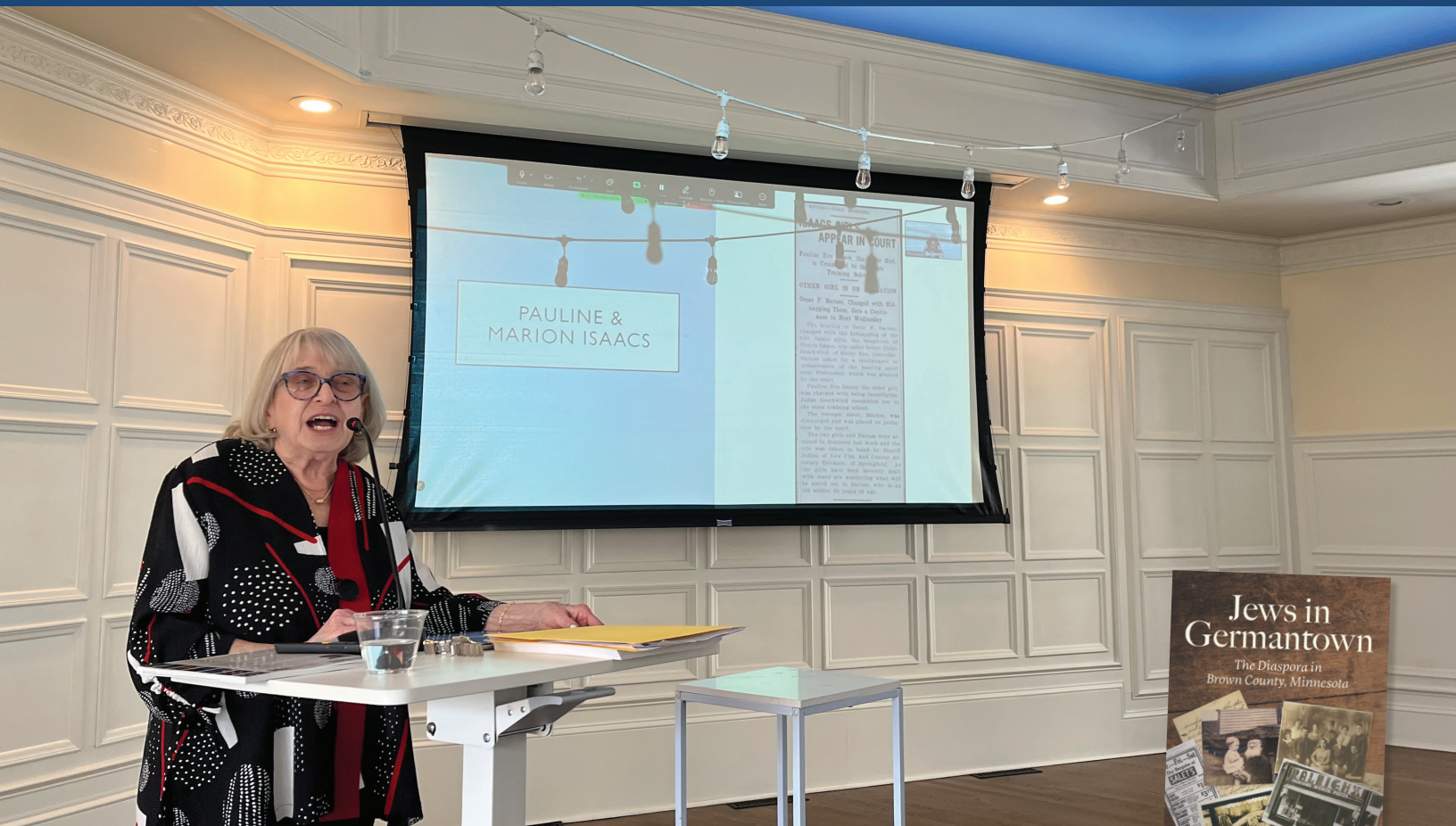
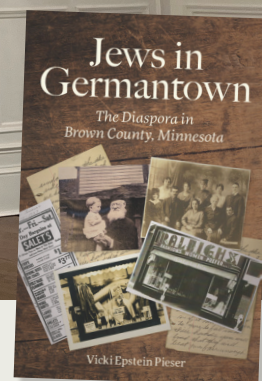


Generations:



SPRING 2025
Annual Report 2024



Jews in Germantown The Diaspora in Brown County, Minnesota

By Robin Doroshow

Part of our mission at the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest is to publish a journal, approximately, every other year, that relates to regional Jewish history. We are fortunate to have connected with Vicki Epstein Pieser who has researched and written a comprehensive study of Jews in

Brown County, Minnesota. This publication of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, with Minnesota Legacy Grant funding, is slated to be released this coming summer.

