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**JEWISH MUSEUM
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FOR

**FLORIDA JEWISH
HISTORY MONTH**

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EVERY JANUARY IS FLORIDA JEWISH HISTORY MONTH!

Thirty-three years ago there was very little known about Florida Jewish history. Scholars did not take it seriously – it was not New York – and most all said that Florida just had a “bunch of 20th century condo commandos.”

Today we know that Jews have been living in Florida since 1763 – when they were first *allowed* to live here – and have contributed greatly to the development of the entire State.

This is a critical time in Jewish history. Antisemitism is growing around the world, on college campuses and in our communities, based on old prejudices and slanders. The number of Jews around the globe is diminishing. World Jewry is down to 13.9 million of 7.4 billion people and the world's second largest Jewish population, in the United States, is shrinking. We are approximately six million or 1.8% of the total population and some report we have lost 500,000 Jews in the last decade.

About 16% percent of our nation's Jews live in Florida, so we have a huge responsibility to help insure Jewish continuity. Rabbis tell us that if our memories are Jewish, we will be Jewish. Jewish educators tell us that to sustain our people and attract Jews to stay Jewish, especially our youth, we need more knowledge and more sense of pride.

Floridian Jews are fortunate that as a result of research and the contributions by hundreds of Florida Jewish families of oral histories, photos, documents and artifacts, the story can now be told and passed on.

Overview of Florida Jewish history: Genesis 1763

A Jew brought Florida into statehood and Jews, as *conversos*, probably lived in Florida before anyplace else in the United States – in St. Augustine in 1565. Most people think that Jews first settled in Florida on Miami Beach after World War II.

Jews have been part of the development of the State since its beginning, but until this myth was dispelled as a result of research in the 1980s, the facts were little-known.

Florida, discovered by Ponce de Leon for Spain in 1513, became a U.S. Territory in 1821; Florida became the nation's 27th state in 1845. During that period, a Jewish man became one of the state's earliest settlers and largest developers in an industry that more than one hundred years later, Jews would play a major role.

Moses Elias Levy: Pilgrimage Plantation 1822-1835

Eighty-one years before the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland (1897), Sephardic Jew Moses Elias Levy embarked on his own "Zion" plan to resettle oppressed European Jews in Florida. Born in Morocco in 1782, Moses Levy was descended from one of the many Jewish families who had been expelled from the Iberian peninsula toward the close of the fifteenth century and had found refuge in northern Africa. He was raised in Gibraltar, made his way to St. Thomas in 1800, and engaged in the lumber business, accumulating a considerable fortune. He

relocated to Cuba in 1816, furnishing supplies to the army. He became intensely interested in Florida, which at that time was still owned by Spain, and predicted that soon the United States would take it over.

In 1819, Moses Levy purchased 92,000 acres and envisioned a haven (similar to Mordecai Noah's "Ararat" in New York that did not become a reality) where Jews could study Hebrew and learn agriculture in Micanopy, land that is now near the site of the University of Florida. He hired Frederick Warburg, who was probably a member of the German Jewish banking family, to be his agent to help recruit Jewish settlers for his colony. It is documented that Warburg and at least five other German Jewish families lived on the Plantation, as did Levy's son David who became Florida's first U.S. Senator.

Levy was tireless in his efforts to bring provisions and equipment. Some historians say that the sugar cane he brought for planting was the first imported into this country. Levy built a plantation house, houses for the settlers' families, blacksmith shop, stable, sugar mill, saw mill, and corn house and purchased fruit trees and seeds. The 1,000 acre Pilgrimage Plantation existed from 1822-1835, until it was burned down at the outbreak of the Second Seminole Indian War. It was a continuing challenge, mostly due to its hostile, remote location.

As Rebecca Gratz noted in an early 1820s letter, "...me thinks I would place foreigners in a more interior situation.." Levy, reflecting on the collapse of his dream, said, "It is not easy to transform old clothes men into practical farmers." Levy created perhaps the first utopian settlement in the Deep South and

included among his projects a plan for the abolition of slavery, public schools and a Jewish school.

