



Branches

News From the Program in Jewish Studies at Rice University

Issue 13 • Spring 2018



Temple Beth Israel, Houston, Texas.



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Director's Note



This fall, the Program in Jewish Studies will launch a new project, the Houston Jewish History Archive (HJHA), to be housed in the Woodson Research Center in Fondren Library on the Rice campus. The creation of this one-of-a-kind archive was made possible by a generous grant from the Stanford and Joan Alexander Foundation. The Alexanders have been supporters of our program for many years. We are extremely grateful to Stanford and Joan

for their great vision and continuous generosity.

The mission of the archive is to collect, preserve and make accessible the documents, photographs and memories that tell the story of Jewish life in Greater Houston, South Texas and the Gulf Coast. I am particularly thrilled that Joshua Furman, currently the Stanford and Joan Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow in Jewish Studies, will be the archive's founding director. A trained historian with extensive connections in the Greater Houston Jewish community and to the network of scholars who study American Jewish history, Furman possesses the ideal combination of training, skills and dedication to direct the archive.

The archive will have multiple components. First, it will include an extensive collection of historical records related to the Texas Jewish experience. We are already hard at work collecting different materials from individuals as well as institutions in Houston, including several synagogues, the Jewish Community Center, Houston Hillel and the Jewish Federation. To those who have entrusted us with their artifacts, I would like to say, we are deeply honored by your trust and will keep your documents safe and secure.

Beginning this fall, Furman will offer an advanced undergraduate research seminar at Rice in which students will study Texas Jewish history, learn basic archival operations, conduct and record interviews with individuals in and around Houston, and produce original research papers working with the archival materials in the Woodson Research Center.

In time, the HJHA will add an oral history archive. These interviews, which will be videotaped and transcribed, will explore a range of themes, including the immigrant experience, life in South Texas Jewish neighborhoods and towns, and encounters with antisemitism. The materials and videos will be made accessible through our interactive webpage.

One of the long-term projects we are most excited about is an effort to create digital neighborhood maps of Jewish Houston that illustrate migration and mobility. Additionally, outreach is particularly important to us. As the archive continues to grow, Furman will write regular blog entries to be published on the archive's new website, write articles for the Jewish Herald Voice, give talks in the community and work to develop programming for Houston-area K-12 schools.

We are looking forward to collaborating closely with other institutions in Houston and beyond. Our partners include the Texas Jewish Historical Society, which generously granted us funds to begin our archival preservation work, including the digitization of Houston Hillel's records. We also look forward to opportunities to work with and learn from the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, the Institute for Southern Jewish Life in Mississippi, the Seaport Museum in Galveston, the Pearlstine Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston, and other important archives and institutions in the field.

This issue of Branches is devoted to our new archive. It gives all of us in the Program in Jewish Studies at Rice University great pride to offer the archive as a service to the Jewish community. When Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston last August, it became clear how urgently such an archive is needed. Together we will make sure that the rich legacy of the Jewish communities of South Texas will be protected for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthias Henze".

Matthias Henze
Founding director, Program in Jewish Studies
Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of
Biblical Studies



Please visit our new website at jewishstudies.rice.edu.

The Houston Jewish History Archive

By Joshua Furman, Joan and Stanford Alexander Postdoctoral Fellow in Jewish Studies

In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, the Program in Jewish Studies recognized an unmet community need: the preservation of historical documents and artifacts that tell the history of the Jewish community in Houston. The new Houston Jewish History Archive (HJHA) at Rice is being created to fill that void.

“Hello,” the Facebook message began. “I understand you are collecting Houston Jewish history. I might have a fairly large banner for you. I have not unrolled it in thirty years ...”

In late October 2017, only two months after Hurricane Harvey devastated the city and prompted our efforts to begin collecting historical artifacts related to Houston Jewish life, I received this note from a woman I had never met. She explained that in the late 1980s, her father was cleaning out a storage closet in a building near Stella Link Road that had been home to Beth Jacob Congregation, one of Houston’s Orthodox synagogues, when he found a 9-foot banner honoring



Jewish men and women who served in World War II. The banner lists the names of more than 220 Jewish Houstonians, with a star sewn above each name. Unable to find another home for this historic treasure, he took it home and fixed it up, and the family preserved it for decades. Luckily, the Southwest Houston house where the banner was stored did not flood during the hurricane.