You may ask, exactly where is Brown County? Situated just northwest of Mankato, it includes the towns of Sleepy

Eye and Springfield, in addition to New Ulm, its county seat. Its population is just over 25,000 individuals, with a tiny minority of Jews. In fact, New Ulm is often noted as one of the nation's most homogeneous cities, with its population being more than 92% white, and predominantly Christian. Additionally, it is heavily German, with many of its residents tracing their roots back to 19th century German settlers in the area.

Vicki Epstein Pieser is the daughter of Czech and Russian immigrants who fled Prague with their older daughter (Vicki's older sister) four months after Hitler's army invaded the city. She grew up in Temple, Texas and has always lived in small towns without Jewish communities.

After graduating from the University of Colorado with a Masters in Sociology and a teaching certificate in Social Studies, she and her husband, Ben, returned to his hometown, New Ulm, Minnesota, so that he could work in the family furniture store.

She has taught at Gustavus Adolphus College in the Sociology Department and at Minnesota State University at Mankato in what was then Women's Studies department. She also worked as a Juvenile Corrections Agent for counties in Southern Minnesota.

Her interest in history led to her serving as Director for the Brown County Historical Society.

Vicki is a decades long member of the New Ulm Branch of the Association of American University Women (AAUW), an early feminist, and a community leader. She and her husband, Ben, have three children and three grandchildren.

This past April, Vicki made a presentation on the topic of Jewish Women in Brown County at a meeting of the St. Paul Chapter of the AAUW at St. Paul College Club on Summit Avenue in St. Paul.

To ensure that you receive information on kick-off events for this journal, please go to our website at www.jhsum.org and follow prompts to join our email list, or email us at history@jhsum.org.

Honoring Leon Lewis

Hurley, Wisconsin was home to many Jews, and may even have a few living there today. One illustrious son of Hurley is Leon Lewis.



Leon Lewis

Born in Hurley to German Jewish immigrants in 1888, he became the first national secretary of the Anti-Defamation League, as well as the national director of B'nai Brith. As the founder and first executive director of the

Los Angeles Jewish Community Relations Committee, Lewis was a key figure in the spy operations that infiltrated American Nazi organizations in the 1930s and early 1940s. Nazis had referred to him as "the most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles."

A monument to Mr. Lewis is being dedicated at the Iron County Historical Society Museum on August 20.

More information will be shared via eblast. To ensure you receive information about this event, and other events of interest, please send us your email address at history@jhsum.org.

You Can Help Preserve Our Jewish Midwest History

The story of the Jews in the Upper Midwest goes back nearly 200 years. Our story is urban and rural, religious and secular, joyful and tragic.

For 40 years, JHSUM has been a part of making sure that this history lives on. We do so through exhibits, publications, and events that enable you to place yourself right where it happened, and where it is happening today.

When you contribute to JHSUM, you ensure that we continue our mission of promoting vitality and continuity of Jewish culture in the Upper Midwest.

>> Donate today at www.jhsum.org



**JHSUM President
Jamie Heilicher**

As much as I would like to discuss politics (have we learned anything from our past), I don't have enough space in this newsletter to do it any justice. So, I am going to talk about books, books and more books.

We have been gifted thousands of books relating to Jews (Jewish subjects, Jewish authors, Israel, etc.). Books in Hebrew, English, German among others. We need to find new homes for these books.

If anyone has an interest, please reach out to us, so we can provide a list for your consideration.

We need your help!

We need your help to continue to collect and tell the stories of Jews in the Upper Midwest. We are currently seeking sponsors that will help create a sustainable organization for years to come.

Please join us in realizing our mission!

Film screening co-sponsored with Mitchell-Hamline School of Law

On March 12, JHSUM had the honor and pleasure of co-sponsoring with Mitchell Hamline School of Law the film, *Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round*, a feature documentary by Emmy Award winning Ilana Trachtman. *Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round* is the untold story of the first organized interracial civil rights protest in U.S. history.

A favorite professor from my law school days, Eric Janus, along with his wife, Carolyn Chalmers, made the event a reality and brought in Ms. Trachtman to participate in the panel discussion following the screening.

