

# FOUNDRY**ART**CENTRE

## BEING JEWISH IN ST. CHARLES



The assumption that has endured for half a century is that learning about the history of Jewish persecution inoculates people against antisemitism.

It doesn't.

We believe a more effective approach is to intentionally share the stories of Jewish life and culture, as told by friends and neighbors.

From the outside looking in, many assumed there were no Jews in St. Charles. And for those Jews living in St. Charles, most thought they were the only ones and oftentimes felt extremely isolated.

By shining a light on the lives of the Jews of St. Charles, we aim to share a better story, one photo and one story at a time. Ones of strength, pride, and hope.

We talked to people in their homes, in their businesses, and in their public spaces.

Some had a lifelong immersive Jewish background, others were getting involved for the first time.

They shared with us their heartfelt memories of cooking and eating traditional Jewish foods. They reminisced about celebrating Rosh Hashanah, lighting the menorah on Chanukah, and their family's Passover seder.

Every interview provided a unique perspective; every profile challenged assumptions.

Who are the Jews of St. Charles? What's Jewish life like in St. Charles? Why haven't we heard about all of this until now?

Our hope in sharing this exhibition is to share the faces and voices that help answer these questions. And to invite each of us in and around St. Charles County to get to know each other better.

**Rabbi Chaim Landa**  
**Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County**

The recognition of the importance our communities hold for us and the desire to tell the stories of past days is an innate human need and has become a recent enterprise taking place across the country. Main Street in St. Charles, Missouri, for the life of its existence, has been part of this expanding venture – early foundations, decline, urban renewal, and economic success. With an expanding venture has come several theories or ideas that contribute to its achievements. Every town and city has its own identity and factors that make it different from the next place. In those differences, the individual character and culture of each community lies. The enduring presence of Main Street is to preserve an essential part of our existence.

When and where did the first Jewish settlers come to St. Charles will remain an unanswered question. What is known is that following the large influx of immigrants through St. Charles County starting in the 1830s, the Jewish merchant played a major role in the development of a thriving downtown Main Street. Arriving with a dream and determination to succeed, German Jews established businesses and were leaders in the garment industry with Russian Jews following in pattern, accounting for a healthy percentage of Main Street mercantile. As their businesses flourished, so did the community of St. Charles. Reliable products and fair prices attentive to the needs of the community catered to both the local townspeople and the surrounding farming families. Other non-Jewish entrepreneurs saw the potential and opened their shops creating a lively, diverse, and prosperous commercial district, melting differences, and merging similar aspirations into life-long friendships.

Palace Men's Clothing Company, The Famous, Hub Clothing were all familiar business names on Main Street. But the names behind the store front might not have been as familiar– Ike Constam, Emil Weil, Samuel and Paul Polski, Charles Shapiro, Harry Caplan, and Joseph Wolfson. Similarly, other businesses off the beaten path of Main Street might not have been thought of as having Jewish owners. Other economic fields outside of the mercantile business were also prime for Jewish management. Benjamin and Jacob Kaplan operated a lumberyard in St. Charles first on Clay Street and then later N. 2nd Street. And where there was lumber, the furniture business thrived with the Willner family operating the Hub Furniture Store. Willners and Kaplans also raised livestock on the outskirts of the St. Charles business community.

While the motive to migrate to a small, initially French Catholic and later, overwhelmingly Christian midwestern town in the mid to late 19th century may have been primarily economical, those Jewish families who planted their roots in St. Charles County willingly joined the secular environment and embraced community roles of leadership, negotiating their relationship to their religion and culture as they served for the good of all. These were the Jewish families that were always willing to go a little more than halfway to take part in civic life. Though St. Charles can no longer be thought of as a "small town," its growing Jewish community is not only staged to tell us what it's like to be Jewish in St. Charles, but what it's like to be Jewish in America today.

**Amy G. Haake**  
**Archivist**  
**St. Charles County Historical Society**

## **Photographers**

Lindy Drew | Bill Motchan | David Hazan | Colleen O'Connell Smyth

### **Humans of St. Louis**

Humans of St. Louis (HOSTL) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that shares first-person stories and photographic portraits, featuring people and places throughout St. Louis. There are many forms of storytelling, and HOSTL aims to capture many of them. Under the leadership of HOSTL co-founder and lead storyteller, Lindy Drew, and in collaboration with photographer/storyteller Colleen O'Connell Smyth and photographer/journalist Bill Motchan, the Being Jewish in St. Charles project was realized. The goal being to interview and photograph 100 Jewish people who live or work in St. Charles County. This exhibition is a partial display of their work; the rest of the stories can be found on the Being Jewish in St. Charles social media platforms.

### **David Hazan**

David Hazan is a prolific stereo-photographer who champions the anaglyph format in the modern traditional red/cyan complementary color scheme. Originally from Istanbul, Turkey and now residing in New York City, Hazan's photography captures the essence of the modern day human condition using their natural environments as a backdrop. His anaglyphs are admired by conventional photography aficionados as they are by fans of stereo photography, and truly break the inter-dimensional boundary between viewing 2D and 3D art. Trained in communication arts, Hazan has worked in the field of commercial and art photography for three decades and is currently co-owner of picturehouse+thesmalldarkroom, a photo lab and post production house in Chelsea, New York City.

### **St. Charles Jewish Community Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County**

"When two people meet, something good should result for a third."  
— The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory

The Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County aims to create a space where every Jew in St. Charles County feels at home. With nearly 6,000 Jews living in the county, the center offers family Shabbat and Holiday celebrations, children's programming, and adult education classes in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Among its flagship programs is "The Gan St. Charles," the first-ever Jewish preschool in the County and the "St. Charles Jewish Family Network," a warm and child-friendly community for Jewish families with young children. For more information about the St. Charles Jewish Community and to get connected, visit: [www.JewishStCharles.org](http://www.JewishStCharles.org).

### **Glossary**

Have you noticed a word or phrase you don't recognize or a term you want to learn more about? Search the glossary of Jewish terms by visiting [www.JewishStCharles.org/Glossary](http://www.JewishStCharles.org/Glossary)

This exhibition is dedicated to The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, whose teachings of love and respect continue to inspire a Jewish revival of hundreds of communities around the world, including here in St. Charles County, Missouri.

### **Special Thanks**

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Cami Thomas and My Friends and I Made This  
Eastman Reproductions

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picturehouse + thesmalldarkroom

**HUMANS  
OF ST. LOUIS**



Chabad Jewish Center  
St. Charles County

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