

CHESED

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CHESED BEGINS PUBLICATION

We are often asked by our contributors and friends interested in our work for information and updates on the Hebrew Free Burial Association. As we become better known, more people are curious about the largest free burial society in the Diaspora.

To answer your questions and keep you informed, we have created Chesed, a triennial newsletter designed to bring our work to you.

Chesed includes current events, history, plans and other news of interest.

Please share Chesed with your friends and colleagues. Additional copies are available through our office (212-686-2433). And of course, our office staff is always available to answer your questions.

EXTENSIVE CEMETERY MAINTENANCE PLAN BEGINS Tremendous Improvements Seen in First Weeks



Mt. Richmond Cemetery following Spring landscaping

As the Hebrew Free Burial Association begins its second century of service to the Jewish community, it has put into action an aggressive plan to upgrade and maintain our two historic cemeteries at Mt. Richmond and Silver Lake, both on Staten Island.

“Our cemeteries are an important part of American Jewish history,” stated HFBA president Gerald E. Feldhamer. “They represent a side of our experience that people often do not know or think about when we discuss the success stories of American Jews. The cemeteries must be maintained so that all who want can come to visit them.”

The immediate goal is to restore the cemeteries to “visiting condition”. As many who have come to see the graves of loved ones have discovered, the ongoing strike called by our caretakers last year had left

many graves inaccessible. In the beginning of the spring, when grass began to grow anew, many graves, common areas and roads were overgrown with greenery. As visitors ourselves, we were pained by what we saw.

As a result of the landscaping program, conditions at the cemeteries have improved dramatically. Walkways are now clear. All graves are accessible. Grass that had grown unfettered for almost a year was cut down. As important, we now have an ongoing maintenance contract with a land-

scaper to ensure that the cemetery will remain available to all who wish to come.

All this comes at a price, of course. The cost for the initial cleanup was in the five figures. HFBA has begun a special fundraising campaign to pay for the initial and ongoing landscaping costs. Additionally, as treasurer Jack M. Gross commented, "We are hopeful that the community will respond as they see the hard work and excellent progress we've already made at the cemeteries."

HFBA "SECOND CENTURY" BEGINS

Extensive Outreach Will Renovate Cemeteries, Expand Outreach To New York Area Poor

One hundred years ago, a group of committed individuals came together for the express purpose of ensuring that indigent Jews be buried with the decorum and dignity our tradition demands. Their goal was to make sure that every poor Jew receive a Jewish funeral and be buried with his brethren. That remains our top priority today.

Now, with the wisdom that comes with age, we are taking a close look at our secondary priority: safeguarding the important part of American Jewish history that HFBA represents. Under the direction of president Gerald E. Feldhamer, the board of directors has outlined several steps for renewing our cemeteries. Over the course of the next years, the Hebrew Free Burial Association will embark on an ambitious program to:

Identify each grave with a simple stone



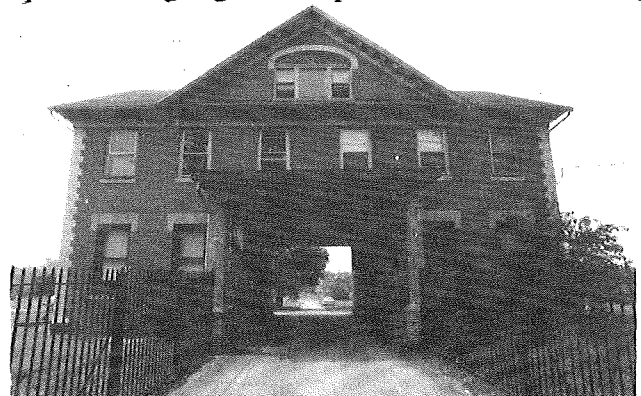
Section of unmarked graves needing footstones

footstone. Currently, all graves are marked on a map. We want each person to be known by name by visitors to the cemetery.

Renovate the chapel at Mt. Richmond cemetery. Part of our unique caretaker's cottage, the chapel dates back to the earliest years of this century. Our aim is to reopen the chapel as a place for meditation and repose for mourners and visitors.

Creation of an outdoor garden and seating area. As part of our redesigned cemetery, we will create a simple garden and seating area for meditation in the common area overlooking the gravesites of Mt. Richmond.

These three steps are the foundation of a multi-year program that will both build upon our past and highlight an important era in our history.



Mt. Richmond Cottage containing historic chapel

GERALD E. FELDHAMER RE-ELECTED PRESIDENT

Gerald E. Feldhamer was unanimously re-elected president of the HFBA at the Association's annual meeting in March, 1989.