Pioneer Floridian Jews

Levy was probably the first developer in Florida, but not the first Jewish landowner in Florida. Since Florida was owned by Spain since its discovery in 1513, Jews were unable to live here – it was “for Catholics only.” But in 1763 in the Treaty of Paris following the French and Indian War, Florida was given to the British and Louisiana was given to the Spanish. Jews living in New Orleans were again on the move and it is documented that three Sephardic Jews came to Pensacola and bought land: Samuel Israel, Joseph de Palacios, and Alexander Solomon (some historians say he was related to Haym Solomon who helped finance the American Revolution).

It is possible that *conversos* lived in St. Augustine in the 1500s, over one hundred years before the 23 Jews who sailed from Brazil landed in New Amsterdam (New York) in 1654. Yes, American Jewish history may have started in Florida!

Jews have lived in Florida as Jews since 1763. Even though the state was returned to Spain in 1783 in the Treaty ending the American Revolution, there was a need for settlement, so Jews were tolerated. Until statehood in 1845, Jews continued to trickle into northern Florida.

David Levy Yulee: Florida's First U.S. Senator

When Moses Levy moved to Florida he brought two of his four children, Elias and David. Elias was sent to Harvard; David boarded with the Moses Myer family in Norfolk to get his Jewish education, then came to Florida by 1827 to manage some of his

father's properties. He pursued the law and was admitted to the Florida bar in 1832. David Levy became extremely active in politics. He helped draft Florida's constitution and eventually was sent to the U.S. Congress as the representative of the Territory of Florida, where he argued for statehood. With less than 100 Jews in the state in 1845, David Levy was elected to the U.S. Senate. Being the first Jew to serve there, Levy faced discrimination when John Quincy Adams referred to him as the "alien Jew delegate from Florida."

David officially changed his name to that of his Sephardic ancestors in Morocco, becoming David Levy Yulee. Yulee's political contributions to the state's development were amplified economically when he built the first railroad across the state, "The Florida Railway." Levy County and the town of Yulee honor the significant contributions of Moses and David to the development of Florida.

More Early Jewish History

In another tribute, Florida's west coast city of Ft. Myers is named for Abraham C. Myers, a West Point graduate and a descendant of the first rabbi of Charleston, S.C., who served as quartermaster during the Second Seminole Indian Wars.

A Jewish girl was born in Pensacola in 1822 and a boy in Jacksonville in 1857, which is the date of the first Jewish cemetery, also in Jacksonville. This cemetery was followed by others in Key West (1865), Pensacola (1869), Ocala (1873), Tampa (1894), St. Augustine (1911), and Miami (1913).

Pioneer Congregations

Florida Jewish pioneers Philip Dzialynski, Robert Williams, and Morris Endel each brought a Torah with them when they settled in Jacksonville (1850), Tallahassee (1865), and Gainesville (1865), respectively. This insured that Jewish worship would take place on the Florida frontier.

By the turn of the 20th century, there were six Jewish congregations in Florida. The first synagogue was in Pensacola (1876) and B'nai B'rith had a chapter there in 1874. The next historic congregations were Ahavath Chesed of Jacksonville, 1882; Rodeph Sholom of Key West, 1887; United Hebrews of Ocala, 1888; Schaarai Zedek of Tampa, 1894; and B'nai Israel of Pensacola, 1899. All remain in existence, although the historic congregation in Ocala is now split into two, and Key West's congregation is now known as B'nai Zion. In 1901 a second congregation was founded in Jacksonville, the Orthodox B'nai Israel, which has evolved into the Jacksonville Jewish Center. Two years later, Rodeph Sholom, an Orthodox congregation, was founded in Tampa, as a result of an irreconcilable split between the Orthodox and the Reform factions at Schaarai Zedek.

In 1909, B'nai Israel congregation was organized in St. Augustine. B'nai Zion was established in 1912 in Miami and was renamed Beth David in 1917. Orlando's first Jewish congregation, Ohev Shalom, was formed in 1918 in response to the city paper's editorial comment following a patriotic rally for World War I, that Jews were not represented (because they were not organized).

Temple Israel, the first Jewish congregation in Palm Beach County, was established in 1922 in West Palm Beach. That same year, another Temple Israel was founded in Miami. Conservative congregation B'nai Israel of St. Petersburg was founded in 1923.

The following year marked the start of Gainesville's B'nai Israel. Still another B'nai Israel (later, Temple Israel) was founded in 1925, in Daytona.

