/giveto/RFBfund.
Samantha Rose Crane  
Major in Journalism and Political Science, with certificate in Jewish Studies  

Samantha’s early education at a Jewish day school in Chicago built the foundation for her Jewish identity and love of learning. In high school, she expanded her understanding of her cultural heritage by taking Hebrew and completing a two-year Israel advocacy fellowship. Pursuing a Jewish Studies certificate at the UW allowed her to deepen that knowledge through her coursework. Two of her favorite courses were “The American Jewish Experience” with Tony Michels and “Israeli Politics” with Nadav Shelef. As Samantha recalls:

I took “The American Jewish Experience” in the first semester of my freshman year and immediately felt a sense of relief. With all the new adjustments in college, this course felt like the first familiar space. Learning about the different waves of migration of Jews to the United States and how they prospered was an excellent introduction to the kinds of courses that Jewish Studies had to offer. I also thoroughly enjoyed “Israeli Politics.” I think learning the politics of another country, especially one of the United States’ greatest allies, allows us to think critically and gain a more global perspective.

Currently, Samantha is studying for the LSAT with a view to attending law school. Last year she got a head start on a legal career through an internship at the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights under Law, which focuses on advancing civil and human rights for Jews across the country. The internship, she explains, “led me to appreciate and come to understand some of the vexing human rights issues that plague our society.” Eventually Samantha hopes to work on these issues as a human rights lawyer.

Lily Gray  
Major in Journalism and Political Science, with certificates in Jewish Studies and Public Policy  

Lily decided to pursue a certificate in Jewish Studies because she was interested in studying policy and politics through a Jewish lens. As she explains:

I love how Jewish communities around the world are a microcosm of whatever community they are in and can provide unique insight into problems and solutions. I also love being Jewish and wanted to continue that love in an educational way. My favorite Jewish Studies class at UW was “Jewish Humor” with Professor Sunny Yudkoff. Jewish humor is a really interesting lens through which to look at the Jewish experience, and I appreciated the ways it made me think differently about comedy.

This summer Lily is working at a summer camp as a program director for the junior counselor program. After that, she plans to go into political communications and hopes to work on Capitol Hill.
Maya Jeremias

Major in Microbiology (with honors), with a certificate in Jewish Studies

Before coming to the UW-Madison, Maya spent a year in Israel. “My gap year shaped my world view and perspective on religions. I became passionate about learning more about the history of Judaism and retaining my connection to the Hebrew language,” she recalls. Like Isabella, she has especially strong memories of Hebrew classes with lecturer Judith Sone:

“She always had the most welcoming learning environment, which made coming to class something I always looked forward to! She also was more than willing to be there for me if I needed help beyond the classroom, and it was always very clear she cared deeply about her students’ success and happiness.”

Next year Maya will be attending the College of Dental Medicine at Columbia University. She hopes to specialize in oral and maxillofacial surgery.

Isabella Shaffer-Jaffery

Double major in History and Jewish Studies

Isabella has always been interested in the Jewish religion and in the history of her own family. At the UW she was able to pursue these interests in greater depth, with an emphasis on Soviet and Eastern Bloc history. “I always felt very encouraged by all of my Jewish studies professors and the entire department,” she says. Hebrew lecturer Judith Sone was particularly supportive:

“The support and kindness of Judith Sone, my Hebrew teacher, allowed me to be much more confident in my Hebrew ability and my Jewish identity overall. I often felt like I was behind because I did not grow up learning Hebrew, even in Hebrew school. Judith always made sure to help me feel comfortable and pushed me to grow. There were also times when she acted as my own ‘Jewish mother.’ While I was taking her classes I had both mono and pneumonia. She’d tell me to just go home and rest, and she always checked in to find out how I was feeling later!”

Since graduating in Winter 2020, Isabella has been the Coordinator of Individual Support at the Pittsburgh Symphony. Eventually, she hopes to complete a Ph.D. with a focus on Jewish and Soviet studies.

