

VilnaScribe

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Roots and Wings

This Fall Scribe sets the stage for the New Year, wishing you all a Shana Tova. May this year bring great joy, health and healing to all.

The title of my article for this Scribe stems from our June Board of Director's meeting discussing BCJC's continuing path. During last year, we have centered the focus of our organization on, "Restoring Community." Fulfilling the needs of the Boston Jewish Community in creating a welcoming, pluralistic environment at the Vilna was our concentration. We have accomplished a great deal toward this vision with innovative Shabbats, expanded programming, special visitors tours, Camp for Tots, and many family holiday celebrations. Modernity asks for an array of opportunities to explore, both personally and in 'community', and we provide the possibilities.

With community and continuity as our centerpiece, we are taking the unique historical nature of the Vilna and using it as a way to reengage Jews with their heritage and build new connections to their own futures. The history of the Vilna is intricately tied to the story of how Boston was formed by immigrant groups who came seeking freedom, security, and opportunity. Their struggles became their triumphs. History and memory combine seamlessly at the Vilna, bringing these lessons of our ancestors into the lives of each person who steps inside. This building is emblematic in binding the past with that of destiny – building bridges to a purposeful future.

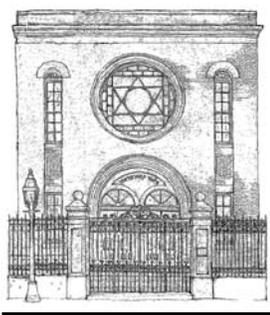
It is quite fitting that this year's OCTOBER 4TH Gala theme is **Our History Inspires Our Future**. We are honoring two renowned Brandeis scholars, Jonathan Sarna and Ellen Smith, for their work in defining the history of the Jews of Boston as well as their cultivation of the leaders of tomorrow. Music and stories will fill our space. Please come and celebrate with us!

As the first congregants of the Vilna came together to form a community, we at the Vilna are renewing the Beacon Hill Jewish community in a different way. We are creating a space conditioned for the malleable modern realities. By embracing the wide range of choices toward a relevant contemporary "Jewishness", we have expanded our programming and our partnerships to include new segments of the community. To that end, we have given additional emphasis on interfaith families, young professionals, unaffiliated Jews and families with young children. Contemporary society requires a more fluid community by sharing common roots and seeking varied outcomes. With our innovations, we are attempting with to do the same...beginning with the ROOTS and expanding with WINGS.

History inspires us to look forward and adapt to the ever-changing uncertainties of our world. Yes, we are often defined by where we come from; however, what really makes the difference is who will succeed us in the future. With the image of "Roots and Wings", the Vilna is enabling us to embrace the roots of our past with relevance for tomorrow.

Deborah Feinstein

President of the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture



THE VILNA SHUL

Boston's Center
for Jewish Culture

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Executive Director 's Message

Thousands of people have visited our building during my seven years here at the Vilna, but it wasn't until a few weeks ago that people were commenting on the floors. A number of visitors suggested that the words written on the floor in the foyer of the Vilna could mean something more than just a description of the people who once worshipped in the building. The "Vilner Congregation" might in fact be inferring the Yiddish words *vil nor*. the meaning in Yiddish, the language spoken by the Vilna Shul's founders, translates to "if only you will it." Well, we have "willed" it in our ongoing mission of "preserving and perpetuating Jewish identity." We will it through reaching out to the community.

Individuals, families and school groups from the Boston area and beyond come to explore Jewish history at the Vilna every day and, in many cases, have their first real conversation about Judaism. And those are just some of the faces we see. The Vilna is also a regular place to visit for pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes throughout greater Boston. Our history is now an integral part of class curriculum and provides young boys and girls with a tangible and authentic sense of a time in Boston's Jewish history that they might never have experienced before. At the same time, Havurah on the Hill is in its tenth year of Shabbat learning services, providing young professionals with a connection to Judaism that they feel is better found here than anywhere else.

The US Park Service has also added us to their official map of major historic sites in Boston, allowing us to reach more people than ever before. Visitors from all over the world seek us out and enjoy our tours and exhibitions. With our strategic location along the Black Heritage Trail, rangers from the National Park Service bring thousands of school children and sightseers to us in order to introduce their visitors to the history of Beacon Hill's North Slope. Here, this area was once home to a middle class African American community which moved away in the late 1890's when the Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants moved in. Seeing Beacon Hill today, tour groups get a good laugh at this. Demographics change and we are all part of that change.

Yes, we have come a long way in grasping this dream of "willing" Jewish continuity in the Boston. Jewish identity, in all of its manifestations, is being explored, redefined and experienced at the Vilna. As our reach to the community grows, the second part of our mission, preserving the Vilna, is slowly being accomplished through stabilization work in the building. However, we still desperately need to restore parts of the structure and make our facilities handicapped accessible. We at the Vilna are all "willing" to do what it takes, but we need your help. Your donations and our joint "will" together can make a difference!

A Shana Tova to you all.

Steven M. Greenberg
Executive Director

Join Our Team!