Until now, even though Houston is the fourth-largest city in the United States, and even though the port of Galveston played an important role in the immigration experience of 10,000 American Jews, there has never been a centralized effort to document the history of Jewish life in this region. Many rare and precious records have been neglected, thrown away or destroyed by floodwaters. Many of the men and women who built the foundations of Jewish communities in Houston and South Texas have passed away, often without the opportunity to record their stories for posterity. We simply cannot allow this to happen ever again.

Now, with the launch of HJHA, the Beth Jacob banner, together with hundreds of other artifacts, photographs, documents and oral histories, will have a permanent secure home in the Woodson Research Center in Fondren Library. The mission of HJHA is to collect, preserve and make accessible the documents, photographs and memories that tell the story of Jewish life in Greater Houston and South Texas.

Already, the HJHA houses important records from several of the city’s synagogues, as well as the Jewish Federation

Continued ▶



A 9-foot banner from 1942 displaying over 200 names of members of Beth Jacob Congregation who served in World War II.

of Greater Houston, Houston Hillel and the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center. We have an extensive collection of papers, photographs and recordings from Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel, Beth Israel's senior rabbi from 1943 to 1975. We also have a significant collection of photographs and memorabilia documenting the historically Jewish Meyerland neighborhood, and we are working to build or expand several other collections, including San Jacinto High School, Young Judaea, Hadassah, Workmen's Circle and more.

In the near future, the HJHA will have its own dedicated website, exhibits in Fondren Library, sponsored lectures and other public events. In the meantime, please come visit us in the Woodson, and if you have materials that you would like to donate to the archive, please contact me at joshua.furman@rice.edu. ■

Right: A group photograph of Congregation Beth Yeshurun's Confirmation class of 1962, taken on the steps of the Southmore Avenue building. Shortly thereafter, the congregation moved to its present facility on Beechnut Street. **Below:** A certificate signed by Golda Meir and David Ben-Gurion, presented to the Houston Jewish community on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Israel's independence.



The Woodson Research Center

By Amanda Focke, Asst. Head, Woodson Research Center

The Woodson Research Center is the special collections department of Fondren Library at Rice University, preserving and providing access to fascinating manuscript collections, rare books and Rice University archives. The Houston Jewish History Archive (HJHA) is an exciting new group of collections in the center, poised to grow as additional records and papers from organizations, families and businesses are donated. The Woodson Research Center

serves as the archival partner to the Department of Jewish Studies at Rice. Other subject strengths of the Woodson's manuscript collections include Houston families and history, Rice faculty members' papers, Houston's fine and performing arts, U.S. Civil War materials, British maritime and Naval history, and more. Formats in these primary source collections include photographs, letters, diaries, sermons, reports, financial records, memorabilia, land deeds, architectural drawings, computer disks, email, born digital files, maps and many others.

In total, the Woodson Research Center collections measure in the thousands. The collections are described in guides which are available online at <http://archives.library.rice.edu/> and at Texas Archival Resources Online <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/search.php>. These guides offer a bird's-eye view of each collection such as a historical sketch and a brief description of the collection as a whole, as well as a container list detailing the contents of the collection, either by folder names or by item names. Researchers use the collections' rare and unique materials in the Woodson reading room, or staff help provide digital access for patrons who cannot travel to Rice. Additional ways of raising awareness of the collections include exhibits, special events and digitization/online access.

