

EXHIBIT REVIEW

Jewish Journeys to San Diego

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San Diego's Jewish pioneers arrived with statehood in 1850. These risk-taking innovators came to the southwestern most settlement in the United States looking for adventure, for good weather, for better health, and, above all, for opportunity to make the American dream their own.

California's early Jewish settlers were double immigrants—having come to America from Europe and uprooting themselves again, to go west. Since the turn of the 20th century, the Jewish community here has only grown, as Jews from all over the world have decided to make San Diego home. Why did Jewish individuals and families choose San Diego? How did they get here? What sort of community did they find, and how did they shape it? This article explores these questions through the lens of twelve Jewish journeys to San Diego between 1850 and the present.

Each Jewish journey portrayed at the History Center illustrates certain themes or characteristics of the community. They are representative stories, meant to capture the links between region and identity, journey and destination, that emerge from the timeline of San Diego's Jewish history. Louis Rose's entry, for example, represents the pioneer experience, considering the motivations and implications of a Jewish journey to San Diego via wagon train in 1850. This was a route travelled by dozens of other pioneer Jews who settled in San Diego. Rose's story is his own, but his journey also reminds us of the challenges that 19th century travel to California presented for Jews, and his destination prompts us to recall the deep roots of the Jewish community in this city.

Rose's portrait, together with the other eleven entries, highlights individuals, ideas and issues that influenced the journey of San Diego's Jewish community from pioneer times to the present. The Exhibit will remain until Spring 2018.



Louis Rose, c. 1870. SDHC Collection.

Louis Rose (1807-1888)

Westward Ho! To California by Wagon Train

A trip to California in 1850 presented special challenges for religiously observant Jews, including the procurement of kosher food and the difficulty gathering a *minyán* (quorum of 10) for prayer. Consequently, most Jews who made this trip maintained a flexible attitude toward religion. Such was the case for Louis Rose, who traveled as part of a wagon train from Texas. Rose experienced a long and dangerous journey, as the land route traveled through the desert and treacherous mountain passes. Rose told his daughter that members

of his party were so hungry by the time they reached the Cuyamacas, “the men were glad to chew their belts.”

The land route also required Jews to live and work closely together with non-Jews, a new experience for many recent Jewish immigrants who were used to living and working primarily with their co-religionists. Lasting partnerships formed on the wagon trail, as together they made their way across arduous terrain. This was the case for Rose and former lieutenant governor of Texas, James Robinson, who met on the journey to California and became long-time business and political partners in San Diego.



Robinson Rose House, Old Town San Diego. SDHC Collection.



Hannah Schiller Mannasse, n.d. SDHC Collection.

Hannah Schiller Mannasse (1834-1913)
*Old Town, New Ideas: Jewish Women
Journey to the American West*

We do not have many accounts of women's travels to San Diego, but we do know something about their journeys once they arrived. Hannah Schiller Mannasse sought autonomy in the west—a region that valued individualism. After a disastrous divorce, she aimed to control her own destiny, as court documents, tax records, and a cattle brand demonstrate. This sort of formidable female activity would have been harder to accomplish in the established east.

Her first marriage was to notorious lothario of Old Town, Heyman Mannasse. He deserted Hannah after less than a year of marriage, leaving on a cattle drive to Arizona and never returning. She subsequently married Joseph Mannasse, Heyman's brother. For this marriage, she made sure to protect her assets and assert her financial independence. She owned her own herd of cattle and plot of land in Roseville. She even went to court to be sure that her assets remained separate from those of her second husband. Joseph and Hannah remained married for the rest of their lives.

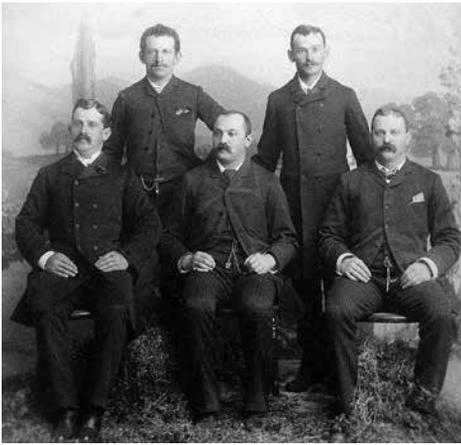


The Klauber family en route from San Francisco to San Diego, 1892. SDHC Collection.