It was great to see many faces from years ago, and to view this important film with members of various communities. In addition to Ms. Trachtman, Robin Washington, a Black and Jewish journalist, participated on the post-film panel, along with Professor Janus.

As a small organization, JHSUM is pleased to come together with other relevant organizations to co-sponsor and support events of mutual interest.

If you missed this one, be sure to sign up for our emails so you don't miss upcoming events. You can sign up for emails by going to our website and following prompts at www.jhsum.org.



Remembering Ruth Easton's Jewish Legacy

By Doris Rubenstein

The birthrate for non-Orthodox Jews is extremely low, so with intermarriage, the American Jewish community is shrinking at an alarming rate. How can — at least — those with substantial financial means carry on their dedication to the Jewish people and Jewish causes? A great example of this can be in the life story of Ruth Easton. Never heard of her? How about Ruth Edelstein?

Ruth Easton was a radio and theater actress in the 1920s and 30s. The list of her leading men is impressive: Lionel Barrymore and famous Jews like Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor. She performed in five plays on Broadway in seven years. On radio, she voiced roles in radio plays with such legends as Walter Huston and (later to be Dame) Judith Anderson. She was successful, no doubt about it. But like so many Jews of that era, she used — and actually changed — her surname to Easton from her birth name of Edelstein.

Even as Ruth Edelstein, born in 1900, she didn't fit the stereotype of a first-generation, native-born Jew in the early 20th century. The Edelstein family settled in North Branch, Minnesota — hardly New York's Lower East Side, or Minneapolis' North Side, or even St. Paul old West Side. Her father had (what else?) a dry goods store. It was at North Branch High School that she was first bitten by the acting bug. Ruth started her higher education at the University of Minnesota and transferred to Macalester before giving in to the siren call of Hollywood and went to the Cumnock School in Los Angeles to finish a theater degree. She performed all over the country, but gave up all the glamor to care for her aging mother in L.A.

Ruth started volunteering her time and talents to charities in her community, but never forgot her Minnesota roots. One of the first grants from the Edelstein Family Foundation, which she established with her two bachelor brothers — both very successful businessmen — was for a piano and other arts programming at their old High School in North Branch. The school community has enjoyed choral and symphonic concerts for decades, thanks to the Edelstein family. The Auditorium there bears their name. In a 2003 Minneapolis Star article, Laura O'Hern, a guidance



Ruth (Edelstein) Easton

counselor stated, “This was a Jewish family living in the middle of Olsons and Johnsons who made a good life themselves and gave back to the community.”

The list of arts organizations that have benefitted from the Ruth Easton Fund within the Edelstein Family Foundation is exhaustive, but here are just a few examples: the New Play Series at the Playwright's Center in Minneapolis bears her name as does a fund at the Ordway Center; Pillsbury House Theatre; even the Mixed Blood Theater website is funded by a grant from the Easton Fund!

The Edelstein Family Foundation gives beyond Minnesota. The trustees have awarded in excess of \$6.5 million to Brandeis University alone.

There is an adage in Latin: *Vita brevis, ars longa* which translates loosely to “life is short, but art is enduring.” Ruth Easton died just before her 98th birthday, but her legacy of theater arts will live on through many generations.

On the road:

North of Gooseberry Falls — Part 2

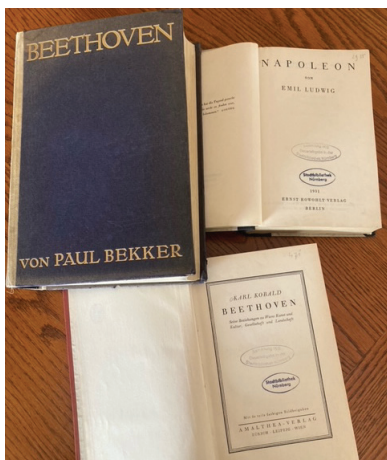
By Robin Doroshow

Some of you may remember a story published in our On the Road column in the fall of 2023. That story recounted my family's Thanksgiving 2022 experience at an Airbnb located just north of Gooseberry Falls on the North Shore of Lake Superior.

That story recounted how Ruth Schladnich Harris, born in Vienna, would come to have a home with her late husband, on Lake Superior. This story was related to me during a Zoom call with Ruth's three daughters, Judy Harris Lykins, Barbara Harris Gabioud, and Janet Harris.

