

T'flor V'Dor

From Generation to Generation • The Newsletter of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society

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Reflections on Earth Day, Avatar, and Jewish Life

By: Michael Gendler,
NJHS Board Member

I received a much appreciated request from Director Renee Corcoran for an article on a recent movie in the context of Jewish life. I noticed that April 22 was not far away. In fact, as I begin to write this article it is precisely Earth Day! In my forty years of teaching

college history as a graduate student and as a professor, my students often brought up questions about the origins of Earth Day and its significance. It was introduced to American culture first as a teach-in about the environment on April 22, 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson and others in an effort to heighten national consciousness over the importance of preserving the harmony and cleanliness of our environment. The emphasis was and is upon the interdependence of all life and the importance of appreciating the role played by every life form. Just as important was the idea that we should look at the earth with reverence. While this article is decidedly critical of radical environmentalism, let it never be forgotten that the most enlightened facets of this movement have been vital in accomplishing critically important advances such as the Clean Air Act as well as making many of our major lakes and rivers usable again.

But there is much more to the story. Earth Day came about just after the first manned landing on the moon as well as some extraordinary photographs of planet earth taken from the moon. Such photos did a great deal to influence the view of many toward the idea that we should think of the earth in terms of "oneness" since no national boundaries could be seen from the moon. (This would make sense if we lived on the moon, but since we live on earth and deal with real up-close and personal differences among people and places, nation-states make a great deal of sense—as do fences whether in Israel or on the Arizona-Mexico border).

What comes to mind in terms of free association when you think of "Earth Day?" Here are a couple of words that occur to me: "cruelty" and "Nazis" What is my problem? For starters, we could turn to Ecclesiastes 1:18 in the JPS Tanakh: "And he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Indeed.

This is of course not an argument to stop learning. But I do mean to suggest that going more deeply into this topic is not only fascinating, but disconcerting. Earth Day and the movie that I've chosen to discuss, Avatar, are



Roots of the great tree

2016

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Letter From the NJHS President, Bob Belgrade

Dear NJHS Member,

Thank you, as always, for your membership in the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society!

Our staff, board and volunteers consistently do amazing work on a very lean budget because of your continued support.

The NJHS has been collecting and cataloging memorabilia, artifacts, and documents, oral and video histories for 34 years. We are delighted that our collection has become an outstanding research source in and out of our Jewish community.

Currently, with a generous grant from the Goldsten Foundation and the Special Donor-Advised Fund of the Jewish Federation of Omaha Foundation, we are doing a major update of the Youth Exhibit that is currently displayed on the walls of the JCC. These pictures have always drawn lots of attention from visitors to the campus.

Our board recently held a meeting at the Boys Town Hall of History. We were treated to a fantastic tour of the Boys Town museum. The visit created excitement and gave us the inspiration to share more of our archival collection with you and visitors to the JCC campus.

We are fortunate to have a great core of committed board members and are always looking for others to help guide our Historical Society into the future. Please let us know if you are interested or know of someone that would enjoy being a board member. They are always looking for the opportunity to add knowledge and experience.

As you read through this newsletter, please be proud of the great work that you have supported and the important achievements taking place to preserve our Jewish community for generations to come.

to Our Newest Members

We gratefully acknowledge and welcome the new members of the NJHS. Thank you for your generous and continued support.

Fran Shrier Aron

Mark Trustin

Danny Cohn

Aaron Wolfson

Cheryl & Richard Diamond

InU, P-etc
History
NJHS eekMS

The "Little Shed" on 25th & Seward
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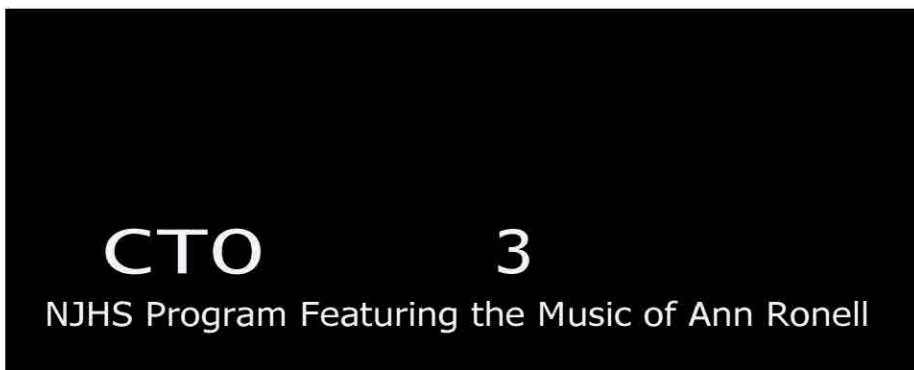
We Need Geeks?

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Cohn Silverman, AZA Grand Aleph Godol, visited the NJHS office to search through the archives.



See Oliver Pollak, "Adventures in Nebraska Jewish History" on Youlube. The lecture was uploaded by the Nebraska State Historical Society as part of their Brown Bag Series. Visit www.youtube.com to see this video!



Reflections on the "Little Sheel on 25th & Seward Article"

The following comments were submitted to NJHS following the Little Sheel on 25th & Seward Article written by "Big" Joe Kirshenbaum...

"I was Bar Mitvahed at the little "shul" on 25th and Seward. I remember the reception after the ceremony which consisted of schnapps and coffee cake for the 20 or so elderly men who attended with my relatives:' - **Al Feldman**

"I loved Joe's article in your newsletter. It brought back wonderful childhood memories. My grandfather was Mendel Herzberg and I clearly remember going to my brother's Bar Mitzvah at his Shul. Of course, the women had to sit upstairs. I also remember Mendel walking to services every morning and evening with his friend and neighbor, Mauti Middleman, arguing most of way. He did have a Shabbos goy who came in on Friday and lit the gas stove, cut the toilet paper and turned on the lights. Thank you Joe for the memories."

- **Barbara "Tootsie" Roffman Cohen**