Jewish Sister Cities:
San Francisco and San Diego

The Klauber family, Abraham, Theresa and their 12 children, travelled back and forth between San Francisco and San Diego with some frequency, demonstrating how San Francisco functioned as a "hub" for Jews in the West. As San Francisco was the largest, best organized, and wealthiest Jewish community in California in the late 19th century, San Diego Jews looked to their Jewish counterparts in the

north for models of community organization, connections to the larger Jewish world, and most especially, for potential spouses. The Klaubers maintained business interests in both northern and southern California. They moved the whole family to San Diego in 1869, back to San Francisco in 1884 and then finally settled in San Diego in 1892. During their time living in San Diego, the Klaubers sent several of their children to San Francisco to be educated, to work in family businesses, and to widen their Jewish social circles. The adults would travel and stay in San Francisco for business, Jewish family and social life, and superior medical care.



The Levi brothers (standing l-r): Rudolph, Adolph; (sitting l-r): Isaac, Simon, Nathan, San Diego, 1879. Jewish Historical Society of San Diego, Courtesy of Robert Levi.

Family Migration Patterns: The Levi Brothers

The Levi brothers exemplify a pattern of Jewish family migration wherein siblings or cousins would follow each other to a region, and then spread out to explore various business opportunities, forming businesses and dissolving family partnerships as they tested new ideas and territories. The Levis, like other Jewish families from the German lands, came to America to stay in the 19th century. Pushed out of Central Europe by the faltering economy and rising anti-Jewish

sentiment, they sought a brighter future here.

This family migration pattern was characterized by one son (in this case the eldest, Simon) relocating first as the family pioneer who worked until he had earned enough money to send for one or more of his brothers to join him in America. This common practice allowed for families to immigrate and work together to bring over more siblings, while also sending money back to family who remained in Europe. In this way, the other four Levi brothers—Nathan, Isaac, Rudolph and Adolph, came to America. Often, once the migration of a generation was complete, one son would return home to visit parents and find a bride. Adolph Levi returned to Bohemia in 1885, to attend the wedding of his sister, where he met and married Eleanora Schwartz. Several Levi descendants still live in San Diego today.



Marie and Abraham Blochman. SDHC Collection.

**Abraham Blochman (1834-1915)
and Marie Blochman (1845-1918)**
Riding the Waves to California

Pioneer Jews who came to California were adventurous! Though travel by boat was often more predictable than overland travel in the late 19th century, the sea presented challenges, as Abraham Blochman's trip from Arkansas to California demonstrates.

Young and adventurous, with dreams of discovering gold, Blochman chose a "quick" route to California in October 1851: ship from New Orleans to Havana, then a steamer to Chagres, the chief port in Panama. Once in Panama, Blochman negotiated passage in canoe along the Chagres River. When torrential rains made continued travel on the river impossible, Blochman hiked the remaining two-day distance to Panama City, where he could catch a steamship to San Francisco. He bought a ticket, but missed the boat to California, as he had contracted Chagres fever. A local doctor advised him to leave as soon as possible, as the conditions in Panama City were not conducive to recovery. Blochman took passage on the first ship he could find, an unseaworthy old schooner called the *Tryphena*. The 28-day journey was captained by a drunkard whose rationing of food and water proved disastrous: the passengers and crew survived for six days on one glass of water and one glass of flour per day. In November 1852, the schooner docked at Point Loma in San Diego. Blochman stopped in San Diego to regain his strength, before continuing to San Francisco on a different ship. While he did not strike gold in San Francisco, he did find another kind of treasure: a family. Abraham, Marie and their five children relocated to San Diego in 1881. In 1902, he gathered his family and friends for a celebration in Pt. Loma to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his landing there.



Al and Rose Neumann, n.d. Courtesy of the Dept. of Special Collections & University Archives SDSU Library.

