

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Spring 2011

NEWSLETTER

Iyar/Sivan

## Online Newspapers Uncover Lost Family History

by Deborah N. Cohn

In September of 1911, the Philadelphia-based Lipschutz 44 Cigar Factory opened a new branch in a building on Spring Street in New Brunswick, N.J. On opening day, the factory's superintendent rolled the first cigar and handed it to my husband's great-grandfather Theodore Cohn, the president of the Elks Building Corporation, which owned the factory building. Theo declared it to be "a cigar of unusual excellence."

This ceremonial occasion was recorded by the *New Brunswick Times*, which I found online through the portal of the New Brunswick Public Library. The library has digitized a collection of five New Brunswick newspapers dating from 1871-1916. The collection can be searched by keyword or date.

For those interested in genealogical research, these newspapers offer far more than marriage announcements and obituary records. The articles they printed provide an insight into the small-town nature of life in the New Brunswick area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many stories of human interest were published daily, and for those whose family resided in New Brunswick during those years, it is possible to collect many details of family history that otherwise had been lost. The URL for the site is <http://newbrunswick.newspaperarchive.com>.

I recently spent some time researching the life of Theodore Cohn. Theo, as he was known, owned a clothing store in New Brunswick and was active in community affairs including the Elks Club and local government. Theo was a member of Temple Anshe Emeth, and he raised a family of four children, including my husband's grandfather, Joseph. This was the general outline of Theo's life as handed down to us via family memories. I was able to add a great deal to our knowl-

edge by searching for his name in the online archives.

Theodore Cohn was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1857. He moved to New Brunswick to set up his business, while his parents remained prominent members of the Newark Jewish community. When they celebrated their Golden Anniversary in 1905, Theo and his wife, along with their inlaws, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Solomon, traveled to Newark for the affair. The New Brunswick papers reported the party, including many interesting family details.



Theodore Cohn

Theo's wife, Hannah Weil Cohn, who was also from Newark, died later in that same anniversary year of 1905. The obituary noted that she and her husband had come to New Brunswick 20 years prior to her death, thus pegging Theo's arrival in the city as approximately 1885. The young couple immediately made a place for themselves in the local Jewish community. They joined Temple Anshe Emeth

(now Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple), and Theo helped organize a ball at the Y.M.H.A. in 1887, which was well attended and lasted into the wee hours of the morning. Theo also served on the Board of Trustees of the Temple. The first organizational meeting of Anshe Emeth's Ladies Auxiliary was held in the parlor of Theo and Hannah's home in 1900, and Hannah served the organization as an officer. At her death, she was warmly described as "a woman of kind disposition [whose] charitable deeds had brought aid to and relieved the suffering of many persons. No one ever sought her help and was refused."

Theo began in business on Peace Street with his brother-in-law, Harry Solomon, but in March of 1891, Theo bought all interest in the store. Soon after, he (continued on Page 3)

## President's Message

As you may know, our American Jewish Experience lecture series for 2011 began in April. The lectures take place at two locations: the Monroe Township Jewish Center and the Highland Park Conservative Temple, and as in the past all lectures are free of charge. If you attend at the Highland Park location, you are invited by Jewish Family and Vocational Services to join in a free glatt kosher lunch immediately after the lecture. Reservations for the lunch can be made by calling JFVS at 732-777-1940. The rest of this year's schedule can be found on page 5 of this Newsletter.

I attended the first two lectures and found them, as always, to be very interesting and informative. Our April speaker, Jean Klerman, gave a profusely illustrated lecture about the history of the Jewish communities along the Jersey shore. She is the author of *From Peddler to Suburbanite - The History of the Jews of Monmouth County, N.J.*, and she is a co-founder of the Jewish Heritage Museum of Monmouth County, located in Freehold. Our speaker for May, Bruce Tucker, is a local historian and history teacher with a special interest in Jewish involvement in American military history. He is also a Civil War Naval re-enactor. His unusual and very absorbing lecture was about the eventful life of Commodore Uriah Levy, as told in his own voice.

We owe a major thank you to Ruth Patt for organizing this wonderful series of lectures!

*Nathan Reiss*

## Archives Corner

Our archives continue to expand!

