



# Boston: a treasure of Jewish culture

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Boston is a fantastic destination for any traveler, but the Jewish visitor has a virtual treasure chest awaiting. A good place to start your visit is the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture. The last remaining immigrant era synagogue in the city of Boston, it is set among the old tenement buildings of Beacon Hill. While its 1840s-era pews and antique chandeliers give a peek into past artifacts, the Shul also offers exhibits and lectures on Jewish history in Boston. Their current exhibit, "Reconnect the Tapestry," weaves together the stories of the Jews of the North End, South End, West End and East Boston, and their development between 1850 and 1950.

Before you get to town, pick up a copy of the guidebook *Bostonwalks' the Jewish Friendship Trail Guidebook: Jewish Boston History Sites: West End, North End, Downtown Boston, South End, Brookline & Cambridge*, by Michael A. Ross. Ross's book provides the Jewish answer to the Freedom Trail. Walking tours highlight 85 years of European Jewish immigration into Boston.

The Boston area is home to over 50 institutions of higher learning; over 250,000 students matriculate in Boston and Cambridge alone. **Brandeis University**, in Waltham, and **Hebrew College**, in Newton, are two with strong ties to the Jewish community.

Founded in 1921 in Roxbury, Hebrew College now sits on a beautiful, Moshe Safie-designed campus in Newton, training Jewish professionals in both classical Jewish texts and contemporary Jewish studies in degree and certificate programs. Since 2003 it now also prepares rabbis in its pluralistic seminary. Believing that Hebrew forms the link between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry, the College once taught all courses in Hebrew. Today, while most classes are conducted in English, Hebrew remains a focal point of the

curriculum; *ulpan* classes are available at every level for non-matriculating students, as well as "Me'ah," an innovative adult learning program.

Brandeis University was founded only in 1948, but it has made its mark on the academic scene. Named for Louis Dembitz Brandeis, the first Jewish member of the U.S. Supreme Court and an advocate of myriad social justice causes, Brandeis is a small, Jewish-sponsored, yet secular university that welcomes students from around the world. On any given day, one can see a Sikh turban, a *kippah* and a *hijab* in successive study carrels in the library.

The campus, with an excellent theater department, offers dramatic productions in its **Spingold Theater** complex, lecture series and **the Rose Art Museum**. The museum's collection focuses on modern and contemporary art, and it offers a varied program of lectures, musical performances and film screenings. Among the permanent exhibits is *Rosebud*, the museum's collection of video art. On September 10, five new exhibits representing various media will open at the Rose.

The newest educational kid on the block is the **Jewish Women's Archive**, based in Brookline. Founded in 1995, its mission "is to uncover, chronicle, and transmit to a broad public the rich history of American Jewish women." In addition to an annual professional development Institute for Educators, JWA maintains an extensive collection of material on American Jewish women that can be accessed at no cost via the Internet. JWA's offerings include an online encyclopedia about Jewish women, lesson plans and other educational materials, virtual exhibits, and book and film study guides. JWA founding director, Gail Twersky Riemer, was the creative brain behind the film festival darling, "Making Trouble," documenting a century of Jewish women comedienne from Molly Picon and Fanny Brice to Gilda Radner and Wendy Wasserstein.

Speaking of film, the **Boston Jewish Film Festival** is a highlight of November, screening contemporary films on Jewish themes at several sites throughout the area. In recent years, the BJFF has added monthly screenings year-round. But, film watching is only part of the experience. Lectures and panel discussions by documentary filmmakers, directors, and others involved in the film industry enliven the events.

Other Boston-based cultural gems include the **Zamir Chorale and the Klezmer Conservatory Band**. The Zamir Chorale is "dedicated to raising awareness of the breadth and beauty of Jewish culture through performances, recordings, symposia, publications, and musical commissions." Led by Founder and Artistic Director Joshua Jacobson, the Chorale's volunteer singers perform Jewish music from throughout history and the world, including newly commissioned pieces. Zamir enjoys an international reputation due to its tours and recordings, as well as a PBS-aired documentary about the group.

The Klezmer Conservatory Band formed in 1980 and has

performed internationally to rave reviews in venues as varied as Minnesota Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," the PBS special "In the Fiddler's House" with Itzhak Perlman, and at Wolftrap, Radio City Music Hall, Saratoga, and with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. If the KCB is performing during your visit, don't miss it; you may just find yourself dancing in the aisles.

While Boston is a foodie mecca in general, **dining for the kosher observer is not difficult**. You will find the greatest variety in Brookline, with its Jewish population at about 35%. Kosher restaurants include Israeli food at Rami's, Cold Press dairy juice and salad bar, Chinese at Ta'am China, Café Eilat for Mediterranean and pizza). Newton has Shiraz Café, offering Middle Eastern food, while in downtown Boston, the Milk Street Café offers a variety of meat, pareve and dairy/vegetarian dishes prepared in their three kitchens. Unique among the group is O Cantinho, in Cambridge, a quiet lunch spot offering Portuguese food.

## Fish Chowder

Boston may be known as "Beantown" but the quintessential Boston food has got to be "chowdah." This kosher version is thick, delicious, and easy to make. To save fat and calories I substitute milk for the cream.

### Ingredients

- 2 T. butter
- 1 c. onions, chopped
- 1 c. carrots, sliced
- ½ c. celery, sliced
- 2 large Yukon Gold potatoes, cubed
- 2 c. light cream
- 2 c. boiling water
- 1 ½ lb. pounds cod or haddock
- salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

### To prepare:

1. Sauté the onions and celery in butter until soft, but not brown.
  2. Add remaining vegetables, seasoning and water and simmer until tender, about 15-20 minutes.
  3. Add the fish to the pot. Cook another 10 minutes until the fish can be broken into pieces.
  4. Add cream and reheat. Do not boil.
- Serve with salad and a crusty peasant bread or hard rolls.

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