Sarah Fruchtman

Major in Economics, with certificates in Jewish Studies and Global Health

Sarah decided to pursue a Jewish Studies certificate after taking several classes in the department “and loving every single one of them.” She particularly valued her courses in Hebrew, which allowed her to gain confidence in speaking, reading, and writing the language within a small and intimate setting. Almost as soon as she arrived on campus, she recalls, “I was given a place to learn and an instant community.” Near year, Sarah looks forward to working as a healthcare consultant in New York City, bringing with her the knowledge and skills she gained at the UW.
Lily Penina Sokobin
Major in Social Work, with a certificate in Jewish Studies

When Lily came to the UW she was excited to have the chance to learn Hebrew. After taking Hebrew 101 and a Jewish history course during the first semester of her freshman year, she decided she wanted to pursue a certificate in Jewish Studies. As Lily explains:

“I enjoyed all of my courses in the Jewish Studies program, because I always felt connected to the content and enjoyed having conversations with other students and faculty with diverse backgrounds. These courses challenged me to examine literature from all time periods and from all over the world and provided me with a wealth of knowledge.”

In the coming year she plans to live and work in New York, and then go on to a master’s degree in social work.

Jennie Kleinman
Major in Psychology, with a certificate in Jewish Studies

Jennie grew up attending a Jewish day school. When she came to the UW, she welcomed the opportunity to learn about Judaism and Jewish history from new and different perspectives. Like many other students, she found her Hebrew classes especially meaningful:

“My favorite teacher in Jewish Studies is Judith Sone. I have taken four semesters of Hebrew with Judith and have enjoyed learning from her so much. She has shaped my college experience in a lot of ways and always offered a supportive, fun learning environment.”

In the future, Jennie plans to pursue an M.A. in mental health counseling.

Hannah Judith Silverstein
Major in Community and Nonprofit Leadership, with a certificate in Jewish Studies

Hannah says that she has always been interested in Jewish summer camps. After coming to the UW, she decided that a certificate in Jewish Studies would help her with that work. Her favorite Jewish Studies course was “Religion and Sexuality,” with Professor Jordan Rosenblum. In the coming months, she hopes to be working at an overnight camp year-round.
Congratulations to all who received awards from the Mosse/Weinstein Center in 2020-21:

- Andy Bachman Support Fund for Jews and Social Justice
  Rachel Leigh Hale
- Robert and Lynn Berman Scholarship
  Shai Goldfarb-Cohen
  Jacqueline Krass
  Alex Scheepens
  Chagai Weiss
- Rachel Feldhay Brenner Fund for Research and Study of the Holocaust
  Alex Scheepens
- Kaplan Jewish Civilization Award
  Shai Goldfarb-Cohen
- George and Sylvia Laikin Prize
  Lotem Bassan
  Chagai Weiss
- Ida and Isaac Lipton Domestic Study Award
  Alayna Bruney
  Ethell Gershengorin
  Jacqueline Krass
  Savannah Lipinski
  Alex Scheepens
  Chagai Weiss
- Ida and Isaac Lipton Essay Award
  Rachel Leigh Hale
  Jacqueline Krass
  Alex Scheepens
- Menachem Mansoor Award for Excellence in Hebrew
  Jacob Tevya Henry
- Charles and Gayle Mazursky Student Support Fund
  Chagai Weiss
- Robert and Beverly Natelson Family Award in Jewish Studies
  Alex Scheepens
- David Sorkin Graduate Student Support Fund
  Alex Scheepens
- Marjorie and Harry Tobias Major/Certificate Scholarship
  Savannah Lipinski
  Hannah Shirley Silver
- Lawrence A. Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellowship in Education and Jewish Studies
  Eric Luckey

We also congratulate the recipients of the following awards offered by the Department of History:

- Paul J. Schrag Writing Prize
  Maggie Jay
- Julie A. and Peter M. Weil Distinguished Graduate Fellowship
  Dylan Kaufman-Obstler
  Erin Faigin
Chad Gibbs to Direct Holocaust Center at College of Charleston

For Chad Gibbs, the path to Jewish studies began at the age of eight or nine, when he picked up a history book from his grandfather’s bookshelf and first came upon photographs of the Holocaust. What he saw and read in those pages had a visceral effect that remained with him even as his knowledge of the world grew through a wide range of experiences, from Army service in Iraq to study abroad in Lithuania and Israel. This August, after completing his Ph.D. in History, Chad will begin the next chapter of his life at the College of Charleston, South Carolina, where he will be an assistant professor of Jewish studies and the director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies. In his new role, Chad will draw deeply upon his graduate work, which has focused on modern European Jewish history, modern Germany, military history, antisemitism, and the Holocaust.

Chad grew up in a small midwestern town, where joining the Army offered passage to a much larger world. After serving in various posts in the U.S., he deployed to Iraq, where he was wounded near Tikrit in 2006. A few years later, he was medically retired from the service and began college at the University of Wyoming. Initially, Chad had planned to become a high school history teacher. As a first-generation college student, however, he caught the attention of the McNair Scholars Program, which is designed to prepare undergraduate students for doctoral studies. With his professors encouraging him to go further in his studies, Chad switched his major from education to history. Upon completing his B.A., he then went on to attain his M.A. in history at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

When Chad came to Madison to pursue his Ph.D. in the Department of History, he was already proficient in German. For his research on the Holocaust, he next needed to learn Yiddish. With support from the Mosse/Weinstein Center and other sources, he attended a summer program in Vilnius, Lithuania. At the UW, he continued to expand his knowledge of Yiddish through a directed reading course with Professor Amos Bitzan (Frances and Laurence Weinstein Assistant Professor of History) and a graduate seminar with Professor Sunny Yudkoff. To supplement his coursework in Yiddish, he also took online classes through the Workers Circle.

From July 2019 to March 2020, the George L. Mosse Program in History offered Chad a graduate exchange fellowship at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There he began learning Hebrew while conducting research on the Treblinka II extermination camp. In the dissertation that has emerged from this research, Chad uses extensive testimonial sources to examine how male and female prisoners of the camp used their social networks to gain some measure of control in their daily lives and plan their August 1943 revolt.

It has been inspiring, says Professor Bitzan, to watch Chad develop as both a “superstar teacher” and a scholar of “unshakeable focus and professionalism.” As Bitzan explains:

Chad is breaking new ground with his scholarship on resistance at Treblinka, and he communicates his insights in clear, jargon-free prose. His work ethic and constant desire to reach higher astound me. Chad’s devotion to teaching the history of the Shoah is rooted in a noble concern for humanity. He pursues this study with a finely tuned moral compass. Without shying away from the careful study of Nazi policies and perpetrators, he is above all steadfast in his sensitivity toward their victims. It is this ethical vision of his teaching and research that, combined with historical rigor, so enriches our knowledge of the Holocaust as students and scholars.

Professor Bitzan sends Chad off to Charleston with a blessing that draws on the words of Moses to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:7): “Chazak ve-ematz: Be strong and courageous, as you embark on this journey teaching the next generation of students and sharing your knowledge with the world. Professor Gibbs!”
From Generation to Generation

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, Josh Goldstein (BA ‘15) always admired his paternal grandfather, Bernie Goldstein (BBA ’49), and loved hearing about his college days at the UW-Madison. Josh’s father Stewart also attended the UW (BA ’82), so the pull of Madison was strong as Josh entered his senior year of high school and began to apply to colleges. That spring the University of Missouri offered him a full ride, but the UW-Madison remained his first choice. When Josh was accepted, he excitedly called his grandfather, and both started crying. The out-of-state tuition presented a challenge, but Bernie vowed to “make this happen.” True to his promise, he helped Josh’s parents pay the tuition each semester, enabling Josh to realize his dream of becoming a Badger.