**From Barbara Feller Bassano:** Photographs and other documents related to the Feller family history.

**From Edith Neimark:** "Old Traditions, New Beginnings," a catalog of the exhibition held at the Historical Society of Princeton and the Jewish Center of Princeton in honor of the Jewish Center's 50th Anniversary.

**From Rachel Weintraub:** Etz Ahaim newsletters, Ahavas Achim anniversary dinner ad journal and Chanukat Habayit program, and Rutgers Hillel Sefer Torah Dedication program.

**From Don Perlmut:** Photo of Sol Goldberg, c.1940s, for the Perlmut family history collection.

Do you have important family papers such as birth, wedding, immigration and naturalization certificates, photographs, family trees, old letters, or records of community recognition and significant accomplishments? Establish your own family collection in our archives. Call me at 732-249-4894 and I'll tell you how to protect your history for future generations.

*Deborah Cohn*

*Be sure to visit our Web site at  
www.jewishgen.org/jhscj  
for an expanding list of archival materials to  
be found in our collection, information on our  
Speakers Bureau, up-to-date news of our  
activities, and back issues of our Newsletter.*

Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey continues to build its collection of original photographs, documents, and artifacts relating to Jewish life in Central New Jersey. We also accept letters, diaries, clothing, and original works of art and music with a local connection. The Jewish Historical Society assumes full responsibility for its long-term care and storage and commits itself to making this material accessible to the community. Please call Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894 if you have something that you think we might be interested in for our collection.

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*("Theo Cohn", continued from Page 1)*

visited the police station in the company of one John Hennslar. A farmer had come to town and purchased a coat from Theo's store for \$10. The farmer then got drunk, lost the rest of his money, and left the new coat with a Burnet Street saloonkeeper. When he woke up the next morning, the farmer accused Mr. Hennslar of stealing the coat and his money. Mr. Hennslar enlisted the aid of Theo, who accompanied him to the police station where "they each divested themselves of their connection with the circumstances."



Lower Church Street, New Brunswick, c.1908. A sign reading "Theo Cohn, Clothier" can be read at left.

Overcoats were a specialty in Theo's store. In 1898, Theo announced the "great increase in the custom department of his establishment," which was originally called the Newark Clothing Store. When the business moved to Church Street, it needed no name other than "Theo. Cohn, Clothier" over the door and in ads. Theo advertised his "specials", a strictly all-wool suit or overcoat, made to order for \$12 each. He also sold "the finest \$10 overcoat in America for the money," boasting that "no tailor in this whole country gives more attention to the style and workmanship of his garments than we have given to these."

The excellence of Theo's merchandise was perhaps the reason that in 1904 his store was the target of "the boldest robbery perpetrated in [New Brunswick] in a long time." Burglars entered at night through a window, stealing clothing worth \$200-\$300 and exiting through the front door onto Church Street. The crime was discovered by Theo's son, Barrett, at 1:30 a.m. when he returned home from a dance. The newspaper noted that "the burglars were about as nery as any that have been at work here for some time," as the Cohn family was home upstairs during the robbery. The intruders were fortunate that although there was a small fox terrier in the store, which was normally an excellent watch dog, it had been ill and was not aroused by the burglars. The police did, however, apprehend the "professional tramps" responsible for the crime, and recovered about half of the

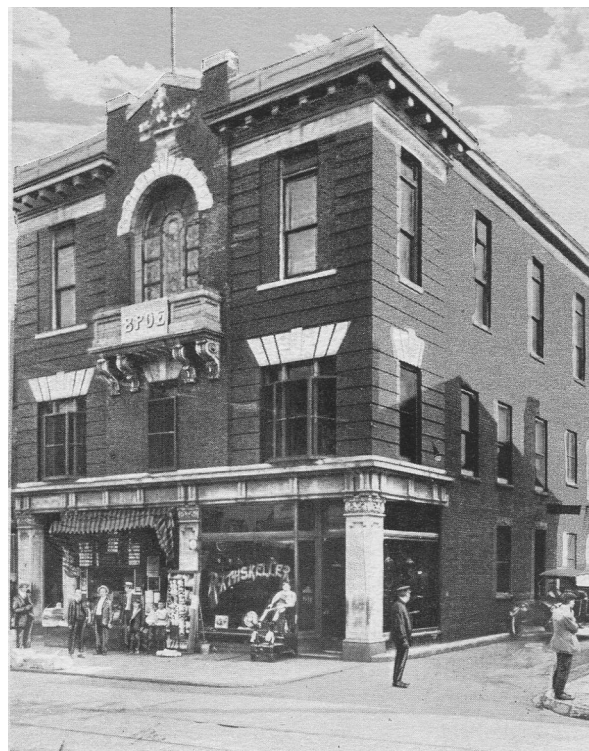
stolen merchandise a few days later. In 1907, Theo's store was robbed again. This time, the burglars left their own clothing on the floor and walked out of the store wearing two brand new suits and taking along "an overcoat apiece and an extra pair of trousers."

