

## JEWISH MUSEUM OF FLORIDA

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### WHY FLORIDA JEWISH HISTORY MONTH

Florida's greatest asset is its people. Diverse cultures have enriched the State since early times. Like other groups, Jews have actively participated in shaping the destiny of Florida. Florida's Jews have brought their visions of freedom and their creativity and have left their footprints across the entire State. Just as Blacks, Women, Hispanics and other groups have a designated month to focus on their contributions to the development of Florida, Florida Jewish History Month is a time to learn how Jews have been involved in enriching the lives and dreams of all Floridians. It is another time to celebrate the strength and richness that our multicultural population brings to our State.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO FLORIDA'S DEVELOPMENT

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1. **Jews have been a significant part of the development of our State since 1763**, which is the first year that Jews were *allowed* to live (as Jews) in Florida. Since Florida was owned by Spain from 1513, it was "for Catholics only" for 250 years. The first Jews settled in Pensacola after the Treaty of Paris was signed that turned Florida over from Spain to England.
2. Today, **16% of the American Jewish community lives in Florida**. Our State hosts the nation's third largest Jewish community (after NY and CA) with at least 850,000. South Florida has the second largest concentration of Jews in the world, after Israel, at 15%.
3. A Jew, **David Levy Yulee**, is known as the "**architect**" of Florida Statehood. As a territorial delegate in 1841, he went to the U.S. Congress to argue for statehood. In 1845 when Florida became the 27<sup>th</sup> state, Florida's first Senator to serve in Washington was David Levy Yulee. Yulee, the first Jew to serve in the U.S. Congress, also developed Florida's first cross-state railroad. Levy County and the town of Yulee in Nassau County honor him.
4. David Levy Yulee's father, **Moses Levy**, had come into Florida by 1820 and began purchasing 100,000 acres in north central Florida where, on 1,000 acres, he started a Jewish colony in Micanopy; he was a founder of that city. Twenty-three years before statehood, in 1822, Moses Levy established **Pilgrimage Plantation** that attracted Jews fleeing persecution in Europe and he brought sugar cane and fruit trees. The Plantation was burned down at the onset of the Second Seminole War in 1835. An Orthodox Jew, **Moses Levy was among the earliest and largest developers** in Florida, published a plan to abolish slavery and was a proponent of free education in Florida as a charter member of the Florida Education Society.
5. More than 100 Jewish **families** have been identified who have lived in Florida over 100 years. The Dzialynski family came to Jacksonville by 1850; is still there--still Jewish. There were six Jewish congregations in Florida before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today there are more than 300 **congregations** who are involved with improving the quality of life for all people in the State.

6. Floridian Jews have served on local, county, state and federal levels as **politicians** and in many public capacities. Richard Stone served as Florida's Secretary of State then U.S. Senator (1974-80); David Sholtz was Governor (1933-37). In 1990, State Senator Gwen Margolis became the nation's first woman State Senate president. More than 250 Floridian Jews have served as judges and more than 150 Jews have served as mayors.

7. Jews have served in Florida in all the **wars**. Fort Myers is named for Col. Abraham Myers, a Jewish West Point graduate who was the quartermaster for the fort in the Indian wars during the mid-1800s. Jacksonville's Admiral Ellis Zacharias, Chief of Naval Intelligence during WWII, helped break the Japanese code in 1941 that resulted in the U.S. victory in the Pacific.

8. The **contributions** made by Jews to the development of Florida are in every sector. A Jew was a founder of the Florida Cattlemen's Association (Saul Snyder of St. Augustine); Jews have been prominent in the citrus, tomato and tobacco industries. An Orlando Jew and a graduate of the University of Florida in 1948 received the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1968 for breaking the genetic code (Marshall Warren Nirenberg). Jews have been active in the development and construction industries including creating cities (Cape Coral, San Carlos Park, Bay Harbor Islands and Seaside) and highways, in banking and insurance, the arts, education, military and science, agriculture, space industry, the professions and much more.

9. **For nearly 250 years, Jews have lived in Florida and maintained traditions of their heritage.** Jews represent one immigrant group in our multiculturally diverse state.

10. The **Jewish Museum of Florida**, opened in 1995, is located on South Beach in two adjacent former synagogues, on the National Register of Historic Places, that were lovingly restored by the Museum. The mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the Jewish experience in Florida. Thousands of students, as well as adults who are both residents and tourists, visit the art and history exhibits and learn how diverse individuals – who are more alike than different – come together to preserve our cultural heritage and enhance the quality of life for all Floridians.