

# Florida Jewish History Month

## Instructional Resources

Miami-Dade County Public Schools  
Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills  
January 2009

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In October of 2003, Governor Jeb Bush signed a historic bill into law designating January of each year as Florida Jewish History Month. The legislation for Florida Jewish History Month was initiated at the Jewish Museum of Florida by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, the Museum's Founding Executive Director and Chief Curator. Ms. Zerivitz and State Senator Gwen Margolis worked closely with legislators to translate the Museum's mission into a statewide observance. It seemed appropriate to honor Jewish contributions to the State, as sixteen percent, or over 850,000 people of the American Jewish community live in Florida.

Throughout the history of the state, and like other groups, Jewish people have actively participated in shaping the destiny and direction of Florida at its roots. In 250 years, the Jewish community of Florida has left their indelible footprints across the entire state. Floridian Jews have served in every U.S. war, and have been prominent in the cattle, citrus, tomato, and tobacco industries, to name a few. Diverse cultures have enriched the state of Florida since its earliest days and Florida's Jewish communities have become an integral part of the state and its history. Jewish History Month is a time to learn about the rich tapestry of Jewish life here. Since 1763, Jews have been involved in enhancing the lives and dreams of *all* Floridians. Florida Jewish History Month celebrates these accomplishments.

Florida Jewish History Month has been so successful since its establishment that it inspired the legislation for Jewish American Heritage Month, which is observed in May with a Proclamation signed by President George W. Bush in April, 2006. The Proclamation states that "The faith and hard work of Jewish Americans have played an integral role in shaping the cultural fabric of America. During Jewish American Heritage Month, we celebrate the vital contributions of Jewish Americans to our Nation. Throughout our history, Jewish Americans have contributed to the strength of our country and the preservation of our values. The talent and imagination of these citizens have helped our Nation prosper."

This year, the Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills has chosen as its theme for Florida Jewish History month the topic of *Outstanding Jewish Women in Florida History*. Included in the educational packet being sent to all schools is an introduction written by Ms. Marcia Zerivitz, Executive Director of the Jewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach, Florida as well as a mini biography list of over 35 outstanding Jewish Women of Florida with information dating back to the 1800's and classroom related activities and resources for staff and students.

# INTRODUCTION

*Written by Marcia Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director, Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach, Fl.*

Florida's greatest asset is its people. Diverse cultures have enriched the state since early times. Like other groups, Jews have actively participated in shaping the destiny of Florida, since we were first allowed to live here in 1763. When Ponce de Leon discovered Florida in 1513 and for the next 250 years, only Catholics could live here.

Florida's Jews brought their vision of freedom and their creativity and have left their footprints across the entire state. Just as other groups have a designated month to focus on their contributions to the development of Florida, *Florida Jewish History Month* is a time to learn how Jews have been involved in enriching the lives and dreams of all Floridians.

It seems fitting to honor Jewish contributions to Florida. Sixteen percent of the American Jewish community lives here. So in 2003, I worked with our state legislators to create a month in January to honor the accomplishments of Florida's Jewish community.

*Women in History* is a relatively new topic. It is hard to believe that we women could not even vote in America until 1920. Our career options were very limited until just a few decades ago. Like many young women growing up in the 1950's, I faced obstacles regarding career aspirations. When I was choosing a career for an 8th grade paper, I wanted to be a doctor. My father, who was a doctor, told me that I was only expected to be a wife and mother, that it would make my husband appear unsuccessful if I worked outside the home. The closest he would permit to be in the medical field was a dietitian so that is what I became. In the next generation, my daughter had the widest scope of possibilities.

I was president of the Orlando Jewish Federation in 1978 and when I went to national meetings, I was patted on the head like a pet kitten by many men leaders at that time and told that I was confused; I must be the president of the "*Women's Division*." I was initiated into Jewish communal service work when I settled in Orlando in the 1960s by doing table decorations for Temple Sisterhood meetings. When I co-authored a cookbook for the Sisterhood, it was a time when we, as women, had no personal identity. Each of us was acknowledged as *Mrs.* (husband's name) rather than by our full first given name.

Along my route, I was told time and time again that my goals could not be met, either because I was a female, or because it had never been done before. Of course, this only reinforced my drive to succeed. I love a challenge; problem solving and decision-making are my strengths. This is how we accomplish so much as women.