Theo began his political career as a member of New Brunswick's Board of Water Commissioners. An early term expired in 1900, but he was later re-elected and served on the Board at least until 1913, including several terms as president.

Theo was also active in Lodge No. 324 of the B.P.O.E., serving as a member of the Elks Building Corporation, which was organized in 1904 to raise funds for and oversee construction of a brand new lodge at the corner of Albany and Spring Streets. The Corporation continued to prosper after the completion of the lodge in 1905, purchasing more buildings including the cigar factory mentioned earlier. The Corporation declared a dividend of 5% at its annual meeting in 1910, at which time Theo was elected as president. Although the newspapers only go up to 1916, other resources inform us that Theo again held the position of president when the Elks sold the Albany Street property and built a second lodge, which still stands on the

corner of Livingston Avenue and New Street. An engraved silver trowel in the archives of the JHSCJ states that "This trowel was used by Theo Cohn, President Elks Building

*(continued on Page 4)*



Original Elks Club building at Albany and Spring Streets, c.1906

## TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Ruth Marcus Patt	Mildred Goodwin	In memory of Louis Goodwin
Deborah Cohn	Mildred Goodwin	In memory of Louis Goodwin
Ann Zar Taub	Ruth Marcus Patt	In memory of Evelyn Goldstein and Helene Strauss
Ann Zar Taub	Adelaide Zagoren	In memory of Evelyn Goldstein and Helene Strauss
Ann Zar Taub	Shelley & Richard Strauss	In memory of Helene Strauss
Yvette Zamost and Edith Zamost	Adelaide Zagoren	In memory of Evelyn Goldstein and Helene Strauss
Yvette Zamost and Edith Zamost	Ruth Marcus Patt	In memory of Evelyn Goldstein and Helene Strauss
Trustees of the JHSCJ	Bert Wolf	In memory of Rita Wolf
Ruth Marcus Patt	Bert Wolf	In memory of Rita Wolf
Bernice & Gene Bernstein	Edith Kesselman	Wishes for a Refuah Shelaymah

(“*Theo Cohn*” continued from Page 3)

Corporation...at the laying of the cornerstone of the Elks Building, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1925.”

Besides contributing to the prosperity of the Elks Building Corporation, Theo served several times as president of the Security Building and Loan Association, and as treasurer for the Elks Lodge No. 324. In 1916, Theo was made an honorary life member of the Lodge and presented with a gift in token of appreciation for his services as treasurer for 18 years. But while Theo was serious about money, he had a playful side. On July 26, 1903, while returning via steamboat from an Elks convention in Baltimore, Theo sent out a “message in a bottle.” He wrote a request on the back of one of his business cards that if found, it should be returned to him, and tossed it overboard. Several weeks later, *The Daily Times* reported, the card was returned by a surfer from the life-saving station at Beach Haven, N.J., who retrieved the bottle from the beach 2 miles south of his station. This story was subsequently reprinted in *The New York Times*.

Theo was active in Democratic Party politics as early as 1898, when he acted as secretary at a meeting held to elect delegates to various conventions. His presidency of the Board of Water Commissioners and other volunteer civic activities brought him to the attention of the party as a candidate for Middlesex County’s Board of Freeholders. *The Daily Times* considered him “well fitted to assume the responsibilities of freeholder”. When he was appointed to fill a Board vacancy in June of 1913, the event was trumpeted with a photograph and large front page headline. The article cited his credentials and deemed him “a very popular choice.”

Theo was a slated candidate that fall and was handily re-elected. *The New Brunswick Times* reported that “The run made by Freeholder Cohn, who has been a member of the board but a few months, was flattering to him, he keeping

pace with the men who have been in service for years and who are so well known in all parts of the county. It speaks well of the popularity of the New Brunswick man.” However, despite his popularity, the newspaper’s hearty endorsement of the incumbent slate, and the expenditure of \$125 of his own money toward campaign costs, Theo was defeated two years later in his bid for a second term, losing by only 36 votes.

