



DE MALYENE

NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGINIA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM VOLUME XI, NUMBER 4, 2009

A Word About Our Title

In the slang of Eastern European Jews, "de malyene" meant "a hiding place." De malyene is where you would protect your most precious valuables — gold, jewels, even a small child. Or yourself.

Make a resolution not to hide, but to come experience the Virginia Holocaust Museum and all it has to share.

With many programs and events happening in the upcoming months, we invite you to come share your time with us.

We welcome your comments about De Malyene and about the Virginia Holocaust Museum. See the back page for our contact information. And thank you for supporting us.

Your gift to the Virginia Holocaust Museum could double in value if your employer has a matching gift program. Please ask your human resources office to match your contribution to the Museum.

A NEW FACE AROUND THE MUSEUM

Walking around the Museum, you may have noticed a new face roaming through the galleries. On September 1st, Dr. Simon Sibelman joined the Museum family as its Assistant Executive Director. Dr. Sibelman comes to the Museum from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh where he was Professor of French and Holocaust Studies. The university had awarded him its TRISS Endowed Chair in Humanities and the prestigious John M. Rosebush University Professorship.

A native Richmonder, Dr. Sibelman received his BA from the University of Richmond where he majored in French and Russian. Following a productive and successful teaching career at St. Christopher's School, he left Richmond and traveled to London, England where he did his graduate studies in French at King's College-University of London with additional academic work at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1985, he received his doctorate in French and shortly thereafter began teaching French at the University of London and Jewish Studies at the Spiro Institute, now the London Jewish Cultural Centre. By 1987, he had moved entirely into the field of Jewish and Holocaust Studies. In 1988, he helped to fashion a weeklong film festival of Holocaust cinema that was held in conjunction with the international conference *Remembering for the Future*. He also worked with Trudy Gold, now the Director of the London Jewish Cultural Centre, on creating teacher training seminars for teachers of the Holocaust in British schools, as well as establishing the foundation for the LJCC's Holocaust Education and Resource Centre.



Clockwise from left: Edward DuBois Ragan, Simon Sibelman, Maureen Elgersman Lee, Alison Dubsky and Aimee Joyaux. Chris Smith photo from Richmond Magazine's New Faces, New Places Sept. 2009

Returning to the United States in 1990, Dr. Sibelman resumed his teaching career at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Though his teaching responsibilities

Continued on page 4

From the President - The Color of Hate



Let me begin by asking a few questions. Is it red, yellow, or black?

It has been over sixty years since the Holocaust, during which over six million Jews, including one and half million children, were murdered. Millions of other people – Sinti & Roma Gypsies, asocial people, Jehovah's Witnesses, Homosexuals, some Catholics and some Blacks – were killed. However, the major target were the Jews. Hitler was going to make Germany Judenfrei (Free of Jews), and this carried over very successfully to German occupied Europe. The Germans had no trouble at all enlisting the aid of their collaborators all over Europe.

This hatred originated in the ancient world in the writings of Apion who claimed Jews sacrificed Greeks in the Temple in Jerusalem. In 1144, we find the first reference in Christian Europe to the Blood Libel when Jews in Norwich, England were accused of killing a child,

William, to obtain his blood for baking matzah. The blood libel continued into the 20th century. In Russia in 1911 Manachem Mendel Beilis was arrested for the murder of a Christian child (Andrei Yuschinsky). During the 1913 trial, a priest, Justinas Pranaitis, presented evidence that Jews had to have Christian Blood for the various ties of Passover. Eventually, Beilis was found not guilty.

Anyone who has ever seen a piece of matzah can readily see that it is white, and blood could not be used in baking it as it would be red in color.

The Nazis used the story of the blood libel against the Jews often in their official newspaper *Der Sturmer* using cartoon stereotypes of Jews killing Aryan children. The Muslim press is now also using that type of cartoon.

In 1946 following the Holocaust, the Polish citizens of Kielce, Poland used the pretext of the blood libel to conduct a murderous pogrom against Holocaust survivors with 42 being killed by their neighbors.

The Nazi's made the Jews wear yellow Stars of David to make them easy targets and to humiliate them. A few years ago, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan did the same to its Hindu minority. The Afghan Muslim population is 31,571,023, the Hindu-Sikhs number 30,000. The current world population is 6,706,993,152 of which the Jewish world population is approximately 14,500,000.