We received kind comments on that article about this story from many of you, our readers. Now, there is more to tell of this story.

In August of 2024, Judy Harris Lykins sent an email alerting us to a new twist in the story of her mother, Ruth, and her Schladnich family. In June of last year, Judy received an email alerting them that books that had been stolen by the Nazis from their family's home in Vienna, had been found and were being returned to their family.



At right is the full text of the email sent by Leibl Rosenberg, a representative of the City of Nuremberg who was authorized to assist with the return of the stolen books.

Dear Judy Harris Lykins,

I am very excited to be finally in touch with the family of **Ruth and Oskar Schladnich**. Unfortunately a first start in this case some years ago did not work out, but — with the kind help of Robert Domes and Ed Horwich — I hope and pray that we'll be able to go ahead with the restitution of three books in our holdings that have been looted in the time of persecution by the Nazis:

Beethoven / von Paul Bekker. Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler 1914, 623 S. – Provenienz: **O[skar] Schladnich** (Schriftzug); 19/1 14 er 12.- (Schriftzug) ; M 12.- b 14/4 15 (Schriftzug) (Signatur: IKG 43_25)

Beethoven. Seine Beziehungen zu Wiens Kunst und Kultur, Gesellschaft und Landschaft / Karl Kobald. Zürich: Amalthea, [1927], 434 S. – Provenienz: **Ruth Schladnich** / Wien (Schriftzug) (Signatur: IKG 43_46)

Napoleon / von Emil Ludwig. Berlin: Rowohlt 1931, 695 S. – Provenienz: **Oskar Schladnich** (Schriftzug) (Signatur: IKG 43_399)

We — the Jewish Community of Nuremberg as legal owners and the Municipal Library of the City of Nuremberg — have long ago decided to give back the looted books to the families of the persecuted victims of the Nazis to the families of the previous owners pro bono, with no costs at all involved to the claimants. We have done that very often for historical and ethical reasons — more than 900 cases could be solved up till now.

In case you and your family decide to claim the above-mentioned books, we would like you to let us know that you would agree to be the representative of the descendants of Ruth Schladnich (a librarian herself!) in this matter. We would then work out the necessary restitution-contracts and send them to you for signing and send them back to us. This being done, we'll countersign the contracts and send the books to you by mail. Please let us know your current postal address.

On a personal note, please let me assure you that it would mean a big lot to me to reunite the books of Ruth and Oskar Schladnich with their family. I am very much looking forward to hear from you.

Best regards,

Leibl Rosenberg

Authorized representative of the City of Nuremberg for the Collection IKG



NEW SERIES FEATURING THE VOICES OF ELDERS

Voices of Elders Event Kickoff

On April 6, the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest held its first of an occasional series featuring the voices of elders in our community. With thanks to JHSUM volunteer, Gail Freedman, for this wonderful idea, we welcomed retired Hennepin County District Court Judge, Allen Oleisky, and his wife, Marcia, longtime librarian of the Beth El synagogue's library.

With thanks for the warm welcome from Beth El synagogue, about sixty people, many friends of the Oleiskys for decades, enjoyed an afternoon of stories from Judge Oleisky's years on the bench, and Marcia Oleisky's years lovingly matching books to congregants.

With so many funny and poignant stories shared that afternoon, one story didn't make it to the group. Below is that story as written by Judge Oleisky:

When I was on a criminal calendar. Attorney Ken Meshbesher appeared before me with a client and he pleaded his client guilty. The plea negotiation called for a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Before the sentencing, in private, I told Ken and the prosecutor that I was going to send his client to prison for five years. At the sentencing, in open court, I asked Ken if he had anything to say. He replied. "Judge Oleisky, I am asking for an extraordinary Writ of



Judge Allen Oleisky and Marcia Oleisky

Relief on behalf of my client. I asked him what kind of Writ he was seeking. His reply was a Writ of Rachmones" (mercy). I laughed and my court reporter asked how to spell Rachmones and I said forget it, he is not getting it. Ken smirked and smiled after he heard my reply. Ken was a long time friend and a former neighbor of mine.

Please watch emails for information on more events in the future. If you aren't receiving our emails (which is the best way to stay apprised of JHSUM activity), please send us an email requesting that we add you to our email list at history@jhsum.org.

