

For Immediate Release

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**Birmingham Museum receives gift to help distribute story of first Jews in
Birmingham**

***U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn makes donation supporting video recording of recent
lecture on Levinson family***

The Birmingham Museum’s ongoing lecture series that explores the community’s history has become increasingly popular, with seating at capacity for the free programs co-sponsored by the Baldwin Public Library. Topics range from neighborhoods to retail history to individuals from the past that have made a difference in Birmingham, and a donation from a high profile federal judge on behalf of a recent talk is further evidence of the program’s importance to the community.

Museum Director Leslie Pielack gave the presentation on October 17 as part of the museum’s ‘First Families of Birmingham’ series this fall. The lecture focused on the first Jewish family in Birmingham—the Levinsons. Russian immigrants Morris and Gitel Levinson came to the village in 1896 and raised their family here, founding a successful retail business that thrived into the 1930s. Among their direct descendants are former **U.S. Senator Carl Levin** and **U.S. Representative Sander Levin**, who attended the talk with their cousin **local realtor and businessman David Levinson**, and participated in a question and answer session with the audience. Bloomfield Community Television video recorded the program as part of its service to the community, getting the attention of local resident and renowned **U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn**.

“Judge Cohn called me personally to offer a donation to make the recorded program accessible to a wider audience by providing it on DVD free of charge,” said Pielack. “As part of the extended Levinson/Levin family, he and his wife Lois wanted to ensure that this video was available not only to other family members, but to the general public to document and share this history.” Pielack was aware that the Levinsons’ story was of public interest, but was surprised at the outpouring of support she received from the Levins, the Levinsons, and the local Jewish community in general. She has received a number of phone calls and personal comments expressing heartfelt gratitude for the presentation. The gift from Lois and Avern Cohn was like icing on the cake, she said.

Kathy Tarnow, who attended the lecture, expressed her appreciation as well. “My family and I thoroughly enjoyed the program about the Levinsons, the first Jewish family in Birmingham. We were fascinated by listening to Carl and Sander Levin.” Tarnow further noted that she would encourage her friends to watch the video-recorded program. “I may even want to watch it again to catch something I may have missed,” she said. Tarnow plans to attend future museum lectures as well.

“The Birmingham Museum’s mission is to tell the story of Birmingham,” said Pielack. “And that includes teasing out the histories of the whole community, some of which are not well known,

and thereby enriching the public record.” As a result of working with the Levins and Levinsons, the museum’s archives now has a more complete story of the family, including a detailed genealogy, numerous personal and historic photos, and documents. The video recording is a special form of oral history, and its availability to a wider public helps broaden understanding of the important role the Levinsons have played in our history. “I’m truly humbled as well as thrilled at the positive impact our work is having on the community,” Pielack said. “Next year, our sights are set on the women of Birmingham, telling their compelling and largely untold stories from the pioneer period to the 20th century, and some of the surprising ways they shaped modern Birmingham.”

The museum’s historic lecture series recordings can be viewed online through Bloomfield Community TV, as well as found on the museum’s web site at https://www.bhamgov.org/history/museum/lecture_presentation_videos.php. Or, a free DVD of the Levinsons lecture is available free by contacting the museum at 248-530-1928 or emailing museum@bhamgov.org.

The Birmingham Museum is located at 556 West Maple. Exhibit hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., and until 8:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month. Two hours of free parking is available at the Chester Street Parking Deck; credit card required for entry and exit. For more information, call 248-530-1928 or visit www.bhamgov.org/museum. Museum admission is \$7 for adults; \$5 for students and seniors. Kids 5 and under and Friends of the Birmingham Museum members are free.

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Brothers Sander and Carl Levin with Leslie Pielack at the lecture on the Levinson family in October (Birmingham Museum photo).