My most recent journey to create the Jewish Museum of Florida had many doubters, but I knew it had to be done for Florida's Jewish community. I learned that women should not take the word "No" personally and should keep up the struggle for whatever it is we want and know is the right thing to do; for ourselves, our families, our people and our communities. And, how times have changed! Now women are identified by their own names (imagine that!!), their own achievements, and can become presidents of their congregations, their businesses and can even become rabbis and cantors if they wish!

I have had role models along the way who motivated me to be the best I can be for Jewish women and for the general Jewish community. Women like Golda Meir, whom I met shortly before she died. While serving on the First United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Young Women's Leadership Cabinet, in the mid-1970s, I had an opportunity to ask Golda why she had gone to Palestine in 1921. She said, "I felt something was happening there and I had to be a part of it. Jews have to help Jews; especially as Jewish women."

Katherine Graham, publisher of The Washington Post, whose father was Jewish, only became eligible to head a publishing empire after her husband died; her father had turned the company over to him, not her. She was not considered competent for the business because of gender prejudice and of course she was a powerhouse for two decades and led Woodward and Bernstein through the Watergate scandal.

All my years of Jewish volunteerism finally qualified me for the professional position I now hold as Founding Executive Director of the Jewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach, Florida. I have made a financial living in the Jewish community since 1980 and, at the same time, have been in an enviable position of helping Jews and strengthening community.

Throughout Florida's history there have been women who accomplished much, who excelled, who had an impact and who served with distinction. Jews have a powerful and proud heritage. There are 4,000 years of intellectual, spiritual, and moral wisdom, more than 220 years of American history roots, and 245 years of Florida Jewish history. Now, we can proudly share all three levels of heritage. Florida has the first museum in the nation dedicated to documenting the Jewish history of a state. This is a very important time for Jews to have a place of their own to collect, preserve, interpret and display the material evidence of their heritage.

Let us look at the accomplishments of Jewish women in Florida in the areas of business, education, civic community work, law, and both local and national politics.

## **JEWISH WOMEN IN FLORIDA**

### **Business**

In 1915, it was Jennie Weiss who was behind the genesis of Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant in Miami Beach and women in the family have directed that restaurant business for four generations. Another pioneer Jewish woman, Rachel Wilck, emigrated from Poland in the 1920s and bought baby turtles and alligators from the Seminoles to sell as Florida souvenirs to support her family.

Florida Jewish women today are heads of ports, commercial airline pilots, celebrity chefs, owners of sports teams, even the main sports writer for the Miami Herald, Michelle Kaufman, is a Jewish woman.

### **Education**

The earliest Jewish woman schoolteacher I have found in Florida was Bela Cohen who earned \$45/month in 1887 in Escambia County. Anna Brenner Myers served on the Dade County School Board for 18 years and led the efforts to create Miami Dade College. Other Florida Jewish women have schools named for them. Today, teaching is a proud career for Jewish women in Florida.

### **Local Civic Community**

Jewish Women got involved in their communities, through civic and Jewish organizations and causes. Henrietta Szold came to Jacksonville to start Hadassah in 1914. Rosie Weiss settled with her family on Miami Beach in 1919, and earned the title of "*Mother of Miami Beach*" for her civic involvement. She attended every meeting of the City Commission for four decades, sold the most War Bonds in the entire state during WWII, started all the Beach's social service agencies, and even designed the city's flag.

### **Law**

In 1890 Gertrude Dzialynski of Jacksonville was one of Florida's first female attorneys, but it was difficult to get clients as a woman, so she became secretary to Governor Broward in 1905. It was so challenging for female attorneys that it was not until 1937 that Key West native Reba Engler Daner became the first Jewish woman to practice law in south Florida; today many Jewish women are judges. Barbara Pariente of West Palm Beach became the first Jewish woman to serve as Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court in 2004.

## **Politics**

More than 150 Jewish men and women have served as mayors of their communities since 1879. Elaine Gordon served in the state legislature for 22 years and recalls when she arrived in Florida as a single mother with no car, seeking a job, and confronting limitations. She worked for a male state representative and said, "I can do that!" She was the first Florida woman to serve as Speaker Pro-Tempore of the House of Representatives, in 1990. Gwen Margolis was the first woman to serve as a Senate President in the entire nation!

