

CHESED

CHEVRA AGUDATH
ACHIM CHESED
SHEL EMETH

A Publication of *The Hebrew Free Burial Association, 1170 Broadway, Room 912, New York, N.Y. 10001*

VOLUME 3

NUMBER 1

September 1991 Tishrei 5752

TRAGIC STORY HAS A HAPPY ENDING

When Fannie Kaplan died in 1928, her immigrant parents were too poor to pay for her funeral. They turned to the Hebrew Free Burial Association for help and little Fannie was interred in Mt. Richmond Cemetery.

Her parents could never afford to erect a simple stone monument to her memory. So, like thousands of other children interred in Mt. Richmond cemetery, Fannie Kaplan lay for decades with no headstone to mark her grave.

This June, at a special graveside unveiling for 75 children, Fannie Kaplan received her monument. Her case had been adopted by the Westchester Jewish Center, whose members donated the funds necessary to purchase the headstone.

The story might have ended there, but for an article on the unveiling published in the **New York Post**. For among the readers of the newspaper that day was Bernard Kaplan, Fannie's older brother.

"Accidentally I turned to page 23 of the **New York Post**," he wrote that day. "To my amazement and mixed emotions, I read about my little sister, Fannie. Now I am a man of 71 years old. At the time our parents only explained that she was buried in Staten Island by a Jewish organization. We were never told the name of the cemetery or the location of the plot."

Bernard was only eight years old when Fannie died. For the rest of his life, he carried the memory of his little sister inside, wondering where she was buried.

"It was truly a miracle."

"It was like something that came out of the sky," Bernard told us in a phone conversation. "My parents were immigrants who never mastered English. When we asked they told us she was buried in Staten Island, but I don't think they even knew where. For sixty years, I felt helpless whenever I thought about Fannie."

Fannie and Bernard came from a close-knit family of 11 children. Her final illness and death is remembered by her brothers and sisters, several of whom have joined Bernard in contributing to the Hebrew Free Burial Association. Finding her grave was extremely emotional for all the siblings. Along with Bernard, they have visited her gravesite for the first time in more than sixty years.

"I thought she was in Potter's Field"

"After sixty years of thinking about Fannie's whereabouts, it has brought me peacefulness within to know she has been found," Bernard wrote. "All these years I thought she was buried in Potter's Field because my parents were extremely poor...I'm grateful to your organization for taking care of her and for your humanitarianism."

The Hebrew Free Burial Association has pledged to mark the tens of thousands of unmarked graves at Mt. Richmond Cemetery as part of the Second Century Campaign. Markers can be sponsored at a cost of approximately \$150.00, when they are ordered and installed in large quantities.

Contributions to the Second Century Campaign can be sent to the HBFA office, Suite 912, 1170 Broadway, New York, NY 10001.

RAINS CAN'T DETER UNVEILING FOR 75 CHILDREN

Under dark gray skies and torrential rains, fifty board members and supporters of the Hebrew Free Burial Association came to Mt. Richmond Cemetery on June 18 to participate in the unveiling of 75 monuments marking the graves of poor children buried in the cemetery.

The 75 headstones, which mark the burial sites of children who died between 1925 and 1942, were acquired as part of the Hebrew Free Burial Association's Second Century campaign, an innovative fund raising project devoted to upgrading and maintaining the Association's two historic cemeteries on Staten Island.

The simple commemorative service began with a brief oration delivered by president Gerald Feldhamer. "These children were born into the unfortunate devastation of poverty, but they were not born into a loveless world. On the contrary, each of the children buried here was loved by a family who cared for them and mourned their deaths. These families had everything parents need to bring up their children — except money. And when their beloved babies were snatched away from them at young ages, they loved them enough to know that they wanted them buried in a Jewish cemetery according to Jewish traditions," he said.

Rabbi Elchanon Zohn, Executive Director of the *Chevrá Kadisha* of Queens and a member of the Association's advisory board, gave a moving graveside *d'var Torah* (sermonette) about the importance of HFBA's work with the Jewish poor. Participants listened closely to Rabbi Zohn's words as the heavens seemed to open up and cry for the 75 children whose deaths were a result of poverty as well as disease. Following Rabbi Zohn's talk, Rabbi Nate Segal of the Springfield Jewish Center - Congregation Shaarre Simcha in Staten Island recited *Kale Mole Rachamim*, the traditional prayer said at the graveside.

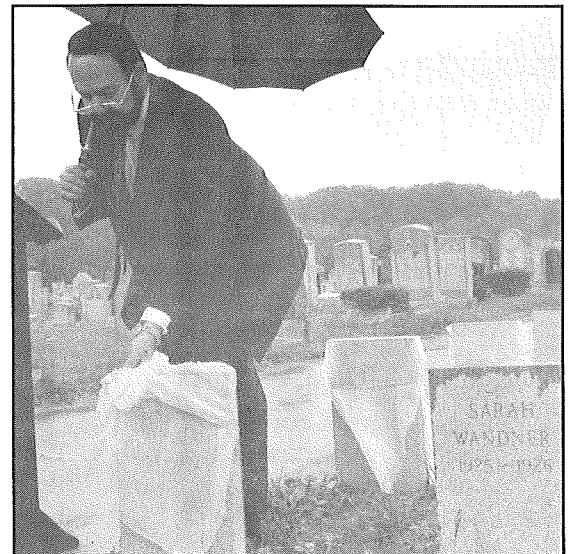


Huddled under umbrellas for shelter against heavy rains, Rabbi Nate Segal (l) recites the traditional prayer for the dead. With him are Rabbi Shmuel Pflaker, associate administrator, Gerald Feldhamer, HFBA president, and Rabbi Elchanon Zohn, member of the Association's advisory board.