While the archival collections cannot all be on display at all times due to the sheer number of items, they are always accessible upon request. Woodson staff encourage all those interested to view and explore the materials. For contact information and an overview of collections currently included in the archive, please visit: <http://libguides.rice.edu/c.php?g=762169> ■

In the near future, the HJHA will have its own dedicated website, exhibits in Fondren Library, sponsored lectures and other public events. In the meantime, please come visit us in the Woodson, and if you have materials that you would like to donate to the archive, please contact joshua.furman@rice.edu. ■

Without Archives, There Is No History

By Bryan Edward Stone, Professor of History, Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas

Professor Bryan Stone, author of two books about Texas history, “Memories of Two Generations: A Yiddish Life in Russia and Texas” (University of Alabama Press, 2016) and “The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas” (University of Texas Press, 2010), explains why the Houston Jewish History Archive is so crucial to writing Texas Jewish history.

History, as I constantly remind my students, is not the study of events but of documents. Without primary sources, the raw materials of history, we can't know what happened, let alone why it matters. Everything we know about the past, about who we are and where we come from, is built from documents that only exist because someone thought to keep them.

This is why, as a historian of Texas Jewry, I'm excited about the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice. Writing

history is an exercise in selection — only so much will fit between the covers of a book — but often it is the availability of materials, not the historian, which does the selecting. In my case, because the collections I depended on were limited, my book leaves out large congregations, communities, even entire Jewish denominations. Without readily available documentation in the places I knew to look for it, I sometimes wasn't aware these absent subjects even existed.

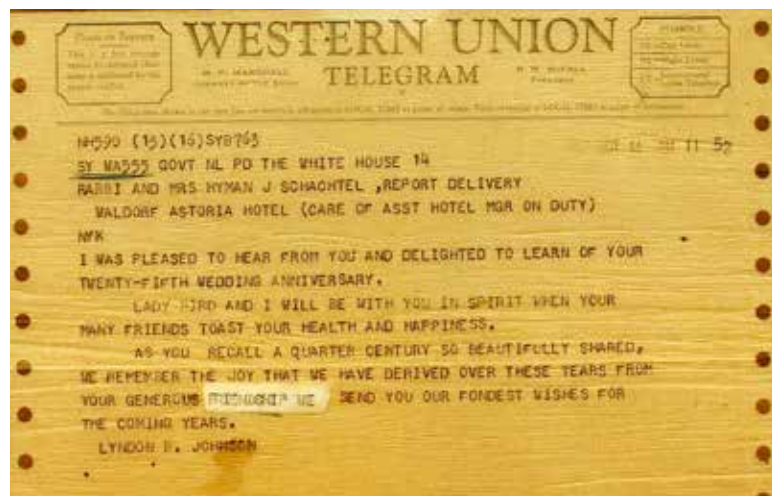
Historians can only write about the things we know about; we can only know about the things that are documented; and we can only learn from the documents we can find. Historical materials must be preserved, organized, catalogued and made available, ideally in large repositories in accessible locations that contain rich varieties of materials — like the one now underway at Rice.

Hurricane Harvey has highlighted the urgency of safeguarding the documentary legacy of Houston Jewry, but in truth that urgency has always been there. Every document has been at risk all along — of being destroyed, lost or simply ignored. I hope Jewish institutions and individuals in Houston will see the value in donating their treasured historical items to Rice, where they will be professionally preserved, kept safe from the elements, and made available for study by researchers and scholars for generations to come. ■



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Writing history is an exercise in selection — only so much will fit between the covers of a book — but often it is the availability of materials, not the historian, which does the selecting.  
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Below left: Telegram from President Lyndon B. Johnson to Congregation Beth Israel's Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel and his wife, Barbara, wishing them a happy 25th anniversary, October 1966 (included in the HJHA's collection of the papers of Rabbi Hyman J. Schachtel). **Below right:** Notebook of minutes from the Refugee Services Committee, 1939–1944, detailing efforts of Houston's Jewish community to assist German Jewish refugees during World War II (part of the HJHA's collection of records of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston).



The Lenard Gabert Archive

By **Melissa Kean, University Historian**

The new Houston Jewish History Archive will be comprised of a variety of collections gleaned from many sources. One such collection is the Lenard Gabert papers, recently acquired by the Woodson Research Center, which tell the story of an important early Jewish alumnus of Rice.