A Helping Hand to Immigrants

By Susan Weinberg, Immediate Past President MNJGS

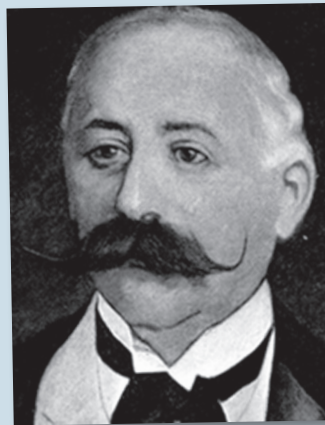
Genealogy gives new meaning to history, reminding us that our families were part of it. It is the story of what brought our families to America and in doing so influenced the course of our own life. When world events affect the personal and significant figures play an important role in shaping outcomes, it becomes a compelling story. Jewish immigrant history is just such a story.

A little history. . . beginning in 1772 there were several partitions of Poland, dividing it between Russia, Prussia and Austria. As a result, Russia became the home of three million Jews, growing to over five million by 1897. This was at a time when Jews were being emancipated in Western Europe, becoming citizens and integrated into the broader community. Russia however, viewed Jews as aliens and heretics. The Pale of Settlement was created, restricting where Jews could live and excluding them from 95% of Russia.

Laws were put in place regulating religious and communal life, economic activities, occupations, military service, property rights, and education. Special taxes were imposed on Jews. After 1827 Jews were subject to the cantonist system where many boys between 12 and 18 were placed into military institutions in an effort to "Russify" them, conversion to Christianity being an important objective. At age 18 they began to serve 25 years in the military.

Things began to improve in 1855 with the reign of Czar Alexander II, a more liberal ruler who freed the serfs and abolished capital punishment. He also made important changes for Jews, abolishing the cantonist program, admitting Jews to high schools and universities, and allowing Jews to live in larger cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow if they were merchants, manufacturers, artisans, scholars or university graduates.

The czar was assassinated in 1881, the Jews unjustly blamed, and a series of pogroms broke out. Czar Alexander III, no friend of the Jews, resurrected the old restrictive laws and added another layer known as the May Laws. No longer were Jews allowed in larger cities and were now barred from higher education and professional institutions. Occupations were restricted and land ownership and leases were forbidden to Jews. Conditions were intolerable for the Jews.



Baron de Hirsch

Enter the Baron de Hirsch, one of the wealthiest men of his time. Born into wealth, he grew it significantly with the building of the Orient Express Railroad.

While he received a Jewish education, he was secular in practice. In addition to his wealth, he had a deep loyalty to the Jewish people and a philanthropic orientation. It is estimated that he invested \$100 million in his philanthropy, \$3.5 billion in today's currency.

In 1891, he approached Russia with a proposal that grew out of his conviction of the need to evacuate the Jews. Perhaps prescient, he made this chilling statement *"Without such help, it would be impossible for the Government to get rid of five millions [sic] of Jews except by slaughtering them in a mass."* Just fifty years later we did indeed face that reality. His solution in the 1890s was to propose his assistance for three million Jews to emigrate over a 25 year-period.



Arriving at Ellis Island.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The government happily accepted this proposal, and the Baron formed the Jewish Colonization Association to assist with these efforts, negotiating favorable terms that would allow Jews to leave without barriers. His initial focus was on agricultural colonies in Argentina. There were many colonies subsequently established in the United States, with the Upper Midwest represented by several efforts in the Dakotas. Painted Woods, ND began in 1883 and lasted until close to 1901. Southern New Jersey was the site of more successful colonies, but ultimately, they too proved unsustainable as the next generation moved into professions in the cities.

Between 1881 and 1924, 2.5 million Jews came to the U.S. from Eastern Europe. The Baron de Hirsch fund was created in the U.S. and funded such programs as the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) to move Jews from NY to central U.S. The Galveston Plan had ties to the IRO and worked to get Jews settled in the Southwest. In addition to agricultural colonies, the Baron also funded trade schools, Americanization programs that taught English, establishment of light industry and loans to assist these efforts. Many were experimental efforts at the time and broke ground for the future. Jewish communities throughout the United States often developed out these efforts benefiting from the many efforts of Baron de Hirsch.

2024 Highlights

A look back at the highlights of JHSUM's work in 2024

April 2024

Regional History Presentation

Apr. 2, 2024 | Ridgepoint

Presentation and discussion on Aberdeen, SD research project that led to the JHSUM video *A Stop Along the Way*, and journal *Aberdeen: A Jewish History*.