In 1925 a group met to organize the first congregation on Miami Beach. Two years later, Beth Jacob Congregation was incorporated. Beth Jacob's two buildings from 1929 and 1936 now house the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU.

Meanwhile, a congregation, Beth Shalom, was founded in Sarasota in 1926. The next year Sanford's Congregation Beth Israel dedicated its new synagogue. Sebring's Temple Israel also dedicated a synagogue in 1927. Fort Lauderdale held high holiday services in 1926 on the eve of a devastating hurricane. It took five years of rebuilding and restoring the Jewish community before the Fort Lauderdale Hebrew Congregation – later Temple Emanu-El – was founded.

Temple Beth El of St. Petersburg was founded in the late 1920s. Temple Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in Tallahassee, was founded in 1937. The following year, Congregation Jacob Joseph was founded on Miami Beach; this became Temple Emanu-El.

During World War II, meeting the religious needs of Jewish military in Florida prompted the founding of new congregations. Postwar movement of Jews into every region of Florida brought the establishment of many others. In 1900, there were six Jewish congregations in Florida. One hundred years later, there are more than 300 Jewish congregations in the state, and the number is ever increasing.

Jews fulfilling their civic duties

Floridian Jews served on both sides during the Civil War, then some settled in Key West, Ocala, Tampa and Orlando. Since 1879 when German Jew Henry Brash served as mayor of Marianna, more than 120 Jewish men and women have served their communities as mayors. David Sholtz, of Russian Jewish parents, was Florida's governor 1933-1937. Richard Stone was the state's second Jewish senator in 1974 and nearly 100 Jews have served both in Congress and in the state legislature. More than 250 Jews have served as judges in Florida.

Land of Opportunity

"Sell everything -- Come quickly to Florida, the land of milk and honey - you can walk down the streets and pick citrus..." And they did come. For Jews, Florida offered opportunities in occupations denied to them in their countries of origin. Some transferred their traditional businesses to the Florida setting; others used the state's resources to develop or expand new ideas. They became ranchers, farmers, cigar makers, architects, developers, hoteliers, artists, writers, scientists, retailers, educators, doctors, lawyers, civic leaders and more. Many of their names have become household words.

For examples, the largest shade tobacco (used for cigars) packing factory was owned by Jews in Quincy; the founder of the Florida Cattlemen's Association was a Russian Jewish immigrant in St. Augustine, Saul Snyder; Marshall Nirenberg of Orlando was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology (1968) for breaking the genetic code; and four Jews have served on Florida's Supreme Court, including as Chief Justice.

Retailing

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was not unusual to find Jewish merchants on main streets and country crossroads, in cities and villages, throughout the state. Many arrived as itinerant peddlers who soon set down their packs and opened small stores. There they sold groceries, clothing, footwear, cigars, dry goods, and furniture. In some cases they also manufactured what they sold. These small-scale merchants arrived in search of economic opportunity. Often they organized or joined local fraternal and commercial organizations and rose to leadership in their business communities.

Some Jewish merchants were mobile, moving from town to town in response to weather, disease, and economic disasters. In 1857, on the heels of an economic panic, Samuel Cline and Max White closed their St. Augustine clothing store and moved to Tampa. Others, such as the Maas Brothers in Tampa, the Cohen Brothers in Jacksonville, and the Frank family in Clearwater, remained in one place where their department stores grew over several generations.

Some were immigrants who paved the way for their *landsmen* to join them, offering jobs and monetary help to the newer arrivals. Such was Berman Weintraub, a Rumanian immigrant to Key West, whose grocery store in the early 1900s was a magnet for other Jews from Jassy, Rumania.

Some communities, such as Live Oak, were stop-off points for Jewish newcomers heading into Florida from Georgia. Sarah and Jacob Fleet, originally from Russia, settled in Live Oak in 1903 with their eight children. Within a generation each of the six sons and one of the daughters had stores – two in Live Oak and also

in Winter Haven, Perry, Fort Walton Beach, Tallahassee and Haines City.

Twelve of Miami's first 16 merchants were Jewish. Furchgott's Store was founded in Jacksonville by the 1860s. Hartman's grocery store opened in Fort Myers in 1898. Zundel Kessler settled in Leesburg at the turn of the century and opened a dry goods business. PG Blanck moved his department store from Key West to Miami about 1910, and, at the same time, Morris Piekansky moved his clothing store from St. Augustine to Miami. Abe Tarapani and his brother-in-law, Sam Lovitz, opened a department store in Tarpon Springs in 1913. Cecelia Tarapani Levy and her husband Philip arrived in Sarasota in 1913, where they opened a women's clothing store.