Now Josh and Bernie have forged another special connection through their commitment to the Center for Jewish Studies. In 2018, after Bernie made a generous gift to create our new Goldstein Family Student Lounge and Library, Josh attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony and felt inspired by his grandfather’s support of the Center. Soon afterwards, Josh agreed to join our Board of Visitors, where he offers a fresh and unique perspective as the youngest member. In supporting CJS, grandfather and grandson have each found a valuable way to contribute to the university that shaped them both.

Bernie grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, where he liked to do the bookkeeping in his parents’ store. At the UW-Madison, he focused on Business Administration and refined the skills he would ultimately need to become a CPA. An only child, Bernie was especially grateful for the friendships he formed through his fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau. “Not only did I get a fantastic education,” he reflects. “I had a fantastic time.” Since then, he has passed on to his children and grandchildren the same lesson that his parents passed on to him: “There’s nothing you can’t do if you want it badly enough and you’re willing to put in the sacrifice to do it.”

Like his grandfather, Josh threw himself into his college experience and soon made friends with students from many different backgrounds. He recalls his surprise upon learning that his freshman roommate, a native Wisconsinite, had never met a Jewish person before. “He was a great guy, and we learned things from each other,” Josh reflects. Through one of his closest fraternity brothers at Delta Upsilon, he soon learned about Jewish Experience of Madison. In one particularly memorable session, he was able to spend time listening to the experiences of some Holocaust survivors. JEM also arranged for him to spend a weekend living with a Hasidic family in Milwaukee, where he had the opportunity to take part in a fully traditional shabbat for the first time.

During his years at the UW, Josh came to value his relationship with Bernie more than ever, and they would get together regularly, bonding over beers at the Nitty Gritty and their shared passion for Badger athletics. When Bernie would talk about his own college experiences, Josh says, he realized that his grandfather was “like me, in more aged skin.” Occasionally Josh would attend services with Bernie, who proudly introduced him to all his friends. At these times, Josh was glad to “step outside of the college bubble” for a while and reflect on how lucky he was.

Josh continues to count his blessings. Currently, he and his wife Brynne are living in Denver, Colorado, where Josh works for the Zillow Group. This September they are expecting their first child, a baby boy, who may just turn out to be a fourth-generation Badger, following the footsteps of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.
Rachel Feldhay Brenner was one of the first CJS faculty members to greet David Pettersen after he joined the Mosse/Weinstein Center as our Financial Specialist in August 2019. She immediately made him feel at home. “Talking on the phone with Rachel or visiting her office always felt like connecting with a family member,” says David, a recent UW alumnus who graduated in 2018 with a double major in History and Political Science and came to CJS after working with another department the previous year. “She was welcoming and joyous.” David was impressed by her scholarly achievements and dedication to teaching. At the same time, he was struck by her unassuming demeanor and kindly interest in others. “It seemed that whenever something bad was happening in the world, she was quick to empathize with those in unfortunate circumstances, while simultaneously reminding me that sunnier days were always ahead.”

When Professor Brenner passed away unexpectedly this past February, David was moved to establish a student award in her honor. With money from a trust of his own, he created the new Rachel Feldhay Brenner Award for Research and Study of the Holocaust. In May, CJS was pleased to offer the award to its first recipient, Alex Scheepens, a graduate student in the Department of History who is now completing his master’s thesis, “The Jewish Experience in Hiding in the Dutch Countryside during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1945.”

