

HFBA MISSION STATEMENT

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION devotes its resources to performing *chesed shel emet* (the ultimate act of loving kindness). It is the only agency in the NY metropolitan area dedicated to assuring that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral and burial.

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THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION was formed in 1888 on Manhattan's Lower East Side by a group of philanthropic and community-minded Jews who were committed to burying their indigent dead according to Jewish tradition, rather than having them buried in a mass grave in City Cemetery. Since its inception HFBA has interred over 60,000 Jews in its two cemeteries. HFBA is also committed to retrieving the identities of those interred and is attempting to provide a gravestone for each unmarked grave.

For more information about how you can help please see page 6.

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Chesed

Across America, Indigent Burials Increase

Recent articles in the American press have discussed the phenomenon of the increased number of unclaimed bodies and the bodies of those whose loved ones cannot afford to bury them. Coroners and government officials across the United States have concluded that the recession has left people with fewer resources for funerals and burials. HFBA's own statistics support this view as our caseload has increased over 25% between 2008 and 2012.

If at the time of death, there is no one to claim a body, state medical examiners have the task of investigating, researching and finding a next of kin. If none is found, remains are disposed of in different ways depending on the locale. In New York City, unclaimed bodies are buried in mass graves on Hart Island by prisoners, overseen by the Department of Corrections. In other locations, bodies may be cremated or donated for medical research (both of which are prohibited by Jewish law).

HFBA is in close contact with New York City's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and makes all the necessary arrangements for a traditional Jewish funeral and burial for any Jew left without a capable friend or relative.

We depend on the generosity of our donors to ensure that no Jew, no matter how isolated or impoverished, is abandoned and forgotten. HFBA is unique in its mission, burying Jews among their religious brethren with the respect and dignity each soul deserve.

HFBA burials have increased 10% over last year!

January 1-May 15, 2012: 134

January 1-May 15, 2013: 149

HFBA Helps



Dorothy P. passed away in Florida at the age of forty-nine. Her brother Sol, in New York, was her next of kin and wanted to have his sister cremated. It took almost a month of negotiations for our rabbinic adviser to dissuade him and Sol insisted that he wanted only a minimal financial responsibility for his sister's funeral arrangements. Ultimately he paid to ship his sister's remains for free burial in HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery. Sol and his friend, as well as the HFBA

volunteer *minyán* attended the funeral where *kaddish* was recited.

Natalya B., who had a doctorate in physics and who had written several books, was born in the Ukraine and came to America with her mother in the early 1980's. Natalya died at the age of eighty five in a nursing home with no known living relatives. Three weeks after her death, an employee in the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner called us. We located Rabbi K. who had been Natalya's health care proxy who was upset that the burial had been delayed, as twenty five years ago he had promised Natalya that he would ensure her a proper, and timely, Jewish burial. Ultimately, Natalya was laid to rest in Mount Richmond Cemetery, with her friend and confidante, Rabbi K., in attendance.

**Names changed to protect confidentiality.*

HFBA's Silver Lake and Other Old American Jewish Cemeteries

HFBFA's refurbishment of Silver Lake Cemetery, currently in its initial stages as described in a previous issue of the *Chesed*, is part of a larger community effort to preserve and document Jewish history and historical sites throughout the United States.

As Jewish communities flourished in America over the last centuries, their members established synagogues, *mikvaot* (ritual baths), kosher butcher shops and Hebrew schools. They created social welfare systems to take care of their own from cradle to grave, helping new mothers with food and babysitting, visiting the sick and caring for the poor. The need for Jewish cemeteries was addressed by the communities as well.

However, over time and across the nation, many once thriving Jewish towns emptied as people moved to seek opportunities elsewhere and slowly Jewish life trickled where it had once flourished. One of the consequences of this phenomenon was the abandonment of old Jewish cemeteries, many now forgotten and in advanced states of disrepair.

There is a renewed interest in old Jewish cemeteries. Last year, an article in the magazine *Jewish Action* described the recent discoveries of abandoned cemeteries in Newburgh, NY and in Mahanoy City, PA. A book, *A Traveler's Guide to Pioneer Jewish Cemeteries of the California Gold Rush* by Susan Morris which takes the reader on a journey through Jewish graveyards of the old American West, was cited in the *New York Times*. Several Jewish cemetery associations, such as CAJAC (Community Association for Jewish At-Risk Cemeteries) and JCANA (Jewish Cemetery Association of North America) have, as part of their missions, the identification and restoration of abandoned Jewish cemeteries across the United States and Canada.