Such a small sampling as this overlooks the countless others who pioneered as Jews and as retailers in the frontier communities throughout Florida. Through their courage, perseverance, and civic contributions, they established the roots that enabled others to follow.

Jews as Farmers, called "social deviants" by sociologists
Jews are usually perceived to be an urban people, but in Florida they have engaged in producing and marketing every kind of farm crop and livestock animals. Their beneficiaries are worldwide, wherever Florida's agricultural products are consumed. Since the earliest days of the 20th century, Jewish people have been involved in agriculture.

Dr. Philip P. Phillips was one of the first and most notable, starting in 1894 in Orlando. He eventually owned more than 5,000 acres of citrus, developed many methods to improve the growing

and processing of the fruit and juice, became a major philanthropist when he sold to Minute Maid in 1954 and many places in Orlando are named to honor him.

Another Jewish pioneer in Florida agriculture was David Bilgore who moved to Clearwater in 1923, established groves and opened a packing house and a cannery. George Terry immigrated to the United States in 1920 with \$40 in his pocket. He came to Orlando in 1940, bought 600 acres of citrus groves and, within 10 years, expanded his holdings to 70,000 acres that included groves and cattle. Terry tested clover feed to fatten cattle on his Magnolia Ranch. He was president of the Orange County Cattleman's Association and also successfully drilled for oil in the 1950s.

Brothers James, Seymour, and Milton Heller began as tomato growers in the Palmetto area. Now into its fourth generation, the Winter Garden-based Heller Brothers Packing Company operates 5,000 acres of citrus groves, extending as far south as Immokalee in Collier County.

Jules and Jack Freeman came to Sarasota in 1953. By the early 1970s, they had planted the "world's largest orange grove" with over 3-million citrus trees. Their 27,000 acres were featured in an article in National Geographic. The magazine said the Freeman grove was three times the size of Manhattan.

Among the many others were Henry and Sylvia Benedict whose pineapple packing business was in Orlando in 1904. The Cohen family's Riviera Groves started in West Palm Beach circa 1915. Harry Rubinstein started his tomato farm in Dania in 1930.

Theodore and Ann Berman's dairy farm in Okeechobee has spanned four decades. The Haftel family groves in Tarpon Springs are historic and extensive. The Bush egg farm in Pinellas County boasted 40,000 hens in hatchery.

Charles and Hannah Peyser in Ocala were manufacturing and marketing El Tropico cigars from 1860 thru 1920. From Key West to Tampa to Quincy, Florida Jews engaged in growing tobacco and manufacturing cigars since the 19th century.

Focus on South Florida

In the beginning all settlement was in north Florida or Key West, which was a port of entry for some arriving from Europe. After the railroads opened up south Florida in the 1890s, Jews began to settle there. The Jewish migration trickle of the 18th and 19th centuries turned into a few spurts until after World War II. Then the flow became a gusher, especially in Dade County. In the 1890s, the Florida Jewish population was about 2,500; by the 1950s, 70,000; today it is nearly 850,000 and growing.

Jews came to escape persecution, for economic opportunity, to join family members already here, for the climate and lifestyle, for their health and to retire. The largest number of Jews settled in Florida after World War II. They include Holocaust survivors; Orthodox Jews; snow birds and snow flakes; Jews from other places in the U.S.; Israelis; the elderly; and Jews from Latin American countries. These Jews who joined the earlier immigrants from the Caribbean, Germany, Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, Romania, and Russia and who made Florida home also made Florida the nation's third largest Jewish population.

Today, south Florida hosts the largest concentration (15%) of Jews outside of Israel. The first south Florida community to host Jews was probably West Palm Beach. Jews first settled in 1893 when Henry Flagler brought his railroad there. Some of these Jews proceeded south to Miami when Flagler extended in railroad there in 1896. The Jewish population in Palm Beach County was 1,000 in 1940 and is now the largest in Florida; Boca Raton is about 50-60% Jewish today.