We are looking for an energetic volunteer docent for our fall and spring seasons, weekdays and Sundays. Interested? Email Jessica@vilnashul.org or call 617-523-2324.



A wide range of visitors come to the Vilna. These are the non-Jewish teachers and students from the Faith Christian Church's religious school in Fitchburg (fcmonline.org). This church/synagogue observes the seventh day Shabbas and Parsha cycle, Jewish holidays and wears blue and white tzitzit.

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Program Manager's Update

hen I interviewed at the Vilna six months ago, I knew I had found a place to develop myself as well as actualize the potential of a worthwhile organization. Every day the Vilna makes a difference in people's lives, whether it be through sharing our knowledge of Jewish Boston, fostering a child's encounter with traditions, or seeing a family's joy of being Jewish together.

This fall is sure to be a busy one at the Vilna! Our first program of the season is one that exemplifies our mission of fostering an array of connections to Jewish culture and life. This fall, it's all about Exploring Jewish Boston and getting to know the people and resources in the area. We are expanding our programs, so please join me in welcoming our newest partners, Rabbi Braham David and Esther Kosofsky of the Jewish Discovery Institute, who will be presenting free workshops for interfaith families and celebrating the High Holidays. Speaking of holidays, we are bringing back our very popular family and innovative Shabbat services, so sign up and join in the fun! And for those who like a good discussion, on November 16th, Havurah on the Hill is having local television and radio host Jim Braude speak on the role the media in the Presidential election.

The Vilna works with an array of impressive organizations, but what about the individuals who spend their days at the Shul? Any employee of a historic site or museum will tell you that local volunteers are essential members of their organization. For visitors, the smiles of a docent, the helping hand of a neighbor or the insightfulness of a guide can mean the difference between a mediocre experience and one that knocks their socks off.

This summer we welcomed five bright new faces to the Vilna. Jessica Schiowitz, a volunteer turned intern from Tufts University, and Meredith Davis from the University of Iowa, worked tirelessly to catalog our archival materials. And with her big smile, local high school student Alex Conrad gave tours so memorable that our visitors continue to write to me in thanks for her efforts.

To give you an idea of just how great these girls are, volunteer Rachel Spilecki gave her first tour within two weeks of her arrival at the Shul to a visually impaired family in French. Without practice or a script in hand, Rachel worked with the mother to figure out the best words to use in the tour and created an experience that was so full of touches, sounds, smells and descriptions that every other visitor in the room wanted to be on her tour. I applaud Rachel for wholly embracing the Vilna's commitment to inclusiveness and equality without hesitation. Together with Dina Shvetsov, Rachel will be reaching out to the public more effectively this fall with the creation of new visitor learning materials and tours in French and Russian.

This Scribe is the perfect place to thank all of the Vilna's volunteers. For those who have been with us for many years, I thank you for your dedication. For those who are new, may you find such inspiration here that you come back again and again.

I encourage everyone reading this today to come by the Vilna, meet our volunteers and have an experience you will never forget! —Jessica Antoline

Saunders Family Honors Patriarch, Jacob Saunders

During the last week in August, twenty members of the Saunders family spanning three generations came together to honor their patriarch, Jacob Saunders, who arrived in Boston from Lithuania in 1896, and lived around the corner from the Vilna Shul at 41 Anderson Street. Originally Jacob Sanderowitch, he was the grandfather of Roger Saunders, a long-time benefactor of the Vilna. Roger gathered his family together to talk about Jacob, his life in Boston at the turn of the century, and also to show them the Vilna Shul, where Jacob was likely to have worshipped. As a thank-you to Roger for all his support of the Vilna, Marilyn Okonow, member of the Board of Directors, offered her genealogical services to Roger in the hopes of helping his family learn more about their past. Each member of the family, including Roger's twin 3-month-old grandchildren, received a personalized book about their Saunders ancestors. Past and future generations were connected in an emotional and meaningful afternoon for both the Saunders family and the Vilna Shul.



Our GALA on October 4, from 6:30 to 8:30 will be an exciting event honoring the acclaimed Brandeis scholars, Jonathan Sarna and Ellen Smith. We will see and hear stories of the past, experience today's musical excellence and imagine the future.

Email Jessica@vilnashul.org or call 617-523-2324.

Become a Member Today!!

It is easy to see why we all take pride in and can get behind what is happening these days at The Vilna. Our focus is to Preserve the Experiences of past generations, Establish meaningful connections to the present, and Develop pathways to an enduring Jewish identity for the future. Quite simply, we want to foster awareness and inspire historical, cultural and spiritual connections. We do all this through education, programming, community partnerships, exhibitions, and the celebration of holidays and life cycle events.

Keep this connection growing. We would be honored if you would become an "official friend" of The Vilna Shul through Membership. Join us as we build a strong community who support our programs, projects and mission—and participate in the many Vilna Shul offerings.

Please go online to http://www.vilnashul.org/index.php/get_involved/membership_program and become a member or renew your membership today.