Theo’s family life prospered throughout the years covered by the online archives, and the Cohn family was mentioned frequently in the Women’s Pages. In 1912, the Cohns moved from their apartment over the store on Church Street to a house at 286 Redmond Street. Some confusion occurred when Theo’s competitor Louis Cohn of Peace Street announced his retirement. “I am too busy to retire; my customers won’t let me,” Theo told a *New Brunswick Times* reporter, and proved it by expanding his store in 1914 with the addition of a Ladies Department. In 1915, Theo’s daughter Helen married Leon Samuel in a “very pretty wedding” at home after several bridal showers, all of which were reported in detail. The best man was Helen’s brother Joseph, who had opened his own “up to date” grocery store on Church Street three years earlier. Joseph married Blanche Spritzer, “one of the city’s most charming young ladies”, in 1914 in a quiet wedding held at the bedside of her invalid mother. The popular young couple lived on High Street, and were very active at the Y.M.H.A. Theo’s father, Robert, lived to attend Helen’s wedding. The *New Brunswick papers* reported his death in September 1915.

Sadly, the online newspaper trail ends here. I will continue my research with the New Brunswick Public Library’s microfilm collection, a more tedious task than searching rapidly through the newspapers via computer. But the information that is available in old newspapers is well worth searching for. Thanks to the online sources that are available to anyone with a computer, Theo Cohn, his extended family, and the city they lived in have come alive again for his great-grandchildren.

# American Jewish Experience Lecture Series

Series #1  
**Monroe Township Jewish Center  
 (Etz Chaim)**  
**11 Cornell Drive, Monroe Township**  
 Lectures are held on the  
 2nd Monday of the month  
 10:00-11:30 a.m.

June 13          Rabbi Elliot Malomet  
*Some Interesting and Unusual Canadian Jews*

July 11          Dr. Mildred Goodwin  
*Once Upon A Time: Famous and Infamous Characters in Jewish Literature*

Aug. 8          William Levy  
*World War II's Holocaust at Sea*

Sept. 12        Susan Schwirck  
*The Jewish Path Through the Ultimate Threshold*

Oct. 10        Philip Cantor  
*The Jewish Forward and the Jewish Media*

Nov. 14        Dr. Leslie Fishbein\*\*  
*The Tender Trap: Love, Sex and the Quest for Jewish Identity in Literature and Film*

\*\*Dr. Fishbein's lecture is co-sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

Series #2  
**Highland Park Conservative Temple/CAE**  
**201 South 3rd Avenue**  
**Highland Park**  
 Lectures are held on the  
 3rd Wednesday of the month  
 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

June 15          Rabbi Elliot Malomet  
*Some Interesting and Unusual Canadian Jews*

July 20          Ruth Marcus Patt  
*"You've Got Mail": Letters From Our Archives*

Aug. 17        William Levy  
*World War II's Holocaust at Sea*

Sept. 21        Susan Schwirck  
*The Jewish Path Through the Ultimate Threshold*

Oct. 19        Philip Cantor  
*The Jewish Forward and the Jewish Media*

Nov. 16        Dr. Leslie Fishbein\*\*  
*The Tender Trap: Love, Sex and the Quest for Jewish Identity in Literature and Film*

\*\*Dr. Fishbein's lecture is co-sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

**THANK YOU**  
*for making a contribution to the JHSCJ*

Eileen Robison  
 Adelaide Zagoren

**Lunch Following Lectures**

For those who attend the Highland Park lectures, Jewish Family and Vocational Service invites you to join in a glatt kosher lunch immediately following the lecture. Please let JFVS know that you would like to stay for lunch by calling them in advance at 732-777-1940.

**Membership News**  
*We Welcome Our New Members*

Marvin Bricker  
 Lena Feld  
 Iris Goldin  
 Herman & Selma Jacobs  
 Sandra & Donald Hirschhorn  
 Harriet Steinberg

*Renewal as Life Members*  
 Dr. Ira and Bonnie Birnbaum

*Renewal as Patron*  
 Richard and Ellen Diamond

**JHSCJ is Traveling to Philadelphia**

We are very excited to be traveling to visit the new National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia on June 14. This trip, which was announced in the Winter 2011 Newsletter, is being co-sponsored by the Raritan Valley Chapter of Hadassah. We are looking forward to docent-led tours of all three floors of the museum, free time to explore a little bit on our own, and a kosher lunch catered by the Museum.