Sophie Wirth Camp

Apr. 11, 2024 | White Bear Lake Area Historical Society

Sophie Wirth history presentation by Laura Weber, followed by a discussion in partnership with White Bear Lake Historical Society.

August 2024

Viewing of Summer Camps video

Aug. 7, 2024 | Sholom East

Ice cream social and viewing of the JHSUM video *Summer Camps*.

Schloff Grant Awardee Presentation

Aug. 29, 2024 | Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives

Schloff grant awardee, Chad Mondrie, presented on the history of Blackface and involvement of Jews.

Premiere of *The Story of NAPCO*

Aug. 11, 2024 | MNJCC Sabes Center

Premiere of the first Jewish entrepreneur film from JHSUM, *The Story of NAPCO*, featuring the Rappaport family and their business NAPCO.



September 2024

JHSUM 40th Anniversary Event

Sept. 8, 2024 | Ted Mann Concert Hall

Those Who Serve, a film highlighting Jews in executive, legislative, and judicial roles in the Upper Midwest premiered, and was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Robin Washington. Panelists included Minnesota Secretary of State, Steve Simon, Minnesota State Senator, Sandra Pappas, and US Congressman from Maryland, Jamie Raskin. Congressman Raskin's

grandfather, Sam Bellman, was one of the earliest Jews to serve in Minnesota's legislature in the 1930s. Bellman, who grew up visiting his grandparents in Minnesota, was strongly influenced by his grandfather's career. A dessert reception, sponsored by the Stillerman Family Foundation. A VIP reception preceded the event.

Twin Cities Jewish Film Festival

Sept. 14, 2024 | MNJCC Sabes Center

Life. Lore. And the Lincoln Del film kicked off the 2024 Twin Cities Jewish Film Festival, and was voted audience festival favorite.

Premiere of *Nechama*

Sept. 15, 2024 | MNJCC Sabes Center

Nechama, a film on the Jewish disaster relief organization founded in Minneapolis was premiered at the 2024 Twin Cities Jewish Film Festival. A pop-up exhibit and panel discussion accompanied the event.

October 2024

JHSUM Annual Meeting

Oct. 15, 2024 | via Zoom

Susan Weinberg, JHSUM board vice president, and Minnesota Jewish Genealogical Society past president, presented on the program that brought many Jews to the Upper Midwest.

November 2024

JHSUM - Six Points Collaboration

Nov. 10, 2024 | Six Points Jewish Theater

Brunch and tickets to *Just for Us* made possible by Bruce Goodman, donor and community member, in collaboration with the Six Points Jewish Theater.

December 2024

Regional History Presentation

Dec. 15, 2024 | Or Emet Congregation

Presentation and discussion on Aberdeen, SD research project that led to the JHSUM video *A Stop Along the Way*, and journal *Aberdeen: A Jewish History*.

Thank you to our contributors and members for making these achievements possible!

Your ongoing support provides general operating dollars that allow us to share excellent content with you and the broader community as well as preserve our region's rich Jewish history for future generations.

The following memberships and donations were received from Jan. 1 – Dec. 31, 2024.

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Your generosity brings the JHSUM mission to life. With each gift, you preserve, interpret and educate our community about the Jewish history in the Upper Midwest.

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- Honor a deceased loved one with a L'Dor V'Dor membership
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Congratulations Dan Berlinger for receiving The 2024 Arthur T. Pfefer Memorial Award

Congratulations Heather Edelson on being elected to the Hennepin County Board

Congratulations Judge Jennifer Frisch for her appointment to Chief Judge of MN Court of Appeals.

Congratulations Stuart Bear for receiving The 2024 Sidney Barrows Lifetime Commitment Award

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If you would like to discuss the benefits of establishing your own endowed fund or legacy giving in general, please contact us at 952-381-3360.

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We preserve the name of our Life Members by moving them to the L'Dor V'Dor list when they pass on, thereby linking our generations together and honoring them well into the future.

A L'Dor membership gift is a beautiful way to permanently honor or memorialize family members or friends. Your minimum gift of \$1,800 will create a legacy to ensure you and your family members will be a light for future generations.