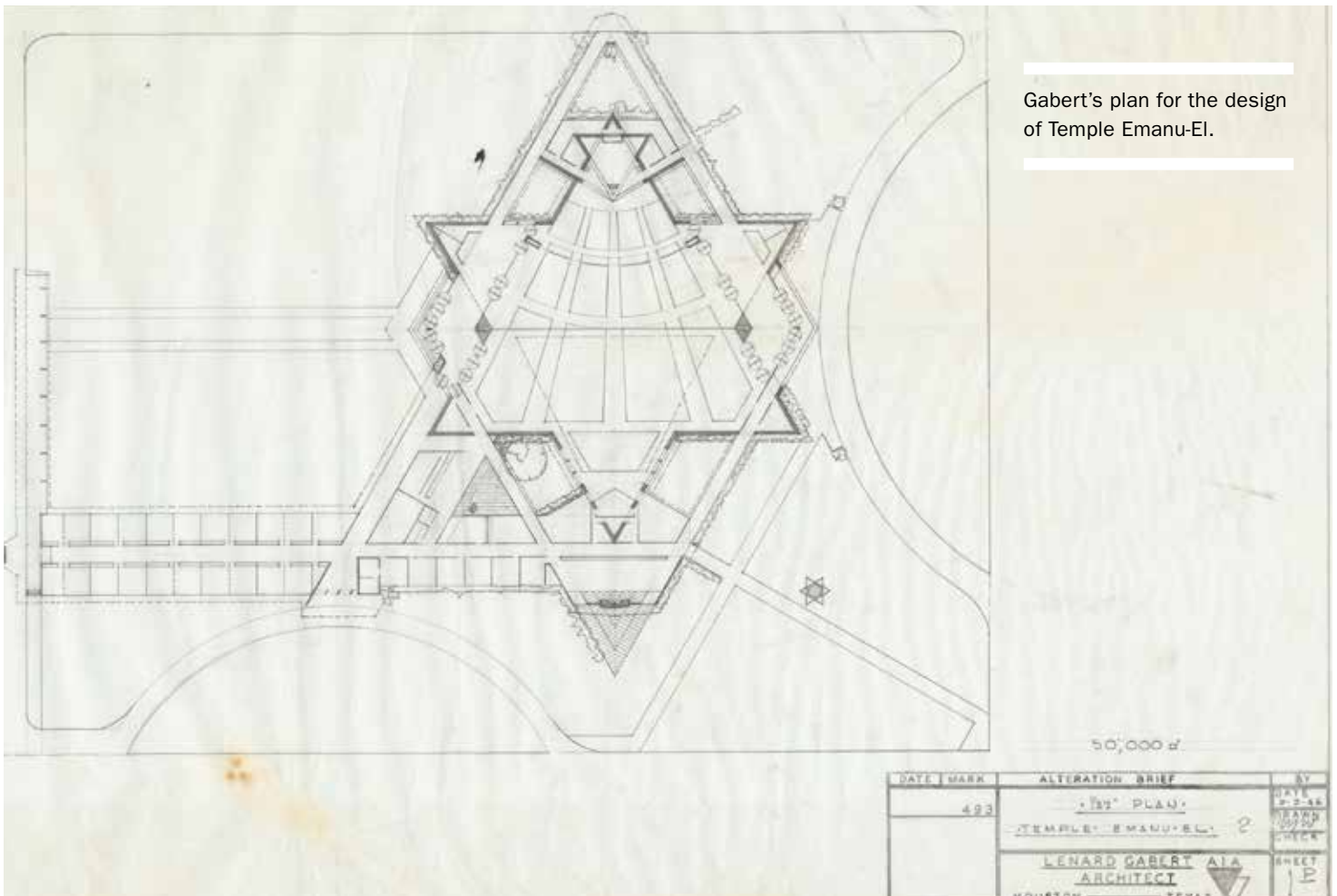
Last summer, the Woodson Research Center acquired a remarkable collection of papers, photographs and architectural drawings from the family of Lenard Gabert Sr. '16. Gabert was born in Navasota in 1894 and after studying briefly at Texas A&M he transferred to the Rice Institute as a member of the