"Gerald Feldhamer has demonstrated unique leadership abilities, taking the helm of the organization and guiding us through one of the roughest transitions of recent memory," said Maurice Spanbock, HFBA's past president. "During Mr. Feldhamer's first term, Harry Moskowitz, our esteemed executive vice president for over 40 years, retired from full-time service. Gerry worked tirelessly to bring a new management team to the organization and working to make sure that HFBA moved forward. Under his direction, HFBA has embarked on several ambitious programs to raise funds for the renovation of our cemeteries and build our endowment for burials and perpetual care."

At the meeting, Mr. Feldhamer introduced

Harry Moskowitz' successor, Dr. Alan A. Manheim. Dr. Manheim, a psychologist and administrator by training, was previously the executive director of the Jerusalem Elwyn Institutes, a school for handicapped children in Israel. As director, Dr. Manheim

built a donor constituency for the school, raising funds across the United States and Canada and building the institution from a dream to a reality with an annual budget of several million dollars.

"We are fortunate to have Dr. Manheim's services," said Mr. Feldhamer. "I and the rest of the board of directors look forward to working together with him to realize our goals and grow."

Along with Mr. Feldhamer, Jack M. Gross' accomplishments as treasurer were affirmed when he was re-

elected to that position. Sanford M. Ward and Lawrence Gorfinkle were re-elected vice presidents.



Gerald E. Feldhamer

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION One Hundred Years of Service to the Jewish Community

Although the Hebrew Free Burial Association began its mission of burying indigent Jews in the middle years of the 1880's, the organization incorporated as a charity 100 years ago this year.

This formality started HFBA on a course that would eventually encompass the entire New York area and provide a final resting place for over 50,000 Jews.

To celebrate its centennial of service, the board of directors recently authorized an extensive fundraising campaign designed to improve the design, appearance and accessibility of our cemeteries at Silver Lake and Mt. Richmond on Staten Island (see related article). The first phase of the project will oversee the upgrading of the cemeteries themselves. Long range plans include the creation of educational materials about the oldest parts of the cemeteries for use by educators and students of American Jewish history.

"Unfortunately, many people who came to America to make their fortunes found that the streets of the *Goldena Medina* were not really paved with gold. Their experiences are an important part of the Jewish

generational chain," explained president Gerald E. Feldhamer. "Many of these people formed the backbone of the garment district, the labor movement and other trends which have profoundly affected American and Jewish life today. Many died fighting for our country or after sacrificing their own goals so that their children would be materially successful. Their lives must be viewed with the worth and dignity Judaism gives to each individual."

One hundred years of history.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association began on the Lower East Side, the response to a desperate need among New York's newest and poorest Jewish immigrants. With disease rampant in the tenements and few immigrants able to afford a doctor, death was common. It was every family's dreaded fear that they would not be able to afford a simple funeral and Jewish burial for a loved one. Families saved for such eventualities, but the harshness of daily living often made their meager savings inadequate.

Against that background, a group of concerned men founded the HFBA to ensure that no family would be forced to suffer the indignity of consigning a loved one to a mass grave in a pauper's field or beg for charity during their time of greatest sorrow. The HFBA guaranteed a Jewish funeral and burial to any Jew in need. HFBA formed its own *Chevra Kadisha*, or burial society, to take care of the ritual requirements for burial. A rabbi intoned the prayers for the dead and saw that the body was buried with the dignity demanded by our tradition. Thus, poor Jews were assured that the lack of funds that separated them from their more affluent Jewish brethren in life would not keep them apart in death.

The first HFBA burials took place in Queens. Before long, however, the directors took the important step of buying and consecrating a graveyard in Staten Island. Silver Lake Cemetery filled up

quickly and a second cemetery was acquired nearby. That cemetery, Mt. Richmond, is still in use by HFBA today.

Unfortunately, the need for HFBA services then, as now, was great. The Association buried hundreds of children who died as each of the influenza and diphtheria epidemics swept through the tenements of Jewish ghettos. Many of the Jewish victims of the Triangle Shirt Co. fire of 1911 are buried at Mt. Richmond. Sons who fought in the World Wars were laid to rest by parents who wanted their children to be buried in Jewish cemeteries.

The earliest fundraising for HFBA was done in the ghettos themselves. Families kept *pushkas*, or charity boxes in their homes, the funds earmarked for HFBA. The board of directors moved their efforts uptown as well, visiting many of the prominent Jews of the day to enlist their help. In fact, a canvas of HFBA records shows that families like the Guggenheims and Strausses were among HFBA donors. New York Jewry appeared to be united on this front: a Jewish burial was the right of every Jew.

Today, HFBA operates in much the same way as it did 100 years ago. Despite the myth of Jewish affluence, pockets of poverty still exist and our services are requested over 200 times every year. Just as in the first years of our existence, and poor Jew can be buried according to Jewish tradition in a Jewish cemetery through the HFBA. And we are determined that until every Jew has the means to pay for his or her own funeral and burial, we will continue to be there for the Jewish community of New York.



Remember the Hebrew Free Burial Association in your will

Your bequest will help build our endowment, assuring every Jew the opportunity to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.