Boca Raton

The first Jews to settle in Boca Raton, at a time when they could sit in the middle of Old Dixie Highway and play cards, were the Browns who came in 1931. Nettie [Brown] and Max Hutkin arrived in 1936; he was a Polish immigrant, and founder and early president of the first Jewish congregation there, Temple Beth El in 1967. Today, with a membership of 2,000 families, it is one of the largest Reform congregations in the nation. Boca Raton boasted a Jewish mayor, Steve Abrams.

West Palm Beach

Jews who first arrived in West Palm Beach in 1892 had retail stores on Narcissus and Clematis Streets, which were close to the ferry that brought shoppers from the island; they formed the first congregation in 1923, Temple Israel. Among the founders was Joseph Mandel who served as mayor of West Palm Beach in 1923- 24. Another founder was Max Serkin, a produce farmer who had arrived in 1896; his daughter is thought to be the first Jewish child born in Palm Beach County.

As in other areas, shopping malls, Velcro, air-conditioning and fax machines have changed the shape of local businesses. Irwin Levy, Robert Rapaport and Aaron Schechter developed Century

Villages beginning in 1967 that drew a large number of retired garment workers and teachers to the area. Several years later other retirement and golf communities were developed in Delray Beach and the “rush” of Jewish settlement accelerated.

Miami

Until the railroad in 1896, it was difficult to get to the southern end of mainland Florida. The earliest permanent Jewish settler in Miami was Isidor Cohen who was a signatory of the City’s charter and helped found many Jewish and civic organizations. These early Jews (about 25 people) had religious services in homes beginning in 1896. After the great fire that destroyed most of the businesses and took the life of a Jew, Julius Frank, on December 26, 1896 and a yellow fever epidemic in 1899, the Jewish population declined by 1900 to three people; Miami was a hostile environment in which to live. The Jewish community grew to about 300,000 Jews in the 1970s, then began another decline.

Miami’s Jews have worked hard to help develop their community and at opening society and now thrive in it. There is a low intermarriage rate, young Jews, observant Jews, a varied Jewish community infrastructure and, at last, a multi-generational Jewish community.

Broward County

Broward County hosts Florida’s second largest Jewish population, although the white power structure discouraged Jews from setting there. Today about one in six people is Jewish. In 1910 Dave Sokolow built a home in Dania and with Louis Brown had three department stores in Hollywood, Dania and Pompano. In 1916 Rose Seitlin and Max Lehrman, who married in 1913 in

the first Jewish wedding in Miami, moved with their daughter Nell to Fort Lauderdale where they had two more children, the first to be born there. Max Lehrman opened a dry-goods store.

The first religious service was held September 1926, the night of the big hurricane. Fort Lauderdale Hebrew Congregation became Temple Emanu-el and their first synagogue was built in 1937. The founding families included those of Mack and Moe Katz, Abe Newman, Archie Robbins, Louis Sandler, Daniel Richter, David Blume, and Dr. Albert Shapira with Charles and Samuel Lerner of Lerner Stores also as contributors.

By 1940 there were 1,000 Jews in Broward County and the dozen or so Jewish families in Hollywood began to have services. During World War II the airfields were converted to training facilities. After the War thousands of servicemen recalled the nice life in Broward and returned with their families; thousands more joined them and the greatest boom was on.

Harry Berman settled in Davie; Wolfie Cohen of "Wolfie's" had a chicken ranch in Cooper City, which was created by Morris Cooper of Arrow Shirt Company. Abe Mailman helped develop Hollywood and created Miramar in 1952. Bill Horvitz and Herman Goodman founded Temple Sinai of Hollywood in 1956. Hollywood Beach Hotel owner Ben Tobin donated the Hillcrest Country Club to become Temple Beth El.

Maynard Abrams was mayor of Hollywood 1966-69 and by 1970, there were 40,000 Jews in Broward. At the height of the Six Day War in Israel in 1967, funds were raised and the Jewish Federation began. In recent decades, Jews have been very

supportive of the educational and cultural institutions and today there are more than 50 congregations in Broward.

And there's Miami Beach that also did not welcome Jews!