A year ago at the museum we had a group of Malaysian business men visit us while touring Richmond. One of them said to me: "You are the first Jew I met." "Well," I said, "what do you think of the Jews?" "They own all the media and the banks." "And in Malaysia," I asked. "Well, we do." he replied, realizing he had just stereotyped the Jews without having any contact or knowing a single one.

The list goes on but due to space limitations, I will take you now to Richmond, Virginia.

With the rise of anti Semitism in Europe and the Middle East, some young people in the area have recently got on the band wagon. Where did they learn the lessons of hatred: At home? In school? On the internet? Recently I received a call from a friend whose young son just got his school annual and, as is the custom, friends normally write flattering things about each other. Not the case here. "Kill the Jews, (name withheld), you are my bitch." This was not just one student, but a few pages written by different students. A few weeks later similar graffiti was painted in Bryan Park, then in a north side neighborhood. A few days after that, a German Swastika was painted on the hood of a teacher's car.

What are we doing about this at the Museum?

Through the generosity of Marcus and Carole Weinstein we have started a TEI (Teacher Education Institute). It began with one class two years ago, and now in the summer of 2010 we will conduct 3 classes of 35 teachers each. Our staff has prepared teacher manuals and lesson plans. The University of Richmond has partnered with us in this effort and after spending a week of intensive study the graduating teachers receive three graduate credits points for successfully passing our course on the Holocaust and genocide studies. It is taught through art, music, mathematics, religion, and history.



JAY M. IPSON
PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

DIARY OF LINDSAY STONE

DIRECTOR KRISTALLNACHT & BEYOND - NOV. 9TH AT 7 P.M.

I went to Germany as a videographer for the Virginia Holocaust Museum in June, 2008. My mission was to videotape and interview Holocaust Survivor Alexander Lebenstein and family members who were making a return trip to his hometown of Haltern am See. Since I was familiar with Alexander's story, I knew that this was the place where he first experienced the Holocaust on the night of Kristallnacht. I also knew that he was the only member of his family and the only Jewish citizen of Haltern am See to survive the horrors of the Holocaust.

I remember a conversation that I had with Alexander Lebenstein's great niece, Debbie Binshtok, in preparation for our departure. She and I are from the same generation and consequently understood how far removed we are from the pain of Alexander's generation.

We spoke about the feelings of apprehension we felt for Germany and the type of people we thought we might meet in Haltern am See. Could the citizens of Germany have changed that much? We knew that this place must have endured great change in the three-quarters of a century since the Holocaust. Still, our hearts and memories were filled with terrifying stories from the Holocaust and we knew the damage it did to Alexander Lebenstein and his family. For Alex, it always appeared just under the surface in his life. There was no escape from the feeling that Germany might still be a scary place. Those feelings would be tested once we, as a group, set foot on German soil. Here are some highlights of that trip to Germany.



DAY ONE

One thing was made clear to me on my first day in Haltern am See: The citizens of this modest sized town were making no effort to conceal the role their town had played in the Holocaust. Upon our arrival we were taken on a walking tour of the town, narrated by city official, Gregory Housemann. We stopped by several homes that had belonged to Jewish citizens before the events of Kristallnacht. These houses, which included Alexander Lebenstein's childhood home, were marked with a plaque explaining the events that had occurred at this residence. The front walk had engraved 'stolpersteines' or stumbling stones that denoted the names of Jewish residents who had once lived there and most were murdered during the Holocaust. Later that day I returned to the childhood home of Alexander, only to find a small class of elementary aged students gathered around the stolpersteines and plaque. When I asked if I could tape a teacher talking to her class, the teacher simply said, "Yes, we love Alexander." I received a tap on the shoulder from a young boy who clearly wanted my attention. He wanted to tell me about Alexander's home.

Continued on page 9

INTRODUCING SIMON SIBELMAN

Continued from page 1

lay primarily in the fields of French language, literature and culture, his research focused almost exclusively on issues of how the Holocaust has been represented in French literature and film, as well as investigating how French Jews have opted to define themselves in literature. He also extended his interests in Holocaust Studies. Working with his former colleagues Professors Ed Linenthal and Werner Braatz, he established a number of new courses dealing with the Holocaust. "Though a proposed minor in Holocaust Studies had failed to be created," Sibelman remarked, "the student body did have an assortment of upper-level classes to address the history and of the Shoah and the manner chosen to remember it in literature and film." He also initiated the first Holocaust Study Abroad course which enabled students to study on campus before proceeding to Europe to visit the sites where the events of the Holocaust happened. And, in 2004, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded him \$100,000 to conduct a seminar in Lyon, France that dealt with those French citizens who saved Jewish children during the Second World War.

