

# CHESED

Published by the Hebrew Free Burial Association  
1170 Broadway • Room 912 • New York, NY 10001

Volume 1 Number 3

September 1990 • Tishrei 5741

## NEW CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON SYNAGOGUE CONTRIBUTIONS

In the Jewish communities of pre-war Europe, the free burial society was an important part of synagogue life. Poor Jewish families knew they could turn to this group in times of need and that their dead would be buried according to Jewish tradition.

As New York's Jewish community grew, the need for a larger free burial society became apparent. Over time, the Hebrew Free Burial Association was asked to take on larger responsibilities until it became the only citywide agency providing free funerals for indigent Jews. Now we are completing the circle by formally involving synagogues in burying the Jewish poor once again.

The synagogue campaign formally kicks off this year on *Shabbat Chayei Sarah*, Saturday, November 17. Rabbis across the New York region have been asked to speak about the importance of free burial and the Hebrew Free Burial Association's role within the New York Jewish community.

They also have been requested to enlist their congregation's active participation in this important *mitzvah*.

"One of the first *parshiot* we read in the Torah describes the death of Sarah and the purchase of her grave by our forefather, Abraham. It is a most appropriate time for rabbis and their congregations to reflect on Jewish burial and on the need to extend ourselves to assure that every Jew can be buried with his brethren," explained HFBA president Gerald E. Feldhamer. Mr. Feldhamer is spearheading the campaign within synagogues.

Congregations may become involved in the campaign on several levels. The rabbi may choose to hold a formal appeal for HFBA or request that congregants make their own donations to the agency. Or congregations can make a multi-year commitment to erect a number of simple footstones as part of  
*continued on page 3*

## SECOND CENTURY CAMPAIGN RECEIVES FIRST BEQUESTS

Every Jew has a name. A face. A story. Those who are buried in our two historic cemeteries are no exceptions. However, thousands who are buried at Mt. Richmond and Silver Lake cemeteries left no families or friends to erect monuments over the graves. The result is that they are known only on our maps.

Last year, HFBA's board of directors began a project to provide each unmarked gravesite with a simple footstone. The program was included as part of our overall Second Century campaign to renovate our historic cemeteries.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association gratefully acknowledges the first two bequests directed towards this effort. The estate of Robert Wittenberg and the estate of Selma Harris, in memory of Selma B. Harris and William C. Harris, have made substantial grants to the program. These monies will make it possible to erect over 100 footstones in a section to be determined. The markers will be purchased shortly.

A bequest to the Hebrew Free Burial Association's Second Century campaign helps to ensure that free burial remains a reality for indigent Jews throughout the New York area. Contributions can be made to aid our endowment that under-



Hundreds of currently unmarked gravesites will soon receive simple footstones like this one as part of the HFBA Second Century campaign.

writes the cost of burials, to the cemetery renovation project, or to both. Major gift and naming opportunities are available.

Bequests and major gifts will be acknowledged on a special donor plaque in the Mt. Richmond sanctuary. For further information on contributions and bequests please contact Jack M. Gross, treasurer, at 212 686-2433.

## HFBA WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Two years ago, after an exhaustive search, Dr. Alan Manheim was chosen as the second executive director in over 40 years. This summer the board accepted Dr. Manheim's resignation with deep regret when he announced his plans to make *aliyah* with his family.

On August 1, 1990, his responsibilities were assumed by our new administrator, Mrs. Sandra Wiesel. Mrs. Wiesel was previously the executive director of the Hillcrest Jewish Center, a major communal institution with over 1,000 members. She brings to HFBA several solid years of management and administrative experience, computer know-how, new development ideas and boundless energy.

Joining Mrs. Wiesel is Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, associate administrator, who is based at our cemeteries in Richmond, New York. Rabbi Plafker worked in private industry before he joined the HFBA this spring. His responsibilities include overseeing the two cemeteries and supervising renovation and



Administrator Sandra Wiesel and administrative assistant Anna Leist review an application for burial and reimbursement. Much of the office work is now done by computer, allowing HFBA's office to operate efficiently and cost-effectively.



Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, executive assistant, has primary responsibility for the functioning and maintenance of our two historic cemeteries.

maintenance efforts. Rabbi Plafker, who conducts all funerals at the cemetery, received his rabbinical ordination from the Rabbi Jacob Joseph seminary.

Mrs. Wiesel and Rabbi Plafker work alongside longtime administrative assistant Anna Leist. Mrs. Leist's extraordinary "people skills" are put to use daily as she consoles the families and friends of indigent Jews who need our services.

"Dr. Alan Manheim created new administrative systems that allowed us to operate more efficiently and paved the way for our development efforts. We are sorry to lose him. Our only consolation is that Alan will be using his talents to benefit the State of Israel," stated Gerald Feldhamer.

"We are confident that the talent and ability Sandra Wiesel demonstrated as executive director of the Hillcrest Jewish Center will help us accomplish our mission to the Jewish community of New York. She is ably assisted by Rabbi Plafker, whose presence at our cemeteries has aided our renovation efforts and assures that funerals proceed efficiently and respectfully, and by Mrs. Leist. We look forward to having this highly qualified team with us for a long time," he concluded.

## MICROFILMING OF HFBA RECORDS BEGINS

### One Hundred Years of History on Reels

Like many small organizations, HFBA's tiny staff took little notice of our extensive records once they were stored in the basement of our Mt. Richmond sanctuary. Unlike many organizations, HFBA's records are a treasure trove of Jewish history, a compilation of the haves and have nots of the last century. But they were in danger of being lost forever as time and adverse weather and storage conditions took their toll.

The agency's burial and contribution records will soon be made available to students and scholars interested in this part of the American Jewish story thanks to a grant from UJA/Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. The funding has made it possible for us to begin the arduous task of

organizing and microfilming a century of records. A microfilm reader will allow easy access to the records.

The first step, organizing HFBA's massive amounts of client lists, burial records and contributors, has already been undertaken by volunteer archivists. Archival Survival, specialists in microfilming damaged and fragile material, has completed work on the initial section, records dating from 1897 to 1919.

"I am pleased to report that this project has proceeded on schedule and should be completed as anticipated by the end of 1990," treasurer Jack M. Gross told the board of directors. "The material will be available to students and scholars at that time."

## SILVER LAKE COTTAGE TO BE REBUILT

Halloween 1988. A devastating fire swept through the cottage at Silver Lake Cemetery. Luckily, no one was hurt, but the cottage's interior was destroyed and the building rendered uninhabitable.

After a year of investigations by the New York Police Department, fire marshals and our insurance companies, the caretaker's cottage at Silver Lake cemetery is about to be rebuilt.

The cottage renovation is part of an overall plan to better utilize three existing buildings at the site in order to enhance the efficiency of the cemetery and the comfort of visitors. An unused garage will become storage facilities and a third, smaller building will be turned into the cemetery office.

Shmuel Plafker announced that Calvanico Associates has been retained to complete property and land use surveys and to file necessary applications and permits with municipal agencies. Renovations are scheduled to begin as soon as permits are granted, probably during the early winter.

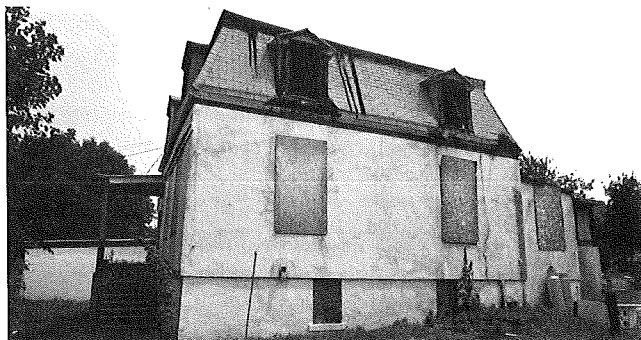
### HFBA PARTICIPATION IN PASSAGE TO FREEDOM PROGRAM RECOGNIZED BY UJA/FEDERATION

As Soviet Jews leave the USSR in record numbers, the entire Jewish community has mobilized to speed their adjustment to life in a free country. For the Hebrew Free Burial Association, the large numbers of Soviet Jews who will settle in New York will mean more people in need of our service.