Gabert (first on left) at his senior class picnic in 1916.

first class, entering in fall 1912. Along with William Nathan, Gabert was one of two Jewish students to graduate in 1916, and he remained at Rice to earn a

degree in architecture in 1917, the first Jewish student to do so. There was no Thresher or Campanile until 1916, so we can't know much about the young



Gabert's experiences at Rice. But it's clear, though, that he was both an outstanding student and an active participant in campus life. He was a member of the Menorah Society, the Riceonian Literary Society and the Architectural Society. Gabert went on to have a long and distinguished career in Houston and surrounding communities, interrupted by military service in both World Wars. For many years, he was the principal at Lenard Gabert & Associates, located downtown on Bell Street. Among his most notable works are the Congregation K'Nesseth Israel synagogue in Baytown (1930), the Eldorado Ballroom (1939) and Temple Emanu El (1949), with MacKie & Kamrath.



One of Gabert's designs, Temple Israel, in Schulenburg, Texas.

Gabert continued in active practice until his death in 1976.

Although it is not a comprehensive collection of Gabert's work, the collection in the Woodson contains over 250 drawings dated beginning in the 1930s, with the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s most heavily represented. It includes a wide range of commercial and residential projects, including grocery stores, banks, restaurants, professional and office buildings, and elementary schools. Gabert also designed a significant number of religious buildings, both synagogues and churches. Included in the collection are drawings or photographs of Adath Emeth, Beth Jacob, Beth Yeshurun and Emanu El in Houston, Shearith Israel in Wharton, and Temple Israel in Schulenburg, as well as the 1958 Hillel Building in College Station. These drawings, as well as the items related to Gabert's personal history, are an important part of the Jewish history of both Rice and Houston itself. ■

The Lenard Gabert Papers

By Nancy Pryzant Picus

The N.M. Pryzant Family Fund provided one of the initial seed donations to the new Houston Jewish History Archive. The family's roots in Houston and at Rice run deep, as Nancy Picus explains.

The Pryzant family's roots in Houston date back to the arrival of our grandfather, Joe Pryzant, in 1912. Our grandmother, Annie Wilkenfeld Pryzant, arrived with her parents around the turn of the 20th century. They were the first couple to marry at the Adath Emeth building on Washington Avenue and our great-grandparents are buried in the Adath Emeth Cemetery. Our family's deep sense of history and connectedness to the Houston Jewish community are perfectly expressed in our commitment to the Houston Jewish History Archive, which is why our family foundation has committed our support to the effort. We are grateful to Rice University for preserving Houston's Jewish history for the next generation of proud Houstonians.

Our family also has a long-term connection to Rice. The first member of the Pryzant family to study at Rice Institute was our father, Nathan "Nat" M. Pryzant. He matriculated from Lamar High School in Houston in 1940 as a general academic student. He had initially applied to Rice's engineering department, but was rejected due to a quota limiting the number of entering Jewish freshman to 2 percent of the class. Also working against him was the difficulty of placing Jewish engineers once they graduated. With the help of influential members of the Jewish community, he changed his application for admission as a general student and was finally

admitted, so long as he did not study engineering.

Nat's years at Rice were prolonged by his service in the U. S. Navy during World War II. When he returned from the war in 1946, he met a young sophomore named Molly Miron, to whom he soon became engaged. Nat eventually graduated in 1947 with a degree in business, and his new wife, Molly, became the second member of the family to graduate in 1948.

Nat's brother Jack "Julius" Pryzant joined him at Rice in 1941. After serving in the Navy, he graduated with a B.A. and later, a degree in architecture in 1950. A generation later, his daughter, Julia, and son Andrew were the third



Undated photo of Molly '48 and Nathan Pryzant '47.

and fourth members of the Pryzant family to graduate. Currently, Julia's daughter, Elin, is a graduate student in the statistics department, making her the third generation of the extended Pryzant family, which also included many members of the Miron family, to find an academic home at Rice.