Debbie Wasserman Schultz is the first Florida Jewish woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. She was first elected to Florida's House in 1992 at age 26, the youngest woman ever elected to the Florida Legislature. She is a wife and mother of three young children, and is never reluctant to stand up for her Jewish beliefs and for women's and children's issues. When being sworn in as a U.S. representative, she asked for a Jewish Bible and waited until it arrived to be sworn in. She worked with me to lead Congress in 2006 to pass a Bill making each May Jewish American Heritage Month. Once again, the power of women!

Through all they achieved, these Florida Jewish women maintained their traditions. Perhaps learning what Floridian Jewish women have accomplished and contributed to the state will inspire those of today and tomorrow to continue to work hard to ensure Jewish continuity.

There are many problems in the world today, and a lot of challenges in our Jewish world. But do not let them diminish what Jews have accomplished, and especially what Florida's Jewish women have done, and the work that still has to be done. The achievements of Florida's Jewish women need to be continuously documented and preserved. The women we honor this month will become part of that history.

*Source: Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach, Florida*

*Ms. Marcia Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director*

# OUTSTANDING JEWISH WOMEN IN FLORIDA HISTORY

(In Alphabetical Order)

*Researched and compiled by Marcia Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director,  
Jewish Museum of Florida*

**Karen Aronowitz** is the President of United Teachers of Dade, a union representing 39,000 teachers and education support professionals in the Miami-Dade Public Schools. Since her election in 2004, the union has built organizational stability and achieved a high degree of success in the political arena. Karen has led successful reform initiatives and gained significant salary increases for educators and support personnel. She currently serves on the board of The Children's Trust and United Way of Miami and is a member of the Miami chapter of the NAACP. She is a proponent of High Schools That Work and is a multiple honoree of the *Who's Who Among American Teachers*. A member of Temple Samuel Or, Karen was also a member of B'nai Israel Synagogue where she organized their first sisterhood in the 1980s.

**Lori Goodman Baer** has served as the Executive Director of the Port of Palm Beach. She is a graduate of Florida State University who has worked in the port industry since 1982, 12 years of which was spent at the Port of Miami. In 2003, she moved into the position of deputy port director at the Port of Palm Beach, and became the Executive Director in 2005. During her tenure as Executive Director of the Port of Palm Beach, dealing with homeland security issues was an almost daily occurrence. Lori resigned in 2008 so that she could spend more time with her family.

**Ruth Behar** is a cultural anthropologist, poet, writer, filmmaker, and noted feminist. In 1988, she became the first Latina woman to be awarded a [MacArthur Fellowship](#) "genius grant." *Latina Magazine* named her in 1999 one of the 50 Latinas who made history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is co-editor of *Women Writing Culture*, a pioneering look at the unique contributions that women have made to the field. Ruth's personal life experiences as a Jewish Cuban-American woman are frequently an important part of her writing. Her recent book, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*, is about her quest to know the dwindling Jewish community that remains on the island she left as a child. Her love of Sephardic culture also led her to direct and produce *Adio Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey*, distributed by Women Make Movies, which documents Cuban Jews living in Miami and New York and has been shown around the world. In 2009, Ruth was presented an award recognizing outstanding Jewish women in Florida by the Jewish Museum of Florida.

**Pauline Berman** was a Jewish woman from Florida who, in 1930, became the first woman radio broadcaster in the U.S.

**Elaine Bloom** became Speaker Pro-Tempore of the Florida House of Representatives. She served as Speaker Pro-Tempore until 1994. Elaine is a South Florida legend. She was influential in obtaining State funding for the Jewish Museum of Florida, and has



been active in Miami-Dade County government and the state government for four decades, always dedicated to civil and women's rights. She has also held many civic and philanthropic positions, including the National Council of Jewish Women, where she was the Greater Miami Section President. From 1979 to 1981, Elaine was a radio talk-show host for WKAT. In 1981, she became the Government Affairs Consultant for the Florida Association of Jewish Federations. She received an honorary Doctorate degree from Bar-Ilan University in Israel in 2001.

**Miette K. Burnstein** was presented an award recognizing outstanding Jewish women in Florida by the Jewish Museum of Florida. In 1976, she served as the first woman and first Jewish Circuit Court Judge in Broward County. Miette became the first woman and first Jewish Chief Judge in Broward in 1985. She was also the first woman chair of the Florida State Conference of Circuit Judges and also served as Chair of the Florida State Judicial Qualifications Commission. Among Miette's long list of honors and awards are the 1967 *Who's Who in American Women*, State Attorneys and Public Defenders' *Outstanding Service on the Criminal Bench Award* in 1978, and *Women of Achievement* in 1985, from Brandeis University National Women's Committee. A life-long resident of Broward County, she has been active in numerous community, civic, professional, and Jewish organizations, as well as being a licensed private pilot and certified scuba diver.