The bus is completely filled, but if you are interested in being on the waiting list, please contact Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894. The cost of the trip is \$50 for members of JHSCJ or Raritan Valley Hadassah, and \$55 for non-members.

## Preserving Your Life Story: Part 3

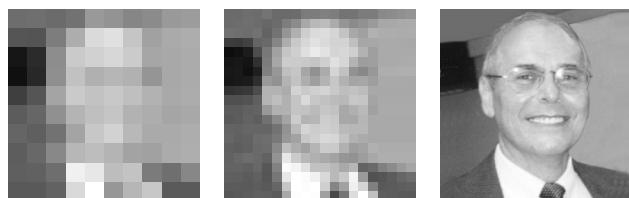
### By Dr. Nathan Reiss

In the two previous Newsletters, we discussed the advantages of archiving your photos and other documents, and suggestions on how to set up your filing system. In this issue we will discuss the basics of using a scanner for importing images into your archive. The primary piece of knowledge needed for scanning an image is how to set the **resolution** at which it will be scanned. The other scanner settings are self-explanatory, e.g. black & white or color? document or photo?

The remainder of this article deals with basic editing of the image after it has been scanned. If you don't feel confident about editing it yourself, or if you don't have the time to do it right away, it can be left for another time, or for another person to do it. The most important thing is to get the materials scanned into the computer and given appropriate file names (see the previous Newsletter).

#### Pixels and Resolution.

The method by which computers and other digital devices (like digital cameras, digital TVs, computer monitors, and digital printers) store or display images is as a series of tiny dots called **pixels**, an acronym that derives from the words "picture elements". The number of dots along each inch of distance across the image (**dots per inch** or **pixels per inch**, abbreviated as **dpi** or **ppi**) is called the **resolution**. The resolution is the same in the up-and-down and side-to-side dimensions of the image.



10 ppi

20 ppi

600 ppi

Here are three versions of the same 1 inch square picture, scanned at three different resolutions. The first picture has a total of 10x10, or 100 pixels, with each pixel having a uniform shade. Note that the individual pixels are clearly visible, giving the picture a crude, blocky appearance. The second picture was scanned at a resolution of 20 pixels per inch, and thus contains a total of 20x20, or 400 pixels. It looks somewhat better, though still quite blurry. The third picture has a resolution of 600 pixels per inch, the resolution at which this Newsletter is printed.

Note that the pictures that were **scanned** at 10 and 20 ppi were **printed** at 600 ppi, as was the entire Newsletter, but they are blurry anyway. The lesson to be learned from this is that there is not much to be gained by reproducing a picture at a much higher resolution than it originally had. Conversely, when printed on a 600 ppi printer, a picture that was origi-

nally scanned at 2400 ppi would not look any sharper than one that was scanned at 600 ppi. The standard for printed photos is about 600 dpi, so that is probably a good resolution at which to scan your materials into the computer. Most ordinary snapshot photos made with film cameras do not benefit from being scanned at higher resolutions than this. The one exception would be some of the very old black-and-white photos, particularly ones taken in studios.

The amount of space that it takes to store a picture in your computer is roughly proportional to the number of pixels that it contains. So, a picture scanned at 1200 ppi will occupy about **four** times as much storage space on your computer as the same picture scanned at 600 ppi.

#### Trimming.

Probably the easiest adjustment that you can make to an image is to **trim** it. Photographs almost always include much more background (often the sky) than is needed. Before trimming the photo, identify the background features that could be necessary for future attempts to identify the date, location, etc., and be sure not to remove those.