Now that the Houston Jewish History Archive has been established, our family's history, as well as the history of so many Houston families, will also be able to find its permanent home at Rice. ■

Jewish Studies Minors



Michael Abrams-Dyer

Hometown: East Hampton, N.Y.

Major: Sport Management

Minor: Jewish Studies

College: Brown

Academic interests: My interest within Jewish studies is the comparative history of Judaism and the parallels that can be drawn from ancient Israelites to the 20th century and beyond. I find the survivalism and persistence of Jews to be particularly fascinating. No other group has been able to last continuously as a tiny minority like the Jewish people.

Favorite classes: Holocaust Memory in Modern Germany and Jewish Food

Influences: I think that Jewish studies has given me a much greater appreciation of the culture and history I grew up in and allowed me to analyze my religion through an academic lens. I believe now that the Jewish community will play a role in the rest of my life. That's not something I believed going into Rice.

Future plans: Next year, I will be taking a gap year to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail, a journey I expect to last about five months. From there, I plan to attend law school and pursue a career in entertainment and sports law. ■



Photograph by Laura Livingston



Colton Cox

Hometown: Houston, Texas

Majors: Sociology and Policy Studies

Minor: Jewish Studies

College: McMurry

Academic interests: I became interested in Jewish studies during my first semester at Rice while taking Professor Henze's course on the Prophet Jeremiah. I subsequently traveled to Israel with Professors Henze and Weininger as part of a course on the history of Jerusalem, an experience which was a defining part of my Rice experience. I also have served as the president of the Jewish Studies Student Association, helping to promote Jewish studies among the broader Rice community.

Favorite classes: In addition to the Jerusalem course, Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe and African American-Jewish Relations, are among my favorites.

Influences: Rice's Program in Jewish Studies has been invaluable in shaping me into a more critical scholar, who is able to understand and respect traditions of thought and culture outside of my own.

Future plans: After graduation, I plan to continue my studies of Hebrew and Arabic and pursue graduate study in law and modern Middle Eastern affairs. ■

Class of 2018



Sonia Hamer

Hometown: Houston, Texas

Major: English

Minor: Jewish Studies

College: Sid Rich

Academic interests: I am interested in a wide range of topics, including: eastern European Jewish culture and history, literary representations of Jewish women and Holocaust memory/memorialization.

Favorite class: Professor Weininger's seminar on Israeli Women Writers

Influences: Thanks to the Program in Jewish Studies, I have traveled around the world, written an extended piece of creative nonfiction and found academic passions I could never have anticipated.

Future plans: My plans for the future include writing, attending graduate school and owning several cats. ■



Victoria Johnson

Hometown: Torrance, Calif.

Major: Mathematical Economic Analysis

Minors: Jewish Studies, Statistics

College: Duncan

Academic interests: Throughout my experience taking classes within the program, I've been most interested in the issues of appropriate and ethical representation of the Holocaust, particularly within Germany. Additionally, taking the Jerusalem course really brought me into the issues of relations between Israel and other countries in the

Middle East, and how complex territorial issues within the West Bank and claims to authority over religious sites are.

Favorite classes: By far the most special and valuable experiences I've had have been through classes that have traveled. Taking Holocaust Memory and Jerusalem, which allowed me to accompany the class to Germany and Israel, respectively, over spring break provided me incredible opportunities to connect and apply class material, and brought me an understanding that really isn't available exclusively through in-class discussion.

Influences: Completing the Jewish studies minor has overall broadened my worldview and taught me to consider complicated problems from many perspectives. I've also learned a great deal about the influence of religion within culture and societal structures. While I won't be working in a field that is directly related to Jewish studies, bringing these skills with me will undoubtedly make me a better researcher.