In the early days, Miamians soon began visiting the southern tip of the peninsula to picnic on its sandy beaches or bathe in the warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1913 the Collins Bridge opened, joining the beach to the mainland and a Jewish family arrived from New York. Joe and Jenny Weiss, with their young son Jesse relocated due to Joe's asthma. Joe and Jennie operated a snack bar at a popular bathing spot at the tip of the beach, as that was the only place Jews were permitted. Several years later, the Weisses opened Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant in a small, wooden frame house, which expanded today, remains the site of this world famous restaurant; the business also remains in the same family.

Developer Carl Fisher placed restrictive covenants in his land deeds prohibiting the sale of lots north of Fifth Street to Jews. Several modest Jewish-owned hotels and apartments arose on property sold to Jews by the Lummus brothers south of Fifth Street. Jews owned and lived in apartments they rented out as their chief source of income.

Built in 1921 by Sam Magid and Joseph and Harry Goodkowsky, who had operated successful Kosher hotels in New England, the Nemo Hotel, on Collins Avenue and First Street, catered to Kosher Jewish winter tourists. On the same block lived Rose and Jeremiah Weiss and their children, Milton, Malvina, and Eugene, who moved to Miami Beach in 1919. Rose Weiss, a deeply compassionate and caring woman and one of the community's

most popular residents, was known as "the Mother of Miami Beach." A civic activist, Rose Weiss attended every city commission meeting for nearly forty years; she also created the city's first flag,

The Blackstone Hotel opened in 1929 on Washington Avenue and Eighth Street. Built by Nathan Stone, the grandfather of future United States Senator Richard Stone, this became a haven for Jewish visitors. (George Gershwin reportedly wrote portions of "Porgy and Bess" while reposing in the hotel's rooftop solarium!) Despite this activity, the Jewish population of Miami Beach grew slowly in the first half of the 1920s, and it was confined to an area from Fifth Street south to the tip of the peninsula. Malvina Weiss Gutschmidt, the talented, effervescent daughter of Rosie Weiss noted that there was nothing, in terms of Jewish residences, north of Fifth Street until 1925.

A fantastic real estate boom in the mid 1920s lured many young Jews, such as Leonard Abess, Max Orovitz, and Baron de Hirsch Meyer, to the area. Especially active here was Henri Levy, a French-born Jew who migrated in 1922 with his family to Miami Beach, a place he characterized as "a lush tropical paradise," and subsequently developed the smart boom-era communities of Normandy Isle and Normandy Beach North, which later became Surfside.

The boom collapsed in 1926, preceding by a few months a killer hurricane, the final blow to that speculative period, which smashed into South Beach and other parts of Dade County with winds of 130 miles per hour. But many "boomers," whose ranks included a considerable number of Jews, remained in the area. In the 1930s, Miami Beach's Jewish population grew significantly,

reaching at least several thousand (out of an overall population for Miami Beach of 28,012) by decade's end, as Greater Miami replaced Jacksonville as the center of Florida Jewry. Many of the new arrivals to Miami Beach came initially as tourists.

Most came from the northeast United States. While many hotels continued to exhibit "Gentile Only" signs, a few maintained no restrictions against Jews. Moreover, Jewish builders erected many of the finest hotels on south Beach in this decade. The 1930s also marked the dismantling of restrictive barriers to Jewish ownership of real estate throughout the Beach, as large numbers of Jews purchased commercial properties from debt-ridden owners only too happy to sell them. Jews also began buying residential lots whose restrictive covenants proved impossible to enforce after the property had changed owners a couple of times. While discrimination had by no means vanished, Jews continued to migrate to the sunny shores of Miami Beach.

Jews and Art Deco

Miami Beach's famed Architectural District contains the largest collection of 1930s Art Deco and Art Moderne buildings in the nation. The square-mile district is bounded by 5th Street to 23rd Street, Lenox Avenue to Ocean Drive. The campaign that established the district and saved the architectural gems of South Beach was launched by a Jewish woman, Barbara Baer Capitman. Through her efforts, South Beach became the first 20th-century district in the National Register of Historic Places.

Another Jew, designer Leonard Horowitz transformed approximately 150 South Beach structures with his "Deco dazzle," applying bright colors to buildings that were originally white with limited color trim.

Henry Hohausser was a leading architect of the Art Deco era. Examples of his work include the Cardozo Hotel (1300 Ocean Drive), which was named for a Jewish Justice of the Supreme Court, Benjamin Cardozo. Hohausser was the architect of the synagogue that was restored to become the Jewish Museum of Florida at 301 Washington Avenue that opened in April 1995.