**Mana-Zucca Cassel** was a child prodigy and a composer, as well as a pianist and singer with an extensive performance record by 1926. She lived in Miami with her husband, Irwin Cassel, and their son Marvin. Mana-Zucca was born Augusta (Gussie) Zuckerman in 1885. Many of Mana-Zucca's compositions were performed by well-known orchestras. Her husband, Irwin Cassel, was the first president of Miami's first symphony, which drew talented local musicians, such as his wife. Mana-Zucca also composed Yiddish music, and was known to have held piano concerts in her living room each Tuesday.

**Ida Schneidman Cohen** was another Miami pioneer. She left Miami for New York City with her son Murray after her husband Jacob died. In 1904, while on a buying trip to New York for his Miami store, Isidor Cohen convinced Ida to marry him and return with him to Miami. Shortly after returning to Miami, Ida gave birth to Claire Cohen (Weintraub). Ida became a tireless community leader and was the founder of the Miami Jewish Home for the Aged. She was considered the "Mother of Miami's Jewish Community."

**Reba Engler Daner** was, in 1930, the first known *practicing* Jewish woman attorney in South Florida. She was born in Key West, but in 1911, her parents, Anna and Abram Engler, brought her to Miami. Reba attended the University of Miami Law School, and practiced law in South Florida from 1937 through 1992. She was the chair of the Miami Beach Library for 30 years, and the University of Miami's law library bears her name. Reba was also the president of Miami's first chapter of HADASSAH.

**Miss Ruby Diamond** lived in hotels for 65 years. When the Diamond family home was sold in the 1930's to make way for Tallahassee's first service station, she chose to begin

living in hotel rooms. Most of her life was spent in her own permanent room at the Floridan Hotel. Upon the closure of the Floridian in 1977, Ruby moved into the Hilton of Tallahassee. She was the Hilton's only full-time resident until her death in 1982. Ruby preferred that her wealth should be spent helping those lacking basic necessities, and because of that she was a generous contributor to many charities across Florida, donating to more than 37 organizations throughout her lifetime. Ruby had a Florida State University auditorium named for her.

**Judy Drucker**, founder and president of the Concert Association of Florida, Incorporated, wanted to become an opera star as a young girl. Instead, she has brought the great musical artists of the world to South Florida. At a time when impresarios had only been men, Judy turned a resort beach town into one of the great cultural capitals of the world. Almost four decades ago, Judy began by presenting concerts for Temple Beth Shalom, using local talent. Within a few years she was bringing world-famous performers to the area. As a result, South Florida has become an important stop on any classical concert tour. She has also given her community a great deal, providing fundraising concerts for a myriad of Jewish causes and free concerts for children.

**Myra Farr** is the 2009 recipient of NCJW's *Woman of Valor* award. For more than 60 years, Myra has worked enthusiastically to make Miami the best that it could be concerned with the well-being of the elderly, disabled, and children. Myra moved to Florida in 1933 after being born in Maine and raised in Massachusetts. She has been involved with the Greater Miami Jewish Federation since its inception in 1938. She is a lifetime appointee and is the second-oldest active member on the Federation's board. Myra currently serves on the Jewish Museum of Florida's board of directors. Myra was local and regional president of the National Council of Jewish Women. In 1980, the *Myra Farr Volunteer Service Award* was established, which is given annually to women who have emulated Myra's service and commitment. In 2000, she received the honor of Jewish Museum of Florida's *Queen Esther's Court*.

**Julia Frank** and her husband Julius Frank were Miami pioneers. Julia owned the first ladies clothing store in Miami. In 1896, she was widowed when her husband was killed in an accident. After becoming a widow, she took her six children and moved to West Palm Beach. She later moved up the state to Ocala.

**Sandy Warshaw Freedman** was brought to the Tampa Bay area by her family from New York when she was two years old. She is a graduate of the University of Miami, and married attorney Michael Freedman. The Freedmans have three children together. Sandy served on the Tampa City Council from 1974 through 1983, and then as City Council Chair from 1983 through 1986. In July 1986, Sandy Warshaw Freedman became the first woman to be elected Mayor of Tampa.