Future plans: For the next two years, I'll be working as a research assistant in Washington, D.C., at the Brookings Institution, specifically within the Tax Policy Center. After that, I will likely be attending graduate school for public policy or a very similar field. ■

The Program in Jewish Studies

Course Offerings — Fall 2018

FWIS 199 **Jews on Film**

HIST 151 **Ancient Empires**

HIST/MDEM 205 **Medieval Mediterranean World**

HIST/MDST /HART **Multicultural Europe, 1400–1700**

JWST 120 **Israel: Language and Culture**

JWST 325 **Archival Research & Historical Methods: Jewish Houston**

RELI 127 **Intermediate Biblical Hebrew III**

RELI 215 **Mystic Cinema**

RELI 318 **Biography of the Bible**

RELI 341 **American Judaism**

Faculty Publications: Klaus Weissenberger

Klaus Weissenberger, professor of German studies, just published an extensive edited volume in German titled, in translation, “The Sub-Genres of the Non-Fictional ‘Artistic Prose’ in Nazi Exile: Unrecognized Forms of the Literary Affirmation of One’s Identity.”

This opus focuses on *Kunstprosa* (artistic non-fictional prose), which entails such varied forms of literary expression as diaries, letters, travel journals

or biographies, and establishes them for the first time as an autonomous fourth literary genre in addition to the triad of lyric poetry, fiction and drama. In addition, this book represents an important contribution to the investigation of exile literature on the basis of a plurality of analyses of renowned authors like Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, Else Lasker-Schüler and Paul Celan, and demonstrates that — in contrast to fictional descriptions of exile — *Kunstprosa* represents the most immediate and truthful literary coming to terms with deadly threat,



“The Sub-Genres of the Non-Fictional ‘Artistic Prose’ in Nazi Exile: Unrecognized Forms of the Literary Affirmation of One’s Identity” (Erich Schmidt Verlag Press, 2017) by Professor of German Klaus Weissenberger

escape, xenophobia and loneliness.

Because of its truth ethos, *Kunstprosa* rejects ideological appropriations of any kind. Instead of these its subgenres function voluntarily or involuntarily as dialogues with all the other fellow-sufferers, which either serve their mutual affirmation or can degenerate into altercations. Furthermore, because they represent in all actuality the literary “trenches” of affirming one’s identity, they display even today a volatile relevance. ■

Advisory Board Spotlight: Michael Ozer and Patricia Kalmans

by Michael Ozer

Michael Ozer is a retired pediatrician and his wife, Patricia Kalmans, a retired attorney. They reside in San Antonio. Pat is a past president of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio. Mike has served on the advisory board of the Program in Jewish Studies at Rice since 2015.