Alex’s research deepens the understanding of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. Most scholarship on the topic approaches it from the perspective of non-Jewish rescuers. Alex shifts the focus, seeking to understand “the choices, motivations, behaviors, and experiences of those Jews who sought to escape the restrictions, persecutions, and deportations of the Nazi authorities and find refuge in the attics, basements, cellars, barns, and underground shelters of their non-Jewish countrymen.” Attending closely to the individual circumstances of Jews in hiding, he finds that their different experiences were shaped by “socioeconomic status and religious affiliation, by the integration into Dutch society and the creation of social networks, by family status and geographic setting, by gender and the existing generational divide, and by whether one was a well-established Dutch citizen or a newly-arrived immigrant from Germany, Austria, or Czechoslovakia.”

In peeling back the layers of this history to reveal its underlying texture, Alex’s work is in the spirit of Professor Brenner’s own scholarship, which in her later years focused increasingly on the Holocaust. Training a keen and steady eye on her sources, she analyzed eyewitness and literary responses to the genocide as it unfolded in Poland to consider the moral complexities of bearing witness to such atrocity.

David’s creation of the Brenner Award honors her legacy by encouraging students like Alex to delve into the difficult subject of the Holocaust with the same rigor and tenacity as Brenner herself. As David explains: “With the right blend of qualities seen in the finest scholars, her life’s work is a testament to what can be achieved through the culmination of hard work, kindness and humility towards others, and sheer resilience in the face of adversity.”

In recent years, David has been concerned about the growing gap in Holocaust knowledge among young people. “It is more crucial than ever,” he explains, “to train the students of today to become the teachers of tomorrow. I was inspired to create this award because it is my hope that it will support the next generation of undergraduate and graduate students as they study and research the Holocaust.”

In the months since Brenner’s passing, dozens of colleagues, friends, and former students have made donations in her name totaling nearly $5,000. These and future gifts in Brenner’s honor will augment the fund that David has created and increase the support available to students.

If you wish to contribute to the Rachel Feldhay Brenner Fund, please visit this webpage: supportuw.org/giveto/RFBfund.
Before there was a Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies, there was a community of Madisonian Jews committed to educating themselves and others about the culture, history, and languages of the Jewish people. Within this community, a small but active group of women played a leading role.

Their tradition of civic engagement can be traced at least as far back as 1914, when one of America’s first chapters of Hadassah was established in Madison by Rachel Szold Jastrow, the wife of UW psychology professor Joseph Jastrow and a sister of Henrietta Szold, who founded the original chapter in New York. By the late 1940s, the Madison Hadassah was a hub of philanthropic activity on behalf of the Zionist cause, which was gaining momentum internationally in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In time, some of these women and their families would leave their mark not only on the Madison community, but also on the Center for Jewish Studies. A major endowment from Madison couple Laurence and Frances Weinstein helped to create the Mosse/Weinstein Center in 1991, and over the years that followed, the Weinsteins continued to build our program through named professorships, a distinguished lecture series, a graduate fellowship, and four student scholarships. In addition, several other Madison-based families, including the Temkins, the Minkoffs, and the Tobiases, have all made substantial investments to support the Center’s mission.

Growing up in Madison, Cheryl Temkin (BA ’70), chair of the CJS Board of Visitors, admired the energy and dedication of Frances Weinstein and her generation. “These women were fired up,” Cheryl recalls. When Cheryl and her brother Harvey (BA ’74) were children, their mother Sylvia was president of Hadassah’s Madison chapter and would sometimes stay up all night working on Hadassah business. Before meetings, Sylvia would send the kids to the movies so that she and the other women could concentrate without interruptions. Inspired in part by the example of this generation, Harvey and his wife Barbara Myers Temkin (BSE ’75) have since gone on to create a new CJS professorship in Hebrew language and literature, and Cheryl has recently established an endowment for a professorship in modern Israel studies. “The tradition of civic engagement trickled down,” Barbara explains. “The women passed it on to the children.”

From the beginning, there was a practical component to Madison’s Hadassah chapter, as the women and their families took in Jewish immigrants and assisted other struggling Jews in the community. Centered in the Greenbush neighborhood, this early generation lived simply, operating groceries, laundries, and other small-scale retail operations. Their hands-on approach is exemplified by one of Hadassah’s legendary leaders, Fannie Mack, who once rode on the back of a pickup truck with a barrel full of chicken soup to distribute to hungry mouths at Passover.