Jews move north on Miami Beach

As the Jewish population continued to move north, and many Jewish soldiers poured into the area for wartime training, Jews founded the Beth Sholom Center in a storefront on Forty-First Street in 1942 (it was renamed Temple Beth Sholom in 1945).

Commensurate with their increase in numbers, Jews began to play increasingly more important civic roles. Baron de Hirsch Meyer, who came to the area during the boom after earning a law degree from Harvard, served as president of numerous Jewish organizations. Meyer's early business ventures on Miami Beach included partnership with his close friend Leonard Abess in founding the Miami Beach Federal Savings and Loan Association. Meyer became the first Jew to sit on the Miami Beach city council in 1934. Mitchell Wolfson, who migrated to Miami with his family in the 1910s from Key West, became Miami Beach's second Jewish councilman. In 1943, the electorate elevated him to the office of mayor. Soon after entering this office, Wolfson enlisted in the armed forces "to go fight the Nazis." Wolfson was the first of now 15 Jews who have served as mayor of Miami Beach. With his brother-in-law Sidney Meyer, Mitchell Wolfson formed in 1924 Wometco Theater chain and in 1949 started Florida's first television station.

Jewish Mafia

In contrast to the long list of worthy causes and activities embraced by many Jews was the underworld involvement of a small segment of them. The most prominent name here was Meyer Lansky, the reputed boss of South Florida crime in the middle decades of this century. Lansky lived in several communities in south Florida, including Miami Beach, but he was not involved in local criminal activities.

Less "prominent" nationally but quite active on the Beach was the S&G Syndicate, which was founded and operated by five Jews. The S&G controlled bookmaking in a couple of hundred hotels on Miami Beach and elsewhere in the area for a portion of the 1940s, grossing millions of dollars annually until a United States Senate crime investigating committee, chaired by Estes Kefauver, put it out of business at the outset of the 1950s.

S.S.St. Louis, 1939

The heartbreak of the Holocaust was previewed for Miami Beach's Jews, who experienced a feeling of helplessness when the *S.S.St. Louis*, filled with Jews fleeing Hitler and Nazism, was denied permission, in June 1939, to land its human cargo on the shores of south Florida. The steamer anchored for two hours off of Miami Beach. Many Jews viewed the vessel from the shoreline of Miami Beach, and experienced a feeling of hopelessness when the *S.S. St.Louis* was turned away. Herbert Karliner, who survived the debacle, recalled, fifty years later, seeing "the coast of Miami Beach very vividly. I was so impressed with the palm trees." But "the Coast Guard came by and chased us off...Such a big country wouldn't let 900 people in." The passengers returned to Europe where most perished in the Holocaust.

While the decades previous to 1945 were filled with steady, often explosive, progress on the part of Miami Beach's Jewish community, it was merely a prelude to the more recent past where the accomplishments and success of that community have captivated the imagination of its brethren throughout the world.

Vibrant Jewish Life Today

Today in South Florida alone, there are 165 congregations, 4 Federations that raise more than \$55 million, 6 Jewish Community Centers, 20 Day Schools, a major Holocaust Memorial, 3 University level Judaic Studies programs, 4 Jewish Family Services, 3 Jewish nursing homes, a Jewish hospital with a national reputation, 2 educational programs with international implications (March of the Living, and High School in Israel), more than 50 kosher restaurants, a full array of Jewish organizations from A to Z and an internationally acclaimed Jewish Museum that collects and preserves the material evidence of more than 250 years of Florida Jewish life.

Come to the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU to discover for yourselves what the Florida Jewish community has accomplished -- and how they maintained the rich traditions of our heritage. The Museum is saving Florida Jewish cultural history and at the same time forging the next link in the chain of Jewish continuity. And when you visit, think about bringing your own photographs and artifacts so that your own family story will be preserved for the next generations. In this way, there is material evidence of the indelible footprints made by Jews in our great State.

The Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU, opened in 1995 and accredited by the American Association of Museums, is housed in two restored

historic Orthodox synagogues at 301 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 33139-6965. The Museum features a core exhibit depicting Jewish life in Florida since 1763, temporary exhibits that change three times each year with a schedule of complementary public programs, films, a Collections and Research Center and a Museum Store.