Old cemeteries are part of our heritage and are important resources for learning about our history as American Jews.



MONUMENT
IN SILVER LAKE
CEMETERY

Dear HFBA

HFBA receives many letters from people who have had experience with our organization. Below are a few recent examples. Client names have been changed to protect confidentiality.



I am so impressed by the compassion, efficiency and professionalism of the Hebrew Free Burial Association, especially of Helen (HFBA staff member), who helped me immensely when my brother Paul E. passed away. I had never planned a funeral before and she calmly, clearly and compassionately helped me during every step of the terrible process. The rabbi... performed a beautiful ceremony and put together a moving and appropriate eulogy from anecdotes that my brother's friends and I provided a few hours before the event. Your organization offers a wonderful service to those in need and I'm very thankful to have found out about it... Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

A.T.

I would like to thank you... for what you did for my Uncle Bert... He had a very sad life but his one wish was to be buried among Jews and I am eternally grateful for your help.

G.J.

I am the Jewish chaplain at Woodhull Medical Center, a city hospital in Brooklyn, NY. A month ago exactly, as the rain poured down and when we expected miles and miles of snow, I was at the Hebrew Free Burial cemetery in Staten Island for the funeral of a longtime patient.

I had known Paul Atkins for nine years, during much of which time he was often a patient—and during which time he increasingly embraced the Judaism in which he was not reared. We co responded when he was away in prison, his commitment to Judaism increasing during that time. He returned to Brooklyn... (for) an extended admission.

... (HFBA staff member) Helen Volshonok called me soon after his death... as she tried to determine his eligibility for burial through your organization. I was so impressed by her dogged attempts to learn anything and everything that would make that determination correct.

... (At the funeral) Rabbi Plafker and I spoke at length as we awaited the family, and then we headed out, in the mud. I was so moved by the service, by Rabbi Plafker's reverence, and by that of the grave diggers, who, while not sharing our faith, clearly knew what they were doing was of the utmost importance; they bowed their heads at service's end.

What you do is truly holy work, giving every Jew a proper burial... To know that every Jew—every Jew—will be accorded such treatment, that in death we are as we should be in life, is deeply moving.

May the work of your organization, and the many fine people in it, continue to be blessed; may it continue to be a blessing to all the Jewish people, a blessing to the Holy One.

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for the service that your company provides. Having had to make arrangements once before and experienced the insensitivity of some people and institutions, it was a weight lifted off my already burdened shoulders. The service with the ten volunteers (minyan) was so unexpected. The rabbi was wonderful and the prayers, soothing. Thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

L.V.

My brother Morris F. was buried at your cemetery. We, the mourners, were so impressed... Beginning with Rabbi Plafker's burial ceremony which was conducted with so much respect. Every word he said was said with meaning... I don't know if you really understand how people appreciate the godly work you are doing...

M.D.

Chaplain Rita Sherman

Department of Pastoral Care, Woodhull Medical Center

Q&A

Q: If a Jew converted to another religion but later regretted his choice, is he allowed to be buried in a Jewish cemetery?

A: Yes, if he regretted his choice and returned to Judaism as he had previously practiced, he may be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

HFBA's Annual Spring Community Chesed Day

Held on April 14, this bi-annual event attracted dozens of people dedicated to the *mitzvah* of *chesed shel emet*. With enthusiasm, good cheer and strong arms, they cleaned and cleared the accumulated winter debris in HFBA's Silver Lake Cemetery in Staten Island, HFBA's first burial grounds dating to 1892. This cemetery contains 13,600 graves and is currently in the first stages of a major restoration.

Many thanks to all our volunteers, who helped clean and clear debris from the grounds of Silver Lake Cemetery over the last several months.

Thanks to the following groups:

- Rav Teitz Mesivta Academy
- Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey
- Oheb Shalom Congregation Men's Club
- Yeshiva University High School for Girls
- Davetrek Adventures
- North Shore Hebrew Academy High School
- The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School
- The Frisch School
- The Solomon Schechter School of Queens

Save the Date!