Brooklyn Meets San Diego

Rose Neumann described the shock of moving from the center of American Jewish life to one of its outpost communities, “Almost to the day I left the east coast, I worked in the shoe department of the big Abraham Straus store. When we came to San Diego, for Jews it was like a prairie wilderness. That’s why Sadie Epstein and I had to have that newspaper to let one Jew know about another, what one did, where another lived, where we could meet, holiday services, who needed help, where to come for counsel, and lots of other things. Those days were wonderful, but hard for all of us.”

For Neumann, building Jewish community in San Diego was of paramount importance and would prove to be her life’s work. Together with Sadie Epstein, Neumann edited and published San Diego’s first Jewish paper, the forerunner of the *San Diego Jewish Bulletin*. Neumann went on to chair Federated Jewish Charities, the precursor to Jewish Family Service, for 25 years. She was also an active member of Hadassah (the women’s Zionist organization), Hebrew Home for the Aged, United Jewish Fund, and Tifereth Israel Sisterhood. She arrived in San Diego to find a “prairie wilderness” which she worked to transform into a connected and vibrant Jewish community.

Navel Oranges: Coming to California for Health and the Military

Several factors attracted people to San Diego in the early 20th century: a healthful climate, good weather, and the expanding military. The Ratner family came from Brooklyn to San Diego for all of these reasons. In 1915, Marco Ratner wrote to his maternal grandparents in San Diego complaining of the bitter cold of the Brooklyn naval yard where he worked. They wrote back, “There’s a little navy out here in San Diego. Why don’t you come and see if you can get a job here and you wouldn’t have to worry



Isaac Ratner, n.d. Jewish Historical Society of San Diego, Ratner Family Collection.

about being cold." Marco took their advice, and the rest of the family followed soon after.

In 1921, Marco's parents, Isaac and Millie, moved the rest of the family west on the advice of the family doctor, who advised a diet of fresh fruits and vegetables—promised year-round in California, due to the continuous growing season—for Isaac Ratner's diabetes. Doctors of this time period frequently prescribed southern California for their patients' ailments. From breathing difficulties (especially asthma) to general frailty and depression, the sunshine and dry air that characterized the region were considered a cure. Reunited with their eldest son and Millie's parents, the Ratner family prospered in the Golden State.



Abraham Nasatir, 1927. Courtesy of Special Collections & University Archives SDSU Library.

Academic Arrivals

Ida and Abe Nasatir, Orthodox Jews, leaders and educators in the community, arrived in San Diego in 1929 when Abraham began what would be a 50-year teaching career at San Diego State College. Abraham and Ida met as students at the University of California, Berkeley. Abe was a history graduate student; Ida majored in English. New and expanding college campuses drew Jewish academics, like the Nasatirs, to San Diego. While Abraham taught, Ida established herself as a beloved local lecturer and book critic, active in

San Diego community organizations. For years, Abe was the most visible Jewish presence at San Diego State College, his traditional piety distinguishing him on campus. Beloved and brilliant, the Nasatirs shaped San Diego culture.



Ida Nasatir, 1927. Courtesy of Special Collections & University Archives SDSU Library.



Rabbi Baruch Stern, n.d. Jewish Historical Society of San Diego, Paul Schraer Collection.

A Holocaust Survivor's Story

"Anyone who comes from shattered Europe can feel only good will in the United States, and especially in this nice city," Rabbi Baruch Stern told the *San Diego Union* soon after his arrival. A Holocaust survivor, Stern's life before coming to San Diego was marked by tragedy. Stern's parents, all four of his sisters, and his two young daughters, ages one and three, died at Auschwitz. Stern came to San Diego, together with his wife, to start a new life and went on to lead San Diego's congregation Beth Jacob for 30 years.