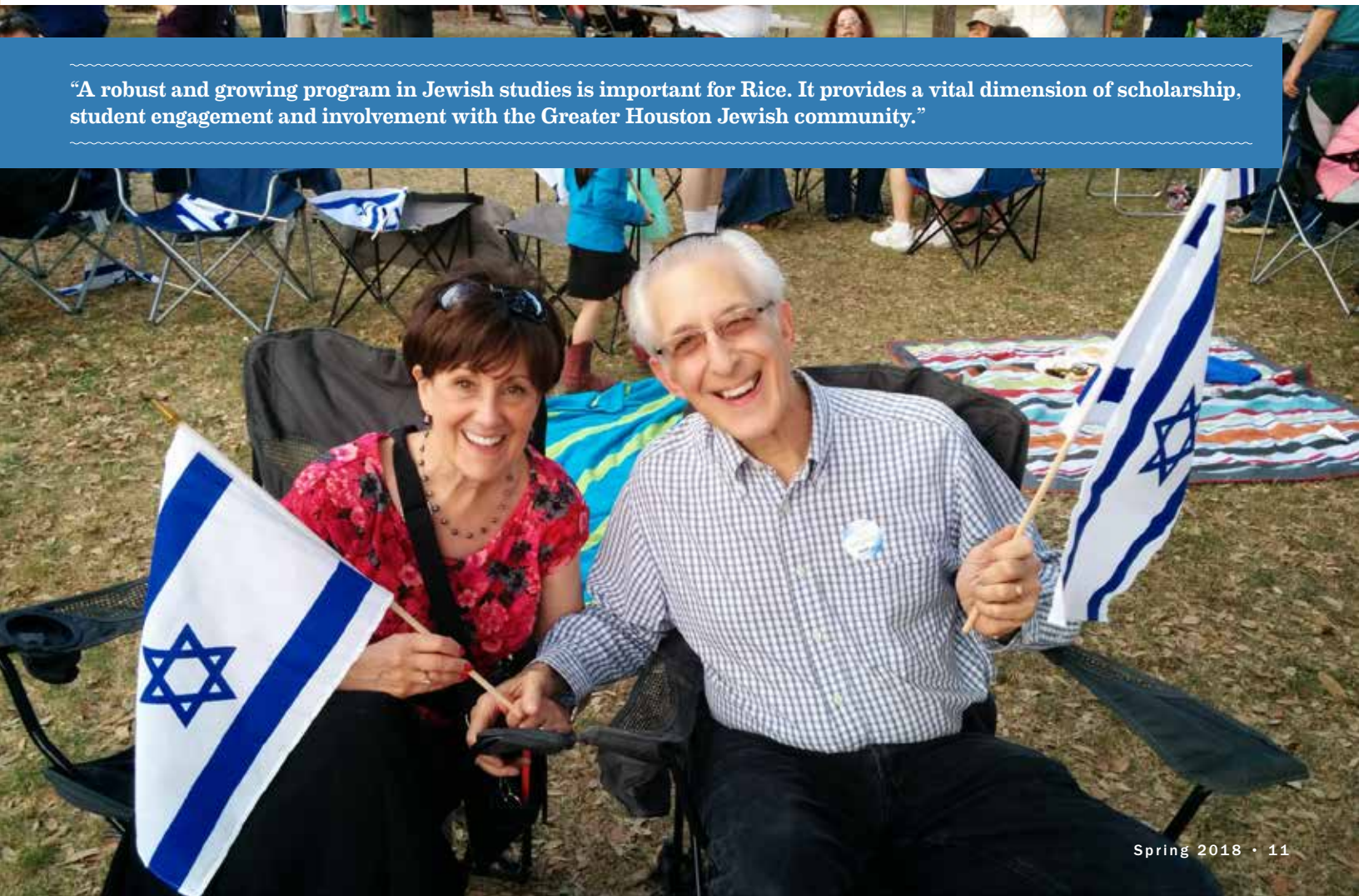
We were introduced to Rice when our younger son, Josh, was accepted into the Class of 2011. We dropped him off at the university one Sunday afternoon in August 2007 and were met by returning students who helped him move into Will Rice College. Everything about Rice seemed uplifting and designed to engage our son, and he took advantage of it all to enrich himself intellectually and expand his horizons. During his sophomore year, he enrolled in a course on antisemitism taught by Shira Lander. About the same time, we had been contacted by the development department at Rice to gauge our interest in contributing to the new Program in Jewish Studies that was in its initial formative stages. Jewish studies was envisioned as an ambitious endeavor and we felt compelled to participate. We have been continuous supporters since 2008.

A robust and growing program in Jewish studies is important for Rice. It provides a vital dimension of scholarship, student engagement and involvement with the Greater Houston Jewish community. Our support focused initially on the postdoctoral fellowship, but in recent years we have also targeted the Jerusalem seminar led by Matthias Henze and Melissa Weininger, as well the immigration course taught by Joshua Furman, which enabled participants to travel to New York and Galveston. Now we see the need to preserve artifacts that document the Jewish history of Southeast Texas and are consequently helping fund the Houston Jewish History Archive to be headed by Furman.

Recently we have been very encouraged about the augmented efforts of the Rice Admission Office to engage high school college counselors from the East and West coasts, as well as their collaboration with the Program in Jewish Studies to help accepted students visit Rice after admission. This is already having the desired effect of increasing Jewish enrollment at Rice.

Having spent many years involved in Jewish communal volunteer work in our home city of San Antonio, we are excited to be part of the Rice Program in Jewish Studies as it further strengthens the university and adds diversity to the educational opportunities offered at Rice. ■

“A robust and growing program in Jewish studies is important for Rice. It provides a vital dimension of scholarship, student engagement and involvement with the Greater Houston Jewish community.”



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