**Elaine Gordon**, as a divorced single mother of three young children in 1964, became a Miami advocate for equal rights. She was continually denied opportunities and was consistently passed over for jobs that were traditionally given only to men simply because she was a woman. Elaine even found that she could not establish credit as a

single woman. She became one of the founders of the National Organization for Women as well as the Florida Women's Political Caucus. She fought, through Florida State Legislature, for women's rights and health issues, for eleven terms, starting in 1972. Elaine Gordon was the first recipient of the Florida United Way Humanitarian Award.

**Meg Green** is a financial analyst and certified financial planner who has gained national recognition for her work within the financial arena. She is the founder and CEO of Meg Green and Associates in North Miami Beach, which is one of the leading financial planning and investment firms in South Florida. She has appeared on a number of national television shows including CNBC and Oprah. In 2000, Meg was honored with the *Most Innovative Use of the Internet to Meet Client's Needs Award*.

**Ruth Wolkowsky Greenfield**, originally of Key West, opened the first integrated school for the cultural arts in Miami. Ruth founded the New School of Music in 1951. She was a composer, pianist, and teacher who attended both the University of Miami and the University of Michigan. Ruth also taught at the University of Miami between 1947 and 1949, and studied under Mana-Zucca Cassel.

**Evelyn Langlieb Greer** is the President of Greer Properties, Inc., a Florida-based real estate development company founded in 1976. She is also a partner in the law firm of Hogan, Greer & Shapiro. Evelyn has been a Director of City National Bank of Florida since 2000, a member of the Board of Trustees of Barnard College since 1994, and is Vice Chair of the Columbia Law School Board of Visitors. She served as the first Jewish woman mayor of the Village of Pinecrest, Florida, and also served on the Miami-Dade County School Board for four years.

**Nicki Grossman** was appointed President of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1995, and has been vital in shaping the Fort Lauderdale tourist industry into the international tourist destination that it is today. She has continued in her role as the President of the Bureau for the last 14 years, and has also become the Chairman and CEO of Visit Florida, Inc. In early 2009, Nicki was named to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's Travel and Tourism Advisory Council. She has also served on the Broward County Commission and the Hollywood City Commission.

**Deborah L. Hecker** was presented an award recognizing outstanding Jewish women in Florida by the Jewish Museum of Florida in 2003. Currently, Deborah is a commercial airline pilot for American Airlines. She also founded the *Keep Flying Scholarship*, a program providing financial assistance and flight school scholarships for women in aviation. Deborah successfully balances her roles as pilot, wife, and mother. During the Gulf War, she worked on a Moshav in Israel, another job atypical for most women.

**Sally Heyman** has been fully engaged in the traditionally male careers of public safety, law enforcement, and criminal justice for more than 30 years and has been an elected public official for more than 20 years. She continues to work on responsible growth management, workforce housing initiatives, transportation alternatives, public safety,

and animal services. Sally is a Crime Prevention Specialist for two police departments and an Adjunct Professor of Criminal Justice at Florida International University. Her involvement in the Jewish community is also extensive as she maintains membership in ORT, Hillel of North Dade, MAR-JCC, the Jewish Federation and Jewish Community Services. In 2008, Sally was presented an award recognizing outstanding Jewish women in Florida by the Jewish Museum of Florida.

**Betsy Kaplan** was awarded the Florida School Boards Association with its *President's Award* in 2001. The former Miami-Dade County School Board Member was honored with the prestigious award that is presented each year to a person who "has made outstanding and significant contributions to education and the Florida School Boards Association at both the state and local levels." Betsy has been involved in the Miami-Dade public school system since she joined the PTA in 1962.

**Tillie Katz** of Jacksonville was the mother of Bill Katz, who was a pilot during World War II, and eventually became the chief pilot of EL AL airlines. EL AL ran a full-page ad campaign in the New York Times during the early 1960's with a photo of Tillie next to a photo of her son, and a short essay by her extolling both her son and the airline.

**Malvina Weiss Leibman**, the daughter of Rosie Weiss and Jeremiah Weiss, taught some of the first Jewish Sunday School classes held on Miami Beach in 1926. Prior to the construction of Congregation Beth Jacob in 1928, Miami Beach did not allow the Jewish community there to have a synagogue. In 1924, Malvina continued, like her mother, Rosie, to fight prejudice by organizing and teaching Sunday school classes in a vacant lot on the west side of Washington Avenue, north of Third Street on Miami Beach.

