

## Descendants of the Galveston Immigrants: Jewish Life in Small Texas Towns:

Panel Participants: Bette Novit Evans, Jan Siegel Hart, Harry Harelik,

Summary:

The concrete legacy of the Jewish immigrants of the Galveston Movement is their descendants--their children and grandchildren, who lived with their successes, fears, and ambiguities. Along with their prosperity, acceptance, and material successes, the Galveston immigrants lived with compromises to Jewish observances and traditions, and with the reality of being perpetual outsiders, striving for acceptance. Our generation lived near our immigrant grandparents. Our experience was life in two worlds--The pervasively Protestant culture of our Texas towns, where we learned more gospel songs than Hebrew liturgy, practiced traditions we didn't quite understand and ate barbecue and kugel, fried chicken and matzoh ball soup. We grew up with questions from friends about whether we believed in God, and we experienced pressure to be perfect because everything we did would reflect on the Jews. We are the living legacy of the Galveston Jews.

This panel gathers third generation descendants of the Galveston movement, who grew up in the presence of those immigrants in the small Texas towns where they settled. The panel's aim is for sociological reflection rather than nostalgia. Because we were outsiders both to urban Jewish communities and rural communities in which we lived, most of us developed an "outsider's viewpoint" that enabled us to both cherish the legacies of the immigrant generation and to contextualize it. Our discussions will include topics such as religious education, living Jewish in a Christian culture, differences between rural Jews and our urban counterparts, Assimilation pressures, acceptance, and marginality.

**Bette Novit Evans**, professor of emeritus of political science at Creighton University, was born in Stephenville, Texas where her family settled after immigrating from Parichi in what is now Belarus. Her grandparents, great-uncles, and assorted other relatives arrived in Texas with the help of the Galveston Movement in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and dispersed themselves into small towns in Central Texas. The immigrants ultimately became merchants and civic leaders in their new hometowns, and the families remained there for the subsequent generation. Dr. Evans and most of her extended family spent their formative years immersed both in the culture of rural Texas and that of her Jewish immigrant family. She attributes her interest in the social sciences to experience of living between two cultures, and the habit of observing both from the outside as well as the inside.

**Jan Siegel Hart** has reached out to thousands of children and adults across the United States to teach them about diversity and multi-cultural studies through her one woman show, *Hanna, The Immigrant*, based on her book of the same name, about her grandmother's life in Russia and her search for a better life in America.

A native Wacoan, **Harry Harellick** graduated from Richfield High School in Waco, later earning his Bachelor's in Accounting and his Master's in Professional Accounting with a specialization in taxation from the University of Texas at Austin. He was a local self-employed CPA for 30 years, then became Executive Director of the McLennan Community College Foundation for almost 16 years before retiring in January, 2017. He currently provides nonprofit and accounting consultation services to area organizations and writes occasional columns as a member of the Board of Contributors of the Waco Tribune Herald. He has taught accounting for McLennan Community College as well as basic fundraising for Baylor University and Waco's Cooper and Waco Foundations.