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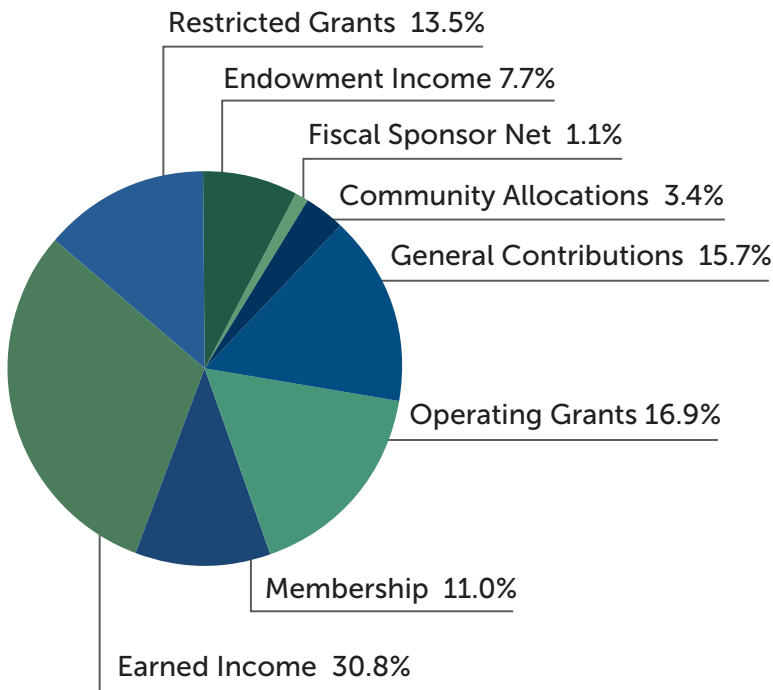
REVENUES

Community Allocations	\$7,335
General Contributions	34,320
Operating Grants	37,000
Membership	23,992
Earned Income	67,330
Restricted Grants	29,500
Endowment Realized Gain	16,774
Fiscal Sponsor Net	2,444
TOTAL REVENUE	\$218,695

EXPENDITURES

Administrative	\$56,726
Fundraising	18,966
Programming:	
Preservation	4,541
Interpretation	155,302
Cost of Goods	2,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$237,535
Net Income (Loss)	\$(18,840)
Endowment Unrealized Gain	54,217
NET INCOME	\$35,377

REVENUES



BALANCE SHEET | 2024

ASSETS

Cash and Equivalent	\$41,719
Endowments	567,680
Equipment	1,629
Inventories	16,129
TOTAL ASSETS	\$627,157

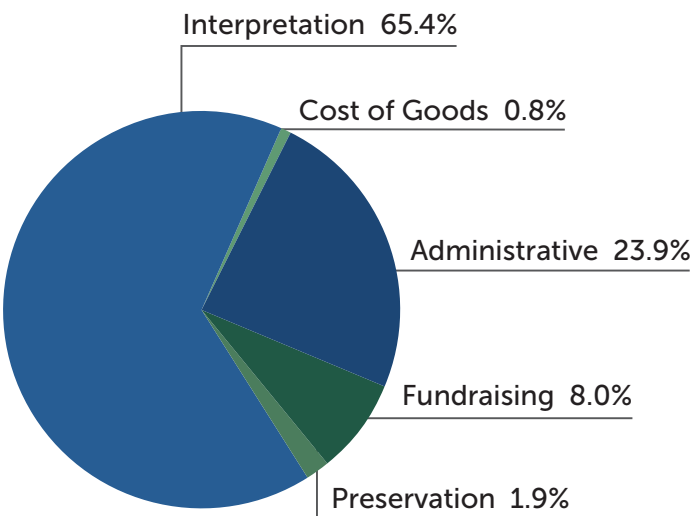
LIABILITIES

Payables	\$1000
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EQUITY

Endowment Contributions	\$373,015
Retained Earnings	217,765
Net Income	35,377
TOTAL EQUITY	\$626,157
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$627,157

EXPENDITURES



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wish you
would
have
asked...

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What challenges did they face?

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Robin Doroshow

As we welcome warmer weather to this region, it doesn't take a temperature of much higher than 40 degrees, to get us out enjoying our short season of more temperate days.

Recently, when walking by Lake Bde Maka Ska in Minneapolis, I noted the acknowledgment of two separate Jewish families on park bench dedications. Whether this is an example of the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, also known as the frequency illusion, or the reality that everywhere I turn I run into a Jew of the Upper Midwest, I really don't know. In any event, I certainly enjoy seeing these gifts to the public made by members of our tribe.



Donor inscriptions, Lake Bde Maka Ska, Minneapolis.