**Gwen Margolis** was first elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 1974, she was re-elected three times before being elected to the Florida State Senate in 1980. She was also elected the first woman president of the State Senate in 1990 and served eight years on the Miami-Dade County Commission. Six of her eight years were served as Chairman of the Miami-Dade County Commission. In 2002, she was re-elected to the Florida Senate, where she served until 2008.

**Anna Brenner Myers** was born in Poland in 1896. She graduated from Columbia University's State Teacher's College and in 1935, and then she moved to Miami. Anna was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1936. In 1953, she was appointed to the Dade County Board of Public Instruction to fill a vacancy, and she served at the Board for over 18 years. Anna played a vital role in the integration of Miami-Dade Public Schools, one of the largest school systems in the United States. She was also one of the leaders in creating Miami Dade Community College and helped to establish the first educational television station in the state of Florida. Anna also became one of the founding members of the Florida Association of Women Lawyers in the 1950's.

**Louisa Myers**, wife of Samuel Myers, welcomed their daughter, Virginia into the world in 1822. Virginia is the first-known Jewish child born in Florida. The Myers' settled in Pensacola, where Samuel became alderman and an officer in the military.

**Barbara Pariente** was elected Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court in 2004. She was only the second woman to ever hold that position. Justice Pariente was appointed to Florida's Supreme Court in 1997. She came to Florida from New York City as a young attorney in 1973 for a two year judicial clerkship with United States District Court Judge Norman C. Roettger, Jr. She is a survivor of breast cancer whose choice to sit after treatment the judicial bench without a wig during televised court proceedings has been considered a major breakthrough for other women undergoing breast cancer treatment.

**Nancy Ratzan**, a Miami Beach resident, and the National President of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), was appointed by President Obama to the White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. In February 2009, Nancy represented the NCJW as a delegate to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. This conference included an historic meeting with Pope Benedict XVI.

**Nan Rich**, in 1996, was the first Floridian in the history of the National Council of Jewish Women to be elected as the NCJW's National President. Nan has been a long-time resident of Florida and earned her degree from the University of Florida. In 1999, she was appointed by President Bill Clinton as a Board Member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. She is now a Florida State Senator and has served on Florida's Senate since 2004. She and her husband, David, have four children.

**Debbie Wasserman Schultz** was, in 2004, the first Jewish Congresswoman ever elected from the state of Florida. She is a graduate of the University of Florida, and lives in Weston with her husband, Steve Schultz, and their three children. In her position as Congresswoman, Representative Wasserman Schultz introduced a resolution which called on the President to declare a Jewish American Heritage Month. The President subsequently did so, and the inaugural Jewish American Heritage Month was observed in May 2006.

**Jennie Seitlin**, arrived in Miami around 1915. She was brought to Miami by her husband Henry Seitlin, along with their son Sam and Henry's brother, Harry. Henry had come to Miami from Homestead in 1913, and opened the Boston Shoe Store. After Jennie arrived, they had three more sons in Miami. The Seitlins were among the founders of Beth David, the Greater Miami Jewish Foundation, and Jennie was instrumental in the founding of Pioneer Women, and the Miami chapter of HADASSAH.

**Ruth Shack** was elected to serve on the Metro-Dade County Commission (now entitled the Miami-Dade County Commission) for three terms in 1976, 1978, and 1982. After leaving the County Commission, she was elected as the President of the Dade

Community Foundation, one of Florida's largest philanthropic organizations. Ruth has built her career around community service, human rights, and the preservation of South Florida's historic landmarks.

**Henrietta Szold** moved to Jacksonville and started the first Florida chapter of HADASSAH in 1914. Henrietta was the founder of HADASSAH, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, which is a women's volunteer organization. HADASSAH was originally founded by Henrietta in New York City in 1912.

**Dara Hoffman Torres** is a four-time Olympic gold medalist in swimming, who has won 12 Olympic medals during her career. She has the longest successful career of any Olympic swimmer. After the 1992 Olympics, she left competitive swimming and spent some time pursuing a modeling career. Dara became the first athlete to appear in *Sport's Illustrated's Swimsuit Edition*. She is originally from Fort Lauderdale and is still competing. In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Dara, at age 41, was the oldest female Olympic swimmer in Olympic history. She took home the silver medal in the 50 freestyle, defeated by only 1/100th of a second.