Dr. Sibelman has quite a reputation for being an engaging lecturer. Shortly after the Museum moved into the building, he lectured on anti-Semitism in France before the War and the situation in which Jews found themselves under the Vichy regime. He also returned in 2007 to speak again about issues related to France's Jewish victims. He has been invited to speak in a host of venues around the country and the world. Some of his recent speaking engagements are: anti-Semitism

Continued on page 10

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Annual Film Series

The Virginia Holocaust Museum will present a free screening of *Unknown Soldier*, on **Thursday, November 5, 2009 at 7 p.m.**

The film, directed by Michael Verhoeven, documents the Wehrmacht Exhibition which made its way around German cities from 1999 to 2004. Protests and riots followed the exhibit across the country. The exhibit used previously unseen war footage and photographs to challenge the commonly held belief that the average German soldier was generally unaware of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust.

The documentary features film clips and photographs from the exhibition as well as interviews from historians and experts who discuss the historical context and implications of the exhibition and the rioting.

This screening is free and open to the public.



**SPECIAL EXHIBITION:
THE ART OF REMEMBRANCE - A RETROSPECTIVE OF HOLOCAUST ART
BY LINDA GISSEN
NOVEMBER 1ST - DECEMBER 31ST, 2009**

The VHM will be hosting a special exhibition of seven sculptures by Linda Gissen in the Melvin Weinstein Art Gallery. Since 1967 Linda Gissen has created ornamental and functional sculptures of metal, glass and enamel. Her works reside in museums and in corporate, liturgical and private collections nationwide. Linda Gissen has said that "as an artist, I have attempted to portray in visual form the history, experiences and the emotions of the Holocaust and the devastating impact it has had and continues to have."

This exhibition is free and open to the public and runs through December 31st.

THE 2009 NEIL NOVEMBER AWARD DINNER HONORING SENATOR HENRY L. MARSH III

Thank you to everyone who made this year's dinner such a success!

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From left to right: guest, Mrs. Halina Zimm, Mr. Adisa Muse, Mr. Alan Zimm, and Senator Donald McEachin

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Neil November looks on as Senator Marsh accepts the award.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE NEILSON J. NOVEMBER AWARD DINNER COMMITTEE

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AN EVENING WITH CHRISTOPHER BROWNING

On Sunday, November 8th at 7:00 p.m., the VHM will host Dr. Chris Browning, author of *Ordinary Men* and *The Origins of the Final Solution*. He will speak about German policy towards Jews and how average citizens participated in carrying out the Holocaust.

As an educational institute, the Virginia Holocaust Museum frequently hears the question: “Why did this happen?” In truth, it will likely never be adequately explained; yet any number of scholars has made an attempt to address how this happened.

Browning, who is the Frank Porter Graham Professor at the University of North Carolina, is known for his functionalist approach to studying the Holocaust, which emphasizes the Third Reich’s gradual shifting policy towards European Jewry – from expulsion to extermination. In his book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, he demonstrated an improvised set of measures that evolved into the first stages of the Final Solution.

Continued on page 10



The Museum would like to thank Narnia Children’s Books in Richmond, VA for its assistance and guidance with the VHM’s Acceptance Suitcases. Rena Berlin, our Director of Education will begin sending the suitcases filled with books, lesson plans and educational resources to schools in the next few weeks.

Above: Dr. Sibelman admires the storefront of Narnia Children’s Books and its Holocaust themed window display.



TO SCHEDULE AN EVENT OR TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE THE SPACE, PLEASE CALL LEIGH WEEDON AT 804.257.5400

GALLERY: 2009 AWARD DINNER

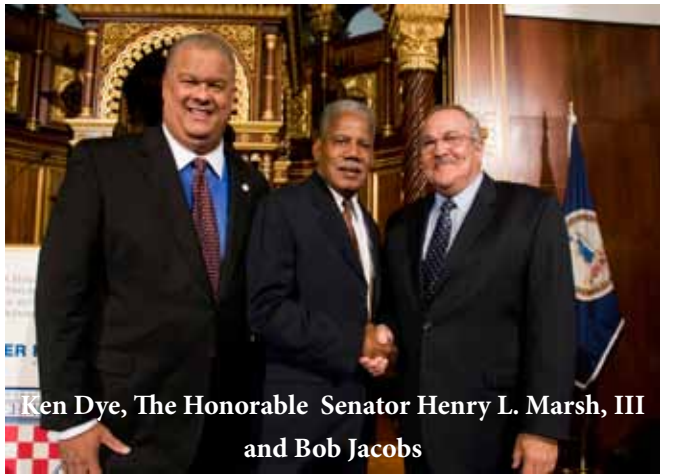
Survivors: Elizabeth Gomperts, Alex Lebenstein, and Lia Kaplan (Survivors)