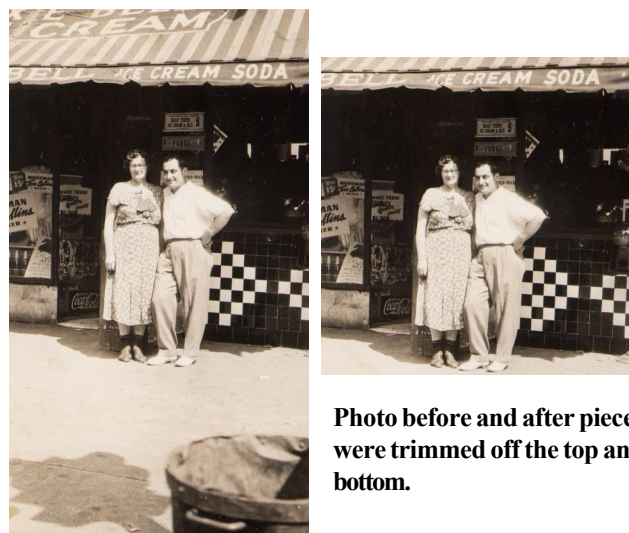


Photo before and after pieces were trimmed off the top and bottom.

Remember that the larger the area of background that surrounds the subject of the photo, the smaller the subject will appear in the photo when it is printed or displayed on a screen. In the photo shown here, removing the canopy, the garbage can and the large expanse of sidewalk that makes up the foreground not only puts the emphasis where it belongs — on the people and the storefront, but it also makes it possible, as we will see in the next few pictures, to increase the size of the most important part of the picture.

When trimming a photo, it's a good idea to bear in mind that the trend is for photos to be displayed on TV or computer screens, rather than in printed form. These screens are nearly always wider than they are tall. Computer screens and those

of older TVs have a width-to-height ratio of 12:9, meaning that pictures of that shape will fit those screens best. The newer HDTV screen format is somewhat wider, with a ratio of 16:9. Pictures that are tall and narrow do not fit these screens very well, and of course the screens can't be turned sideways for better viewing.



The effect of trimming a photo so that the ratio of its horizontal and vertical dimensions is similar to that of the screen on which it is likely to be viewed, in this case a typical computer screen or 12:9 TV screen format. The solid lines that border the pictures are the outline of the screen.

### Brightness and Contrast.

Old photos recorded on film tend to fade, darken, and/or change color over time. Also, many photos were originally taken with less-than-optimum camera settings. Most photos and documents that you scan into your computer, particularly the older ones, will benefit from being adjusted. Some photo editing software is capable of doing this automatically, but since the software may not know which parts of the photo are of greatest interest to you, you may wish to do some manual editing as well. As with any kind of editing, it's a good idea to make a backup copy of the material before you begin to change it.

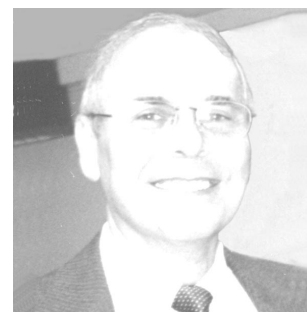
The **brightness** control of the photo editor merely changes the brightness of the **entire** image. Increasing the brightness is particularly useful when the image is so dark that some of the details are obscured. However, when you increase the brightness, the portions of the image that are already bright become even brighter, potentially causing detail in those parts of the image to be lost.

The **contrast** control of the photo editor changes the **difference** in brightness between the light and dark areas of the image. The ultimate low-contrast image is one that is uniformly gray. The highest-contrast images have only black, white, and intensely-colored areas, with no intermediate shadings. The ideal contrast setting for most images is one where the brightest areas are **nearly** white (that is, a very light gray), and the darkest areas are **nearly** black or very intensely colored. This will assure that all intermediate shadings and colors will show up. When photos fade, the darker areas gradually become lighter and the lighter areas become darker, so that the image gradually approaches a uniform gray. The contrast control can be useful for correcting the effects of fading – often with dramatic results.

The **brightness** and **contrast** controls should usually be adjusted in tandem to achieve a nearly optimum distribution of shadings.



Not enough brightness



Too much brightness



Not enough contrast



Too much contrast

This article is meant only as an introduction. If you've never tried to edit a picture that you have stored on your computer, why not try it? You have nothing to lose. Just make sure that you've first made a backup copy of the material that you're editing!

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E-mail: info.jhscj@gmail.com

**For your convenience, this form is for your tributes.**

TO: Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Address : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

FROM: Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Address : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed: \$\_\_\_\_\_

In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Major featured articles and events from this newsletter are available on our web site: [www.jewishgen.org/jhscj](http://www.jewishgen.org/jhscj) approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.*