After 1948, the Madison chapter focused on raising funds for the nascent state of Israel, with a special emphasis on its medical needs. The women’s vision was broad in scope, and their activities always had a strong educational component. “They didn’t focus on bake sales,” Cheryl explains. “They exposed their kids to the Jewish experience at large.” Several of those kids, including Cheryl and Harvey, later went on to study in the UW’s Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies, which was then under the extraordinary leadership of Professor Menahem Mansoor.

Through their generosity, hard work, and commitment to Jewish causes, the women of that unique generation exemplify a local culture of philanthropy and activism that also includes such organizations as B’nai B’rith, Hillel, the Jewish Welfare Board, Workman’s Circle, and Jewish Social Services. In future issues of this newsletter, we look forward to sharing more about the culture of civic engagement that has helped make CJS what it is today.

Right: Elizabeth Woods, Frances Weinstein, Celia Rosenberg, Rae Schwartz, and Doris Simon in October, 1960 at a fundraising luncheon for the Hadassah Eye Bank (Wisconsin Historical Society)
Honoring CJS Pioneers

Marv Conney z”l

By Professor Douglas Rosenberg
UW-Madison Art Department
Founding Director, Conney Project on Jewish Arts

Marv Conney, longtime CJS supporter and Board of Visitors member, passed away on Thursday, March 25, at the age of 94. Marv was a visionary whose generosity, along with that of his wife Babe, provided the support for the Conney Project on Jewish Arts, housed within the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies.

I first met Marv in the early 2000s after he and his wife Babe had made a gift to CJS honoring his own songwriter father’s love of the arts. The gift was intended to support a program that focused on the intersection of “Judaism and the arts,” a non-traditional project that was to explore the Jewish experience in America today as seen through contemporary arts and culture. As his son David Conney explained, Marv’s goal was to “look at Judaism in America through contemporary music, Broadway, film, television, dance, literature, and painting—and how each art-form can tell a Jewish story. And, in America, of course, a Jewish story, at its essence, involves the American dream, optimism, opportunity, diversity, tolerance, social responsibility, social justice, resilience, and survival.”

Thus, the Conney Project on Jewish Arts was born and remains the only initiative like it in the country. As the founding Director of the Conney Project, I had the great privilege to work closely with Marv since 2002, building his vision from the ground up. We spent a lot of time talking about the ways that Jewish immigrants had shaped the culture of the 20th century and thereafter. He also spoke about how proud he was of his roots in Ripon, Wisconsin, and about his love for his family and particularly his wife Babe. Together, they were a force, generous, thoughtful, and full of life.

Marv was very proud of the Conney Project on Jewish Arts, though always humble about his support of it. Before each biennial conference, we would meet up for breakfast at Hubbard St. Diner in Middleton, where he would pore over every page of the conference proceedings, asking incisive questions about each presenter and topic. When we had finished breakfast, he always asked, “What’s next?” As sales and business were in Marv’s blood, he was always brainstorming about how to expand the reach of the Conney Project. He was constantly thinking about how best to fulfill the vision he and Babe had some twenty years ago.

Marv was a mensch in every sense of the word. He was philanthropist and supporter of the arts, medicine, and cutting-edge research at the University of Wisconsin and elsewhere. He was kind and funny, and along with Babe, led a generous and righteous life. He will be greatly missed.

Over the years the Conney Conference has attracted scholars and artists from MacArthur Genius Award winners, to esteemed curators and art historians, to graduate students making their way into the field. In Spring 2022 we will have the chance to honor Marv’s legacy when we convene the next Conney Conference on Jewish Arts at UW Madison. May his memory be a blessing.