The Sterns' arrival in San Diego was organized by the United Service for New Americans (USNA), which posted bond and guaranteed to the U.S. government that refugees under the agency's sponsorship, who had no relatives to aid them, would not become public charges. In order to ensure the best rate of success for this program, the USNA assigned Jewish communities around the country a quota of new immigrants to support so the financial burden of postwar resettlement was distributed equitably across the American Jewish community. In the original agreement between USNA and San Diego, San Diego's Jewish community arranged to resettle one refugee family every two months. In 1948, with the passage of new refugee legislation, USNA began to handle thousands more cases each month. In light of this increase, San Diego agreed to raise its quota to one refugee family per month. In total, from 1948-1953, San Diego's Jewish community helped resettle some 75 Jewish families, all Holocaust survivors, in San Diego.



George and Elsa Feher, 1959. Courtesy of the Feher Family.

George Feher (b.1924) Academic Arrivals, UCSD

The creation of UCSD changed the Jewish geography of San Diego, as a significant number of Jewish faculty, staff and students made the university and its surrounding neighborhood their home.

The new University of

California recruited a number of notable Jewish faculty in the early 1960s, including physicist George Feher. Feher was born in Czechoslovakia, where anti-Jewish legislation disrupted his schooling. In 1941, he emigrated to Palestine, where he pursued an interest in electronics that eventually led to a degree in physics from University of California, Berkeley. He was working at Bell Labs and Columbia University when Roger Revelle approached him about coming to work at a new university in La Jolla. Feher's reaction echoes the sentiments of San Diego's Jewish pioneers a century earlier: *"We were excited to be on the ground floor in planning and building a new campus where one's ideals could still make a difference. My colleagues at Columbia University thought I was crazy to forego a professorship at Columbia to start such a risky enterprise in La Jolla. They and others thought it would be impossible to build a first rate university in an idyllic playground like La Jolla. They were, of course, wrong."* San Diego attracts risk-takers, innovators and adventurers. Feher's ingenious contributions to science won him the prestigious Wolf Prize in Chemistry in 2006/07.



South African Jewish American Community (SAJAC) Annual BBQ, late 1980s. Courtesy of SAJAC.

South African Jews Settle In San Diego, 1970s-1990s

A significant number of South African Jews began to resettle in San Diego starting in the late 1970s. They left South Africa (chiefly Johannesburg and Cape Town) because of the unstable political situation. They were attracted to San

Diego for its economic opportunity, similar climate, and community of other South African Jews. San Diego supports an active chapter of the South African Jewish American Community (SAJAC), an organization founded by South African Jews to assist fellow emigrants in acclimating to local life. South African Jews in San Diego also founded Chai South Africa, a benevolent society dedicated to supporting struggling Jews in South Africa, especially the elderly and the physically disabled.



The Finkel Family, 1978. SDHC Collection.

Operation Exodus: Soviet Jews Settle In San Diego, 1970s-2000s

The Finkel family, pictured here celebrating Hanukkah, was among the more than 500,000 Soviet Jews who came to the United States between the late 1970s and 2000 to escape discrimination. Roughly 50% of these Soviet Jewish refugees settled in or around New York; the remainder moved to American communities big and small, in every section of the country, including San Diego. This exodus, directed nationally by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, was organized locally by Jewish Family Service and Jewish Federation. These two agencies helped resettle hundreds of Soviet Jewish refugees by arranging housing, clothing, health care, English classes, and employment. The organizations also assisted

in establishing community ties, as each refugee family was matched to a local host family who helped the new arrivals navigate San Diego. Families like the Finkels, who had faced anti-Semitic persecution in the Soviet Union, delighted in the opportunity to openly celebrate Jewish holidays here.



Ken Kids, 2016. Courtesy of the Ken Jewish Community.

Jewish Journeys: Mexican Jews Settle in San Diego, 1980s-2000s

A significant number of Mexican Jews, chiefly from Mexico City and Tijuana, settled in San Diego starting in the 1980s. They left Mexico because of the unstable economy and dangerously high levels of crime. San Diego's proximity, similar climate, large Spanish speaking population, and community of other Mexican Jews made it an ideal location. San Diego's Mexican Jewish community supports the KEN, a Latin Jewish community organization that offers a wide range of educational, leadership, social, performing arts, and sports programs and activities. Through the KEN's programming, its members strengthen their Jewish identity, build a connection with Israel, and maintain their Latin culture.