Ed Ayers



Celebration Male Chorus

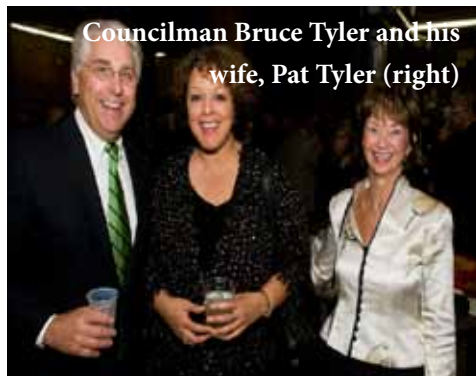


Ken Dye, The Honorable Senator Henry L. Marsh, III and Bob Jacobs

Mayor Dwight C. Jones



Councilman Bruce Tyler and his wife, Pat Tyler (right)



Dawn Siegal, Del. Jennifer McClellan, Jon Huddleston.



Bud and Sonia Brodecki (Survivors)



HELP US MAKE THE MUSEUM MORE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE



The VHM is currently working to renovate our freight elevators to accommodate museum guests.

We would like to extend a special word of thanks to the Dominion Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Dominion Resources, Inc., for the \$25,000 donation to kickoff our fundraising campaign. But we still need your help to reach our goal.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the elevator fund to date!!!

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Continued on page 10



71st Anniversary Memorial Service

In Remembrance of Kristallnacht

Sunday, November 8, 2009
2:00 p.m.

Emek Sholom Holocaust
Memorial Cemetery
Forest Lawn
Richmond, Virginia

DIARY OF LINDSAY STONE *(Continued from page 3)*

He proudly repeated his lesson in perfect English, pointing to the stones with Alexander's name and the plaque with his story. It was clear that this field trip made an impression on all the youngsters in this class.

DAY TWO

This was one of the most exciting moments of the trip to Germany. I showed up at the school and the students were outside waiting for Alexander. When they saw him arrive, they were screaming and yelling for him to come and give them some attention. The children wanted to be near him, to speak to him, to touch him. It was overwhelming to see how much they needed for Alexander to be there. This was Alexander's fifth visit to the town at the request of the students. They had invited him back to his hometown to teach them the story of his family, the Jews of Haltern am See, and the lessons of the Holocaust.

I taped a question and answer session for the oldest students attending the middle school. Alexander encouraged the students to ask him anything...and they did. My favorite question came from a serious-faced boy in the front row, Johannes Schindler, "Do you still hate the Germans?" To me, Johannes could have represented any insecure teenager in the world asking that painful question, "Do you like me?" and nervously waiting for a response. I could sense his uneasiness as he waited for Alexander's answer. "Thank God, No." said Alexander. The students began to relax and the questions and answers started to flow more freely.

DAY THREE

Today was the day of the Civil Award Ceremony. I interviewed Haltern am See's Mayor, Bodo Klimpel, before the event. I was surprised by how frank he was when he spoke about his town's involvement in Kristallnacht and later during the Holocaust. It seemed remarkable for the town's leader to speak about his town's history in such a condemning tone. During the ceremony it became apparent that all of the city officials spoke honestly about the past and the damage that had been done to Alexander, his family, and many other Jewish citizens during the Holocaust. They also expressed their gratitude for Alexander's return to Haltern am See. They hoped that his endeavor to forge a friendship with the local school children would insure the healing of this terrible history. When Alexander stepped up to the podium to accept this Honored Citizen title, he talked about how the children of Haltern am See had helped him to heal from these years of hatred and suffering.

