

PRESS RELEASE

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Breman Museum marks 25th anniversary with *Chutzpah!*

-- New Exhibition - History with Chutzpah taps archival collections to highlight contributions of leaders, everyday citizens --

For Immediate Release

Atlanta, GA. – It took chutzpah to launch Georgia’s only Jewish museum 25 years ago, so it’s only fitting that the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum marks its silver anniversary with the appropriately titled exhibition *History with Chutzpah: Remarkable Stories of the Southern Jewish Adventure 1733-Present*.

The exhibition presents an artifact-rich and interactive immersion into the colorful history of Jewish culture in Georgia and Alabama that serves as the foundation of Jewish life in the Southeast today.

History with Chutzpah is “driven by stories,” co-curator Sandra Berman said, illustrated and enhanced by more than 300 objects, documents, photographs and oral histories. It will give voice to many people – past and present – whose experiences, achievements and perspectives are reflected in The Breman’s deep archival collections.

The exhibit draws strongly from the Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern Jewish History. Seeded by a gift from Atlantan Erwin Zaban in 1984, the archive has grown to be one of the country’s most respected repositories documenting Jewish life.

Berman was the archivist who began organizing and building the archive for the Jewish Federation of Atlanta even before a Jewish museum was on the drawing

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board. Her *Chutzpah* co-curator Jane Leavey was the museum’s founding director who got it there.

Breman Museum Executive Director Leslie Gordon knew that they were the perfect dynamic duo to organize a 25th anniversary exhibit about those who have helped shaped Jewish life in Georgia and Alabama from 1733 to today. enhancing communities in both states.

“Museums are important because without them, without archives, people can be forgotten,” Gordon said. “Jane and Sandy were insistent even before the founding of the Breman Museum that these stories be captured and treated with respect, for the insights and lessons that they would provide in the future. Now with *History with Chutzpah* important chapters of our past come alive once again.”

So what is this “chutzpah” that serves as the exhibit’s connecting thread?

Chutzpah is a Yiddish word that describes a person boasting a character that is bold, audacious, gutsy. People with chutzpah, also derived from the Hebrew word חֻשְׁפָּה, do not lack self-confidence or nerve. The word originally carried a connotation that leaned toward the negative. But in English, it has taken on a broader, more positive meaning, emphasizing an individual’s courage, mettle or ardor. It’s those latter meanings that *History with Chutzpah* embraces.

Berman and Leavey have organized the exhibit into six sections: Courage & Conformity, Hope & Survival, Success & Loss, Patriotism & Perseverance, Benevolence & Community and Murder & Mayhem. People displaying chutzpah in those sections include:

- Isidor and Ida Straus, the Bavarian-born businessman and his wife who lived for a time in Talbotton, Georgia, before he became a co-owner of R.H. Macy & Co. department stores with his brother Nathan. Isidor also served briefly in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1912, he perished with his wife Ida in the sinking of the RMS *Titanic* in the North Atlantic. Ida refused

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to enter a lifeboat without him, and the 1997 film *Titanic* depicts the couple sharing a farewell kiss as their stateroom floods with water.

- Morris B. Abram, who emerged from humble rural South Georgia beginnings to become one of the leading civil rights lawyers in the U.S. during the 1950s. While unmasking the Ku Klux Klan and serving as a key intermediary for the release of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. from prison on the eve of the 1960 presidential election, Abram carried out a successful 14-year battle to end the discriminatory voting system in his home state, which had entrenched racial segregation. The result was the historic “one person, one vote” Supreme Court ruling in 1963.
- Sam Greenblatt, who lied about his age and enlisted with the 4th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry so he could fight in the Spanish-American War in 1898 when he was 16. Greenblatt is represented by one of the more unusual artifacts in *Chutzpah*: a nearly 125-year-old bagel. The story goes, Sam’s mother Beile stuffed his knapsack with homemade bagels before he shipped off to Cuba, but one got buried in the bag and wasn’t discovered until his return. Petrified by time, it has been handed down through several generations of his family.
- Frances Hamburger Bunzl, who fled Germany in 1939 shortly after the Kristallnacht -- also called the Night of Broken Glass because of the shattered glass that littered streets after the vandalism and destruction of synagogues, Jewish-owned businesses and homes. More than 90 Jews were killed, and approximately 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. With the help of American relatives, Frances found refuge in Atlanta in 1941, eventually becoming involved with the National Council of Jewish Women and serving as chancellor of the Austrian Consulate. Among many philanthropic initiatives, she endowed the Atlanta

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Symphony Orchestra’s timpani chair in memory of her late husband, gave generously to the High Museum of Art and established the Cantorial Chair at Temple Sinai.

- Albert Steiner, who rose to be president of the Atlanta Brewing and Ice Co. and the man for whom the Steiner Building on the Grady Memorial Hospital campus is named. In the early part of the 20th century, Steiner’s son and wife died of cancer before Steiner himself lost his battle with the disease. He gave more than \$500,000 (the equivalent of \$8.1 million today) to Grady Hospital to create the state-of-the-art clinic that ended up serving as the model for cancer clinics across the country. Artifacts on view will include a bottle of one of his company’s longest-produced beers, Steinerbru.
- William Breman, president of Breman Steel, who became the Breman Museum’s namesake. Co-curator Jane Leavey recalled that in 1992, Breman, for whom the William Breman Jewish Home also is named, was looking for “something big to do for the community in terms of philanthropy.” Appreciating history, a plan for what became the Breman Museum soon took shape through the Jewish Federation of Atlanta, urged and then shaped by none other than Leavey. “Benevolence, community and charity,” *Chutzpah’s* wall text notes, “were the hallmarks of Bill Breman’s life.”

In addition to Sam Greenblatt’s bagel and Albert Steiner’s beer, notable artifacts bringing other stories to life in *History with Chutzpah* include ...

- A mechanical blue horse used for promotions by Montag Brothers Inc., an Atlanta paper company known for its Blue Horse brand school products featuring collectible stamps that could be redeemed for prizes.

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- A baby bassinet made from a wooden barrel for Dr. Raymond Harris, an Army Medical Corps surgeon, by German POWs he treated during World War II at Camp Clinton in Clinton, Miss. Dr. Harris and his wife used the bassinet for their son who was born in 1944.
- An Enfield rifle musket used by Confederate soldier Jacob Rothschild of Selma, Alabama, circa 1862. Rothschild fought at the Battle of Vicksburg and the Battle of Elkhorn Tavern.
- Playing cards used by young sisters Pola and Irene Blenstock while in hiding in a closet in Drohobycz, Poland, c.1943. To amuse the children and keep them quiet and safe, their nursemaid liberated the playing cards from the Gestapo officer's home where she was employed as a maid.

History with Chutzpah is being presented with the support of the Walter and Frances Bunzl Family Foundation (Premiere funder), the Rich Foundation (Presenter) and Breman Foundation (Founder).

The exhibit is expected to remain on view for at least three years.

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included with museum admission: \$12 for adults, \$8 seniors, \$6 students and educators, \$4 ages 3 to 6, free for children under 3 and museum members.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit thebreman.org.

Press Photographs and Graphic Assets:

<https://bit.ly/3BjIQFg>

About the Breman Museum

Opened in 1996, the Breman’s mission is to “connect people to Jewish history, culture and arts.” Located in Midtown, the nonprofit multidisciplinary center has four focuses: exhibitions, arts and cultural programming, archives and Holocaust education.

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