**Claire Cohen Weintraub** was one of the founders of the Miami Museum of Science. In 1946, her son Alfred contracted polio, and Claire went on to found the March of Dimes in Miami as a result.

**Jennie Weiss**, along with her husband Joe Weiss, and their young son Jesse, relocated to Miami in 1913 because of Joe's asthma. Jennie and Joe started a small snack bar at a popular bathing spot on Miami Beach, one of the few places Jews were permitted. In 1915, Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant was opened by the Weiss's in a small, wooden house. That house, which has been expanded today, remains the site of this world-famous restaurant. Joe's Stone Crab also continues to be run by the Weiss family almost a century later.

**Rosie Weiss** settled in Miami Beach in 1919, and spent her life in public service, working to improve the services offered by the City of Miami Beach. Rosie was bestowed the title of "Mother of Miami Beach" because of her persistent efforts in organizing welfare services for the needy. Rosie became an official representative to the Red Cross after the major hurricane of 1926 struck Miami Beach. During World War II, she sold over \$5 million in war bonds, which was more than any other woman in the state of Florida. Adopted in 1950, the Miami Beach flag was designed by Rosie and continues to be her most visible contribution to the city. Although Rosie never held a public position within the City of Miami Beach, she attended every City Council meeting for nearly forty years.

**Mena Williams**, of Tallahassee was one of the five daughters born to Prussian immigrant Jews who came to Florida of Helena Dzialynski Williams and Robert Williams, and was crowned the first Miss Florida in 1885.

**Pauline Winnick** was the founding Executive Vice President of the Miami Heat for 11 years, holding the highest position for any woman in the National Basketball Association at the time. Prior to that, in 1986, she was the first woman to hold the position of Executive Assistant City Manager for the City of Miami. In the late 1990's, Pauline became the Associate Vice President for Marketing at Florida International University, where she organized such prestigious events as the Miami International Film Festival and the South Beach Food and Wine Festival. Currently, Pauline is the co-owner of The Protocol Centre in Coral Gables.

**Marcia Jo Zerivitz** was selected for the first United Jewish Appeal Young Women's Leadership Cabinet in 1974, and has led many missions to Israel. Marcia is a former leader for Israel Bonds, Hadassah, and the Jewish Federation, where she served both as president of the Greater Orlando Jewish Federation and as a professional. In 1995, she became the Founding Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Jewish Museum of Florida and originated the collection for the Museum. She recently published a book, "*Jews of Greater Miami.*"

# CLASSROOM RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES

## Research

Using the Internet and other resources in your classroom and media center, research and respond in writing and discussion to the following:

1. If we are to recognize the accomplishments of a group of people, it is first important to know who they are, as a group. Research and discuss the following: What is Judaism? What beliefs separate them from other groups? What does it mean to be a Jewish woman? Why is it important to study women's history and in particular, *Jewish* women's history?
2. Bias and discrimination come in many forms, not simply through outright racism. In the last century, women have fought, and continue to fight on many fronts, bias and discrimination against them, as women. What are some of the biases about women that have been overcome in the last 50 years? Research to discover what part Jewish women have played in changing these negative biases into positive ones. Choose one or several Florida Jewish women who were on the forefront of the women's rights movements and do in-depth research on their lives.
3. Research and discover three important Jewish women from any decade between 1850 through 2009. If the women are not from Florida, is it possible that their work affected women or women's rights in Florida in some way? If they are from Florida, is it possible that their work affected women in other parts of the country or the world? Write an in-depth essay paper explaining your research and conclusions.
4. Research to find some of the particular challenges that a Jewish career woman or shopkeeper might have faced in Florida in the 1880's, the 1920's, the 1950's, and even the 1980's. Compare and contrast your findings. What has become easier? Has anything become more difficult? Has anything changed, or are the same battles for equality being fought?
5. Research women in politics. Narrow your search to Florida's Jewish women in politics, such as Elaine Bloom or Debbie Wasserman-Schultz. In a short essay paper, using the results of your research as examples, explain why it is important that women are involved in the political process.