DAY FOUR

Today Haltern Middle School put on a wonderful program for Alexander. The students performed songs and dances and the adults made moving speeches filled with sentimental recollections of the time they had spent with Alexander. We were all very moved by the gratitude and respect that the students and teachers showed to Alexander. Toward the end of the program, everyone moved outdoors for the final dramatic moment – there was a large cloth covering a sign on the front of the high school building. With music and fanfare, the cover was removed to reveal the new name of the school: Alexander Lebenstein Realshule. Doves were released and the crowds cheered. It was clear that changing the name of the school to honor Alex was a result of hard work by many citizens, teachers, students, and Alex. It was a moment of sheer celebration for all they had accomplished. I was honored to be there.

DAY FIVE

After two days filled with celebrations, it was time to do the hard work. On this day, I followed Alexander through the streets of Haltern am See with my video camera, tracing his past and the events of what had happened to his family during Kristallnacht. I was amazed by his stamina at the age of 82 especially when, after hours of walking through the city, he climbed down a steep hillside in the cemetery in order to demonstrate how he and his parents had hid with nothing but weeds and darkness to cover their bodies from sight. Even as Nazi soldiers closed in around them, they quietly hid and prayed that they would not be found. I was grateful that Alexander's son, David Lebenstein, and his niece, Esther Binshtok, were there to assist and comfort him when we climbed back out of the ravine. It was one of the many painful events of the day.

Now, after my experience with Alexander and his family, when I think of Germany, I have a feeling of hope. I understand that there are other people in the world, who want to overcome the terrible events of history to become better people, better communities, with the hope that this will lead to a better country and a better world. I am so grateful to Alexander Lebenstein, and the many teachers, students, and citizens of Haltern am See for creating that hope. I am very grateful to the Virginia Holocaust Museum for sending me to document this historic event and for bringing this touching story to Richmond, Virginia and to the world.

INTRODUCING SIMON SIBELMAN

(Continued from page 4)

in contemporary France (London Jewish a Cultural Centre, 2009); a workshop on saving Jewish children in France at the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (University of Minnesota, 2008); the use of Holocaust literature to preserve the past at the Centre de l'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation (Lyon, France, 2008); a speaker at a seminar on Jewish identity in France (Stanford University, 2006). In addition, he has made professional presentations at more than forty conferences, is the author of more than two dozen scholarly articles on various topics and has authored two books. His critical study of the Holocaust film, *Monsieur Klein*, which he presented at the Museum in autumn 2004, will appear in 2010.

Simon (also known as Sy) brings great enthusiasm to the Museum. "The Museum already has a remarkable reputation. Its sense of vision, its mission to educate are extraordinarily admirable. I hope the staff and I will be able to take this first-class institution to the next level!" To that end, Simon has organized a series of staff meetings to chart the Museum's programs for the next several years. Educational and cultural events will evolve from a central theme thereby forming a cohesive season of different experiences for the public. "For 2010-2011, we are working on the theme of Righteous Among the Nations. By having a series of traveling exhibits, films, speakers and educational events, the Museum hopes the general public will have a better understanding of how Jewish lives were saved by ordinary people who possessed the moral courage to defy the Nazi plan for the extermination of the Jewish People. The season will similarly treat those persons who saved lives in other genocides."

The Museum warmly welcomes Dr. Sibelman and looks forward to hearing more from him.

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AN EVENING WITH CHRISTOPHER BROWNING

(Continued from page 6)

Ironically, it was a series of fiercely critical articles and interviews from a fairly unknown Daniel Goldhagen, who would later write *Hitler's Willing Executioners* to counter Browning's conclusions, which sparked an even deeper interest in *Ordinary Men*. Even though Goldhagen went on to become an international bestseller, Holocaust scholars would overwhelmingly criticize his flawed scholarship and side with Browning's conclusions.

As Yehuda Bauer, one of the "founding fathers" of Holocaust Studies, said of *Willing Executioners*, "the less a commentator knows about the subject matter, and the more he or she is emotionally involved, the greater the enthusiasm" (*Rethinking the Holocaust*, p. 93). Such support is less a vindication for Browning, whose work is highly regarded among his peers, and more a rejection of Goldhagen's untenable thesis.

In fact, Browning's body of research has been instrumental in defining our understanding of events in Nazi Germany. Over the last eight years, he has published three new books: *Nazi policy, Jewish workers, German killers; Collected memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony*; and the first in Yad Vashem's History of the Holocaust series, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942*.

While we will likely never fully understand why the Holocaust occurred, Browning's visit to Richmond in early November is particularly apt. Speaking just a day before the anniversary of Kristallnacht, he is uniquely qualified to address the question of how localized violence against Jews blossomed into the atrocities of the Holocaust.

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TEMPLE EMANU-EL LIVES ON!