**HFBA's Parshat Chayei Sara
Community Chesed Day
in Silver Lake Cemetery**

Sunday, October 27, 2013 • 10AM-12PM

HFBA's New Board Members:

Charles Greinsky, Staten Island, NY
Herman Herskovic, Staten Island, NY
Robert Marcus, Riverdale, NY
Linda Levi Tarlow, Teaneck, NJ

If you would like to get involved with HFBA's important work, we would appreciate hearing from you! Please call Executive Director Amy Koplou at the HFBA office.



DAVETREK ADVENTURES



OHEB SHALOM CONGREGATION MEN'S CLUB



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



THE FRISCH SCHOOL



NORTH SHORE HEBREW ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

BELOW ARE TRANSLATED SUMMARIES OF THE
ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE OF *CHESED*.

По всей Америке число погребений для малоимущих растёт

В нескольких недавних статьях в американской прессе обсуждается возросшее число погребений незатребованных тел, а также тех, чьи родственники не могут оплатить похороны. Государственные инстанции во многих штатах приходят к выводу, что рецессия уменьшила во многих семьях средства на похороны и погребение. Статистика Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро (HFBA) подтверждает это наблюдение: число проводимых нами погребений между 2008 и 2012 годами возросло на 25%.

Если усопшего некому хоронить, чиновники здравоохранения штата пытаются разыскать ближайших родственников. Если таковые не находятся, с телом усопшего поступают так, как принято в данном регионе. В городе Нью-Йорке незатребованные тела хоронят в общих могилах на острове Харт. Погребения проводят заключённые, которых присылает управление тюрем. В других штатах тела могут кремировать или использовать для медицинских исследований. Согласно еврейской традиции обе эти процедуры запрещены.

HFBA находится в постоянном контакте с нью-йоркским офисом главного паталогоанатома штата и согласует все организационные моменты для проведения похорон согласно еврейским религиозным обрядам для всех евреев, у кого нет близких.

Наша деятельность зависит от щедрости наших спонсоров. Мы обеспечиваем достойные похороны любому еврею, вне зависимости от достатка и наличия родственников или друзей. Миссия HFBA уникальна – хоронить евреев среди своего народа, с уважением и достоинством, которые заслуживает каждый.

Нам пишут

HFBA получает множество писем от наших клиентов. Ниже мы приводим выдержки из некоторых писем. Имена изменены.*

Я под большим впечатлением от профессионализма в сочетании с сочувствием и добротой ваших сотрудников, особенно Хелен (сотрудник офиса HFBA), которая очень помогла мне после кончины моего брата, Пола И*. Я никогда раньше не организовывала похороны, и Хелен спокойно, чётко и с пониманием направляла меня на каждом этапе этого нелёгкого процесса. Раввин провёл красивую церемонию и произнёс прочувственную речь, вставив в него эпизоды из жизни брата. Ваша организация оказывает бесценную услугу нуждающимся, и я благодарна судьбе, что вовремя узнала о вашей работе. Спасибо от всей души.

А.Т.

Хочу поблагодарить вас за то, что вы сделали для моего дяди Берта. Невесёлая у него была жизнь, но его сокровенным

желанием было, чтобы его похоронили среди евреев. Остаюсь навеки благодарным,

Д. Ж.

HFBA помогает

• Дороти П. скончалась во Флориде в возрасте сорока девяти лет. Её брат Сол, живущий в Нью-Йорке, хотел, чтобы тело Дороти было кремировано. Наш раввин провел почти месяц, отговаривая Сола. К тому же тот хотел лишь минимально участвовать в оплате похорон. В итоге Сол согласился оплатить перевоз тела сестры в Нью-Йорк, где были проведены похороны на принадлежащем HFBA кладбище Маунт Ричмонд. На церемонии присутствовали Сол, его друг и миньян из добровольцев, которые прочитали поминальную молитву (*кадиш*).