"Unfortunately, some of these people are already old or sick before they and their families can get on their feet and become financially independent, many of these families will suffer the loss of a loved one and have nowhere else to turn," said Gerald Feldhamer. "When that happens, we will be ready to provide poor Soviet Jews with the Jewish burial they could not have had in the Soviet Union."

HFBA's involvement with an increased number of Soviet Jewish families has been recognized by UJA/Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. UJA/Federation recently announced it would renew HFBA's grant for burial of Soviet Jews as part of the Passage to Freedom program.

"A significant portion of our caseload comes from the Soviet Jewish community. We are grateful for Federation's recognition and help in meeting the costs of burying indigent Soviet Jews," continued Feldhamer.



The cottage at Silver Lake following the fire that destroyed the interior spaces. When completed, the cottage will be habitable once again.

"The surveys and applications are the first steps in the rebuilding process," he explained. "We believe that will alleviate the unauthorized "visitors" and occasional vandalism that has plagued the cemetery." He added that armed guards currently patrol the cemetery at night.

### INCREASED SECURITY PLANNED FOR HALLOWEEN

It starts as a night of trick or treating and "harmless" pranks. But too often, Halloween ends up as an orgy of vandalism in cemeteries. Plans are being laid now to assure that our cemeteries are protected throughout the night.

Silver Lake, the scene of a 1988 Halloween fire that destroyed the cottage, will be patrolled the entire evening by armed guards assigned to the cemetery. Their presence is intended to deter any "visitors" intent on roaming through the grounds or making mischief.

Mt. Richmond will be watched throughout the night by armed security patrols. Since a tenant moved into the cottage on cemetery grounds, vandalism has been cut significantly. Additionally, the local police precinct has been very responsive to complaints of loitering and vandalism at Mt. Richmond and we expect their vigilance to continue on Halloween.

---

*continued from page 1*

our Second Century renovation project. The commitment of each group will be recognized publicly at Mt. Richmond cemetery.

Letters to congregational rabbis describing the campaign and recruiting their active participation have already been sent as part of the campaign. HFBA will also provide materials and speakers to congregational groups interested in becoming part of this important effort. Interested synagogue members and officers are invited to call HFBA's administrator for more information at 212 686-2433.

## NEW LOOK FOR CEMETERIES — THANKS TO SECOND CENTURY PROJECTS

In a previous issue of CHESED, we reported that necessary landscaping and maintenance work at our two cemeteries had opened roads and paths and made all graves accessible again. Work has now begun on the second phase of the maintenance plan, righting tombstones, setting foundations and marking sections.

Our landscape maintenance consultant is pouring foundations for scores of graves, clearing the backlog of foundation requests dating back to July, 1988. New foundations are also being set to right stones that have turned or fallen over as a result of age or vandalism.

Said Second Century Campaign chairman Stanley Kaplan, "Our goal is to repair foundations that eroded through the years, causing the stones to fall over and right every stone that has fallen, regardless of the reason.

"While other cemeteries are usually able to recover the cost of righting stones, many of the fallen stones in our cemeteries belong to people who have no families left to care for the graves. Some belong to families who cannot afford the charge. So we have taken it upon ourselves to accomplish this difficult task as part of our Second Century cemetery renovation program. We believe our cemeteries should look as respectable as every other cemetery in the area."



**Rows of tombstones that had fallen over have already been righted by our landscape consultants. However, new foundations and repairs are needed for hundreds more before the task is finished.**

Additionally, section markers will soon be ordered for both cemeteries. The weatherproof markers will clearly delineate each section, making it easier and more comfortable for visitors to locate graves. The markers are scheduled to be installed before the winter months.

1170 Broadway • Room 912  
New York, N.Y. 10001

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
New York, N.Y.  
Permit No. 3301