6. The synagogue has historically been one of the most important aspects of Jewish life, and over the centuries, Jewish women have had an established role in Jewish religious tradition. This role has played an important part in the idea of *tradition* within Jewish society. In the past, Jewish women were typically homemakers and had very limited participation in religious services. However, in the last century, many arenas of religious life that were previously closed to Jewish women have become open to them. Women are now able to more fully participate in religious services, and there are even some Jewish women who are rabbis. So with the “opening” of these areas of religious life has also come a shift in the *traditions* associated with women in Judaism. Research the topic of Jewish culture and women’s changing role in cultural and religious institutions, focusing on Florida’s Jewish women.
7. Research to find some of the contributions that Florida’s Jewish women have made within the last five years. Which of these contributions do you feel is the most important? Explain your answer in a short essay paper.
8. Clair Cohen Weintraub was the founder of the Miami Museum of Science. Research to discover the history of the Miami Museum of Science, and in an essay paper using your research, describe how the Museum has affected the children of Miami by enabling them to learn more about the importance of science and the natural world.
9. Myra Farr exemplifies the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, or "repairing the world," which is the belief that the Jewish people have a special responsibility to make the world a better place to live. How have other Jewish women in Florida’s history demonstrated this concept? Research two other Florida Jewish women who inspire you and have “repaired the world” in some way. Then consider your own life in relation to these women and how you can also help the world to become a better place. Write a short essay paper about how these women have inspired you to take action and changed the world. Then, in small groups, discuss practical applications for your ideas. Make certain each person in the group has time to discuss their ideas fully.
10. Jewish women have been an essential part of nearly every field of study within the last century, including the arts. Mana-Zucca Cassel is an important example of a Jewish woman who has greatly contributed to the musical arts in Florida. Research the life of one Jewish woman in the arts, such as Mana-Zucca and present your findings in class.

## **Reflect, Write, and Create**

**The following exercises are suggested as prompts for writing, small group, classroom activities, and for classroom discussion purposes:**

1. Research the contributions of the Jewish women in Florida from the 1800's until today in each of the following areas: economics, politics/government, law, medicine, literature, sports, the arts, and philanthropic endeavors. Create a class chart divided into the categories above entitled "Florida's Who's Who: The Early Years." Post the chart in a prominent place in the classroom and as more is discovered, add names to the chart.
2. After researching and considering the accomplishments of these Florida Jewish women, which character traits do you most admire about these women? Which would you like to cultivate in yourself? Choose three that you feel are the most important and discuss in small groups, why these traits are important.
3. World War II is a dark chapter in European history and has greatly impacted the world; in particular, the American Jewish population. Research to find how the war efforts were aided by the Jewish women of Florida and how, in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, Jewish women in Florida stepped into leadership roles to honor those who died as well as to educate on preventing another genocide such as the Holocaust. As a class, make a poster board for each area: honoring military veterans and Holocaust victims, educating others on the importance of the Holocaust and America's role in World War II, and activism to help prevent a recurrence in other parts of the world. On each board, place the names and short biographies of Florida's Jewish women who have contributed to each area. Place the boards on display in a prominent place in your class or in the school.
4. After researching Florida's Jewish women in the arts, invite your arts classes to create a collage of Florida's female Jewish artists and their work. Plan a school-wide assembly during which the artwork is revealed and explained, and have several students give short oral presentations highlighting the importance of Jewish women and the arts in the state of Florida.
5. Select one woman from the biographies of Jewish Women of Florida in this packet and write a short story, poem or news article about how her success has helped better understand the Jewish culture and the important role Jewish women have played in the state of Florida.

6. Select one of the Jewish Women of Florida whose contributions you most admire. Create a "Biography Box" by identifying items that represent this outstanding woman, and then put them in a box which you decorate. Display the boxes along with a paper explaining why you selected this individual, listing the items included in the box, and the significance of each item it contains and how it best portrays the woman you selected.
7. Research the topic of anti-Semitism and Jewish women. Keep the focus of your research to the Jewish women of Florida, and in your research, particularly look for what might be special challenges to a woman who is the target of anti-Semitism or general racism. How might a woman experience racism differently from a man? What might stay the same? Share your findings with the class and in small groups, discuss ways you can effect change to counter anti-Semitism today.
8. Research Jewish women in sports, such as Dara Hoffman Torres. How have Florida's Jewish women like Dara impacted the world of professional sports? Have small group discussions about Florida's Jewish sportswomen where you share facts about the women you researched and discuss their contributions to that sport.

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