The next Conney Conference, “The Jewish Arts in an Expanded Field,” will take place March 27-30, 2022 on the UW-Madison campus. Events are free and open to the public. For more information, see the Conney Project website: conneypjewisharts.is/wisc.edu/2022-conney-conference.
Introducing the Balkin Judaica Post Card Collection

A street scene of the Lower East Side. The Great Synagogue of Rome. The Jewish Quarter of Oran, Algeria. These are just a few of the sites and scenes depicted in the wide-ranging Barbara R. and Steven M. Balkin Judaica Post Card Collection. Donated by the Balkins to the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture, the collection is now available to peruse on the Mayrent website (mayrent.wisc.edu/balkin-postcard-collection/). The physical collection will be housed at the library of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies.

This past year, student Lily Gray (Class of 2021) worked with Mayrent Director Sunny Yudkoff to curate the collection. The result is a series of thematically arranged galleries offering vivid images of Jewish life in America, North Africa, Europe, and other parts of the world. Yiddish greeting cards comprise another gallery. Additional galleries of New Year’s Cards in Yiddish, German, Hungarian, and English will go live in the coming months.

“We’re grateful to the Balkin family for this engaging collection,” says Yudkoff, “which includes evocative post cards depicting Jewish culture from Michigan to Jerusalem. We look forward to seeing how our students draw on the resources of the collection, as they learn about the historical and geographical range of Jewish culture.”

Above:
“The Ghetto, New York, N.Y.”
Rivington Street, located on the Lower East Side, was a hub for Jewish immigrants in the early twentieth century. This post card appears in the Balkin gallery called “Greetings from the United States,” together with other images depicting the diversity of American Jewish life: its congregations, schools, health institutions, business outlets, and travel destinations.

Above:
“And little bells ring. And little birds sing. But more beautiful than they is your voice. Oh, sing me your ‘yes’ for once. Oh, sing me your ‘yes’ for once!”
In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Williamsburg Art Co. of New York produced a variety of post cards with Yiddish captions, like this romantic picture of two young lovers.

Left:
“Grandfather and Grandson”
This post card was printed in 1921 by the Jamal Brothers, a tourist agency in Jerusalem.
Faculty News

Professor Adam Stern Publishes New Book

In his new book *Survival: A Theological-Political Genealogy*, Professor Adam Stern examines the strong association between Jews and survival in twentieth-century philosophy, theology, and political theory. Through readings of canonical texts by Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, and Sigmund Freud, Stern considers “the extent to which survival underwrites the narration of both Jewish history (the survival of the Jews) and Jewish politics (the survival of Israel).” Finding that the understanding of survival expressed in these texts invokes notions of incarnation, passion, and resurrection, Stern aims to offer “a critical assessment of Christianity’s role in the constitution of modern, secular, and Jewish politics.” Published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, the book contributes to contemporary discussions of biopolitics, secularism, political theology, and the philosophy of religion.

Stern joined the Center for Jewish Studies and the Department of German, Nordic Studies in 2019, after holding a position as a postdoctoral associate in the Whitney Humanities Center and Program for the Study of Antisemitism at Yale University. His courses at the UW include “The Sabbath” and “Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust.”

CJS Faculty Travel Virtually to Present Their Research

Although travel was restricted during the pandemic, CJS faculty continued to present their research at institutions all over the world. Here is a sampling of the locations where they offered lectures and gave papers virtually:

**In the United States:** Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Washington, D.C., Wisconsin

**Abroad:** Germany, Israel, Italy, Hungary, Mexico, Netherlands, United Kingdom

Faculty Updates

Michael Bernard-Donals (Chaim Perelman Professor of Rhetoric and Culture) co-edited *Responding to the Sacred: An Inquiry into the Limits of Rhetoric*, with Kyle Jensen of Arizona State University.