Until the late-nineteenth century, the majority of Central and Eastern European Jews lived in small towns or market villages such as Posvel, Lithuania, Tycochin, Poland or Zinkov, Ukraine. Called *shtetlach* (plural of *shtetl*) in Yiddish, these environments involved a unique spirit and soul that typified the essence of *yiddishkeit*, or Jewish life. The synagogue possessed “pride of place” being built near the central market square. The synagogue together with Jewish moral teachings became physical and spiritual markers to Jewish contributions to life.

Many believe this spirit existed only in Europe or in the stories of Sholom Aleichem. But anyone traveling through the American south would have recognized a similar situation in small, rural towns and cities. Kingstree, South Carolina; Hot Coffee, Mississippi; Talladega, Alabama: home to small communities of immigrant Jews drawn there for the economic possibilities they perceived.

One such synagogue was Temple Emanu-El in Weldon, North Carolina. This house of worship served Jews living on both sides of the Virginia-North Carolina. Small towns as Emporia and Lawrenceville in Virginia and Roanoke Rapids and Weldon in North Carolina viewed Temple Emanu-El as their spiritual home. Though Jews had lived in this area since 1897 and conducted religious services in rooms above shops, it was only in the wake of the Second World War that the small communities decided to construct an actual building. In February 1948, congregational president Harry Kittner appointed a committee to seek pledges from the community and to explore other means of financing the project. The formal dedication came on November 14, 1954.

Having a physical structure promoted a new sense of Jewish identity. Distant towns with small Jewish populations joined into a single congregation, a *kehillah*. Though Temple Emanu-El frequently had only a circuit rabbi, the congregants were not deterred. They launched Jewish educational programs, formed youth groups and coordinated community events sponsored by a Sisterhood. Though congregants maintained links with family and friends in bigger cities, the synagogue members knew those close bonds of friendship that exist only in smaller towns. Over the decades, the little synagogue in Weldon, North Carolina experienced analogous changes in Jewish practice and traditions faced elsewhere in America. And, like the smaller communities across the South, Temple Emanu-El faced the changing demographics of an aging population and a younger generation that sought its future in larger urban areas.

Sarah Kittner, a longtime member of Temple Emanu-El, recalls that when her family closed its retail store a former customer exclaimed: “Oh my Lord. My daddy always said a town without Jews ain’t no town at all.” The non-Jewish inhabitants of former *shtetlach* in Eastern Europe may not have echoed that remark; many reveled in the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors. Today, one can find deteriorating synagogues in those villages, a stark reminder of the tragedy that blotted out centuries of Jewish life. Temple Emanu-El’s end proved far more quiet. As the membership dwindled, synagogue president, Bari Novey, and other members sadly opted to conclude a chapter. Temple Emanu-El did not die so much as move along its torahs and other Judaica items distributed in Virginia and North Carolina.

Temple Emanu-El will also live on at the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Closing their financial accounts and aware of the outstanding work the Museum does, Bari Novey, former synagogue president, has recently donated \$4,060 to the Museum’s elevator fund. The spirit of a small Southern congregation has become part of the Museum’s founding mission to teach tolerance through education.





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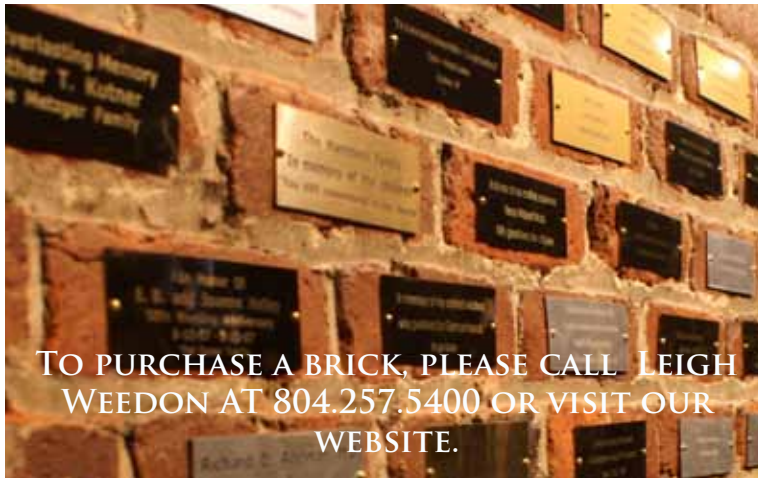
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