Havurah on the Hill

Discussing What Matters to Us

What brings a crowd of "20-and-30-somethings" together, chatting late into the night at a century-old building? Warm and welcoming Shabbat festivities combined with just the right dose of intrigue does the trick.

This summer our Havurah guest speakers presented a strong theme: one of innovative social justice and straight up fun.

In honor of Yom HaShoah, Lisa Einstein of Boston 3G, an organization dedicated to Holocaust remembrance and education in Boston, shared her grandmother's story of survival, her family's recent journey

to Hungary and why remembrance remains a positive and necessary task for us today.

May brought us former council member Georgi Vogel Rosen and a discussion of her recent trip throughout the United Arab Emirates as a representative of AJC ACCESS. Georgi talk was refreshing, hopeful and a positive look at women as collaborative global leaders and entrepreneurs.

In June we celebrated a special milestone in our history, the 10th anniversary of HOH and the return of two of our adventurous founders. The Shul's temperature may have been 88 degrees, but our sanctuary was packed with attentive listeners and more than a few laughs. David Gerzof Richard and



Representatives from the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance together with Dan Lachar (second from left) at the Vilna on August 17, 2012.

Jessie Sage reminded us of how far we have come and, together, how far we can go.

The party continued in July when Ace Gershenson, Boston's nightlife mastermind extraordinaire, pleasantly surprised the crowd when he candidly discussed his own path to Judaism as an adult.

And our voices even became critical in August as Caitlin Golden and "Rebecca," once a homeless teenager in Boston, presented the challenges of reforming our misguided system for the homeless and why young people should be part of this change at the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance.

So it has been an exciting summer filled with spiritual togetherness and great discussions. Now as registrations pour in for the High Holidays, we are getting set for our biggest turnout ever and you are invited!

Support The Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture

With your support, The Vilna Shul provides a unique and historic site for the young families, unaffiliated Jews and visitors of all faiths from around the world to connect spiritually, culturally and historically with our Jewish traditions.

Make a gift today! Your gift will enable the Vilna Shul to continue to:

- Maintain and preserve our Boston landmark
- Welcome all to explore their Jewish identity
- Develop exciting new tours and exhibits Provide educational programs to K-12 students
- Host a variety of speakers, workshops, films and concerts which showcase Jewish culture and history

Contribute now! Honor our past, maintain our present and build our future.

Make a fully tax-deductible contribution to The Vilna Shul's Annual Fund.

DONATE ONLINE NOW at www.vilnashul.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS @THE VILNA SHUL

Programs for Everyone!

Date	Time	Key	Program
9/11/12	7:00 pm	C S	Special Workshop for Interfaith Families: Celebrating the Jewish Holidays
9/23/12	9:30 am	C S	A Taste of Judaism: Are You Curious? A free lecture series offered for adults that explores Reform Judaism's relevance in today's world.
9/16/12	6:30 pm	S	HOH High Holidays – Erev Rosh Hashanah
9/17/12	9:00 am - 1:30 pm	S	HOH High Holidays – Rosh Hashanah Day 1
9/18/12	9:00 am - 1:30 pm	S	HOH High Holidays – Rosh Hashanah Day 2
9/25/12	6:00 pm	S	HOH High Holidays – Kol Nidre
9/26/12	9:00 am - 2:00 pm	S	HOH High Holidays – Yom Kippur
9/30/12	2:00 - 5:00 pm	C	Sukkah Building with HOH
10/3/12	12:00 pm	F C	Community Sukkot Celebration – Especially for young children, come make and hang decorations for the Vilna's beautiful holiday sukkah.
10/4/12	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	C	"Our History Inspires Our Future" 2012 Gala Honoring Professor Jonathan Sarna and Ellen Smith
10/5/12	7:00 pm	S	HOH Sukkot Shabbat
10/17/12	7:00 pm	C	Jewish Meditation with Seth Wax
10/19/12	6:30 pm*	F S	Family Shabbat – Exploring the Blessings of Noah
11/7/12	7:00 pm	C	Jewish Meditation with Seth Wax
11/11/12	4:00 pm	C	Violinist Yaeko Miranda Elmaleh in Concert
11/16/12	7:00 pm	S	HOH Shabbat Services with Local Radio and Television Host Jim Braude
TBD	7:00 pm	S	Innovative Shabbat Services with Max Levis – For those looking for a creative approach to the Sabbath
12/9/12	3:00 - 5:00 pm	F C	Annual Family Chanukah Lights Party
12/12/12	7:00 pm	C	Jewish Meditation with Seth Wax
12/14/12	7:00 pm	S	HOH Shabbat Services and Performance by Members of the Zamir Chorale of Boston
1/11/13	7:00 pm	S	HOH Kabbalat Shabbat with Director Melia Bensussen
1/25/12	6:30 pm*	F S	Celebrating Tu B'Shevat: A Family Shabbat for the Trees

Key: C -Community F -Family Friendly S -Spiritual * Please call to confirm event time: 617-523-2324 www.vilnashul.org

Save The Date!

Join us in the spring for a very special Pesach celebrating the Jewish communities of India.