• Наталья Б., кандидат наук по физике и автор нескольких книг, родилась на Украине. Она приехала в Америку со своей матерью в начале 80-х. Наталья скончалась в возрасте восьмидесяти пяти лет в доме для престарелых, и у неё не было родственников. Через три недели после её кончины нам позвонил сотрудник нью-йоркского офиса главного паталогоанатома. Тогда мы смогли разыскать раввина К.*, который по завещанию Натальи должен был решать медицинские вопросы в случае серьёзной болезни. Тот был расстроен задержкой с похоронами, поскольку ещё 25 лет назад он обещал Наталье, что её похоронят без задержек и согласно еврейской традиции. В конце концов Наталья была предана земле на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд. Раввин К.*, её друг и доверитель, присутствовал на похоронах.

Старые еврейские кладбища Америки

По мере роста благосостояния американских еврейских общин в последние несколько сот лет их члены возводили синагоги, строили *миквы* (места ритуального омовения), кошерные магазины, еврейские школы и – в том числе – еврейские кладбища. Однако со временем некогда процветавшие еврейские поселения пустели по мере того, как члены общины разъезжались в другие места. Постепенно еврейская жизнь замедлялась или замирала совсем. Одним из последствий этого процесса было запустение еврейских кладбищ, многие из которых сегодня забыты и находятся в разных стадиях разрушения.

В наши дни, многие похоронные общества взяли на себя задачу разыскать и восстановить покинутые еврейские кладбища на территории Америки и Канады.

Старые кладбища – часть нашего наследия. Они являются важным источником сведений о нашей истории -- истории американского еврейства.

HFBA Annual Riverdale Community Breakfast

The annual HFBA Riverdale Community Breakfast was held on March 3rd at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. Over one hundred forty people came to support HFBA and honorees Andrea Cohen Harris, a former HFBA Board member and the chair of previous HFBA Riverdale Community Breakfasts, and Ezra and Sherry House, who, among their many *chesed* projects, are committed supporters of the work and mission of HFBA.



Standing l-r: Robert Marcus, Andrew Feinman, Paul Lowenthal, Charles Greinsky, Paul H. Nagelberg, HFBA Board members.
Seated l-r: Amy Koplow, HFBA Executive Director; Ezra House and Andrea Cohen Harris, Breakfast honorees; Minna Seitelman, HFBA Board member

*HFBA thanks the family and friends of **Herbert M. Stein** who have so generously donated to HFBA in his memory. We particularly want to thank **Susan Stein** for the couple's longtime support of HFBA and for introducing others to our unique and important work. May Mrs. Stein enjoy many more years in good health and may Mr. Stein's memory be for a blessing.*

CHESED SHEL EMET – HOW YOU CAN HELP

CONTRIBUTE to HFBA to ensure an annual *Yahrzeit* reminder for your lost loved ones.

INSTITUTE a perpetual *Yahrzeit Kaddish* for your loved one for a donation of \$180.

ARRANGE for *kaddish* to be said for the eleven month mourning period following a death of a relative or friend for a donation of \$360.

REMEMBER to include HFBA in your will with a bequest.

ESTABLISH an HFBA Forever Gift Annuity or Charitable Trust Plan. In addition to the guaranteed income and tax benefits, these plans ensure that HFBA's promise of a Jewish burial to future generations of indigent Jews will be fulfilled.

CELEBRATE a *simcha* or commemorate a loss with HFBA cards.

Cards cost \$18 and can include a personalized message.

PLACE HFBA *tzedakah* boxes in a house of shiva or in your home, school or local kosher establishment.

ENROLL a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our "Mitzvah Circle" by suggesting a gift to HFBA to your guests. The generous child who shares his/her *simcha* in this way receives a framed certificate.

DONATE unused graves. If the graves are not part of a burial society or family plot and are located in New York or New Jersey, please



consider donating them to HFBA and receiving a tax deduction for your gift.

SPONSOR perpetual grave care for an indigent's grave for \$600.

VOLUNTEER with your friends, classmates, fellow group members, or family at our cemeteries as part of our Cemetery Clean-Up Project.

GIVE us your old *talleisim* for use as part of the dress for deceased men who HFBA will be called upon to bury.

USE your clerical skills in our midtown office as a volunteer.

GET INVOLVED as a professional with HFBA by donating your expertise and skills in an area that can help us.

DONATE your property, used vehicle or boat and receive a generous tax donation.

PLEASE HELP OUT TODAY BY SENDING A DONATION IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.