Teryl Dobbs (Professor of Music Education) participated in a webinar hosted by the College Music Society to discuss inter-sections of racism. She also gave virtual lectures on music and the Shoah in Modi’in, Israel and on the musical world of the Warsaw Ghetto in an online conversation hosted by the Jewish Music Institute and the University of London.


Jordan Rosenblum (Belzer Professor of Classical Judaism and Max and Frieda Weinstein-Bascom Professor of Jewish Studies) co-edited *With the Loyal You Show Yourself Loyal: Essays on Relationships in the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Saul M. Olyan*, with T. M. Lemos, Karen B. Stern, and Debra Scoggins Ballentine. In addition, he taught virtual classes at the University of Florida and Missouri State University, was a respondent for the Graduate Conference on Talmudic and Halachic Literature at Ben Gurion University in the Negev in Israel, and gave a virtual invited talk at Pepperdine University.

Sunny Yudkoff (Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and German, Nordic, and Slavic Studies) was granted a residency fellowship from the UV’s Institute for Research in the Humanities to work on her new project, *Against Jewish Humor: Toward a Theory of Yiddish Joy*. She also received the William H. Kiekhofer Teaching Award, which honors an assistant or associate professor in the College of Letters & Science. In addition, she was appointed as chair of the Yiddish Studies Division of the Association for Jewish Studies.
October 7-8 The Tobias Lectures
“The Biblical Book of Samuel and the Birth of Politics: Two Faces of Political Violence”
“Is a Jewish Democratic State Possible?”
Moshe Halbertal (NYU & Hebrew University, Jerusalem)
Co-sponsored with the departments of Political Science, Religious Studies, and the George L. Mosse Program in History at UW-Madison

October 12 Book Talk
“Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II”
Francine Hirsch (UW-Madison)
Co-sponsored with the European Studies Program

October 15 Lecture
“Far from Jerusalem: The Exclusion of Jews on Christian Maps”
Asa S. Mittman (California State University at Chico)
Co-sponsored with the Medieval Studies Program

October 18 Symposium
“If I Embarrass You, Tell Your Friends: Jews Making Trouble, Jews Making Comedy”
Tony Michels and Josh Kun in conversation with Jessica Chaffin, Jena Friedman, Lynn Harris, and Michaela Watkins
Co-sponsored with UCLA’s Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies

October 29 Lecture
Pnina Arad (Ben Guirion University)
Co-sponsored with the Center for the Humanities

November 5 Lecture
“Bene Israel Kirtan as Sonic Translation, 1880–1955”
Anna Schultz (University of Chicago)
Co-sponsored with the Center for South Asia

February 11 The Paul J. Schrag Lecture
James Q. Whitman (Yale)
Co-sponsored with the Department of History, the Department of Afro-American Studies, and the Law School

February 18 Sound Salon
“Yerushe: Bringing the Archive to Life”
Eléonore Biezunski (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris)
Co-sponsored with the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture

March 18 International Symposium
“Reading Shpinoza: A Heretic in Yiddish and Hebrew”
Warren Zev Harvey (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Keren Mock (Sciences Po Paris/University of Paris), Daniel Schwartz (George Washington University), Annette Aronowicz (Franklin and Marshall College, emerita), Allan Nadler (Drew University, emeritus)
Co-sponsored with the Department of Philosophy, the Department of German/Nordic/Slavic*, In Geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies, and the George L. Mosse Program in History

April 6 Lecture
“Tracing the History of a Toxic Present: Resurgent Antisemitism and White Nationalism in the U.S.”
Alexandra Minna Stern (University of Michigan)
Made possible by support from the Wiseman Fund
Co-sponsored by the Department of History, the Department of Sociology, the George L. Mosse Program in History, the Center for the Humanities, and the Havens Wright Center for Social Justice

April 29 Book Talk
“Weaving Disparate Narratives: Behind the Scenes of Bergen-Belsen’s Liberation”
Bernice Lerner (Boston University)
Co-sponsored with the George L. Mosse Program in History

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