Inside the Association's chapel, Mr. Feldhamer read the names of those individuals and institutions that have sponsored the first seventy five monuments. Included in this leadership group are Mr. and Mrs. Gary D. Ambrose; the J.E. and Z.B. Butler Foundation; Mr. and Mrs. Paul Geringer; Dr. and Mrs. Jesse M. Hackell; Mr. and Mrs. Martin Lubell; Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Pearlstein; Mr. and Mrs. Gerald A. Pinsky; Mr. and Mrs. Norman Rosiner; the Rockwood Park Jewish Center; Sisterhood, Hillcrest Jewish Center; Westchester Jewish Center; and the Sisterhood of Temple Beth El, Belle Harbor.

The other side of the American Jewish success story

"The dedication of these monuments represents the beginning of our concerted effort to mark every grave in Mt. Richmond and Silver Lake cemeteries with a simple headstone," Mr. Feldhamer asserted. "Every person buried in our cemeteries deserves to be remembered. They are as important as those whose names are on the tips of our tongues when we think of the growth of the American Jewish community in the last century. Though they are the ones on the bottom rung of the social ladder, though theirs are the feet firmly planted in the mud of poverty, they are our brothers, our sisters, our grandparents, and there, but for the grace of G-d, ourselves."



Gerald Feldhamer unveils one of 75 simple headstones of children buried in Mt. Richmond Cemetery. The monuments were erected as part of the Second Century Campaign.

Graveside Planting to be Regulated

Many families have the custom of planting flowers and shrubs over the graves of their loved ones. The greenery provides a living memorial, and often the annual cycle of renewal gives the bereaved a psychological lift.

Unfortunately, not every plant is appropriate for a graveside. Some of the shrubs and trees planted by loving families can grow to a mature height of 30 to 50 feet. Their roots dig themselves deep into the ground, disturbing graves and even toppling monuments. Flowers which are not routinely watered, weeded and otherwise tended die quickly. Instead of lush color, the grave is covered by dry, brown twigs and debris.

Often visitors to the cemetery are disturbed by the sight of dying plants or shrubs that seem to take over grave areas. We have received many complaints, including some from families whose loved ones' graves were disturbed by overgrown plantings on adjacent plots. Thus, the Association has ratified the following regulations for all new and existing agricultural improvements and alterations.

1. Anyone who wishes to plant any shrub at a grave site must first contact the cemetery office (718 667-0915).
2. We strongly recommend that shrubs be planted only by our landscaping contractor. Arrangements may be made through the office for purchase and care of shrubbery.
3. Under no circumstances may annuals (i.e., mums, coleus plants, etc.) be planted on graves. Flowering plants die quickly when not watered daily and the cemetery has no mechanism to provide this care.

Families and friends who want more information on the new plant policies are invited to call Rabbi Shmuel Plafker at the cemetery office.

CEMETERY TRENCHES NEED REPAIR

Erosion and a high water table have taken its toll at Mt. Richmond cemetery. As the land shifts, rain patterns on and below the surface of the grounds are altered, damaging foundations and causing stones to fall over. Succeeding precipitation exacerbates the predicament.

Early cemetery managers recognized the problem could be solved by digging a series of trenches to channel rainwater to the ends of the rows and then out of the cemetery. Trenches were dug years ago to facilitate the solution. Unfortunately, the trenches themselves have eroded and lost their usefulness over the years. The Hebrew Free Burial Association now plans to redig these deep pathways to once again slow water damage to foundations and monuments.

The work will be done as part of the ongoing Second Century Campaign, according to treasurer Jack Gross. The Association is still seeking donors to cover the cost of plotting and redigging the trenches, estimated to be \$5,200.

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

Your contributions have made a tremendous difference to the Hebrew Free Burial Association. Donations to our operating fund and to our Second Century Campaign have allowed us to complete several important ongoing projects in 1990, including

1. Providing 258 indigent Jews with a dignified Jewish funeral and burial. Approximately 40 percent of our caseload consisted of Soviet-born recent immigrants. This was an increase from 1989 and we anticipate a further increase in both the percentage and the actual numbers in 1991.
2. Laying of gravel to provide dry ground for parking at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. No longer are cars forced to park in mud on rainy days. Visitors do not have to contend with damp feet or muddy shoes when stepping out of their cars.
3. Installation of section markers. New section markers make it easier for guests to find their way at the cemetery.
4. Grass seeding of new section of cemetery. As the grass takes root, we expect this section to turn green from its present brownish color. This will improve the overall appearance of the cemetery and lighten the hearts of those whose loved ones are buried in this section.

5. Clearing and levelling of large areas overgrown and/or littered with debris. This is part of our ongoing effort to maintain the cemeteries in a dignified manner befitting Jewish burial grounds.

DID YOU KNOW...

Your contribution to the Hebrew Free Burial Association can be made in honor or in memory of a special person in your life. Birthdays, anniversaries, *yartzheits*, graduations, weddings and other events can all be commemorated through the organization involved in *Chesed Shel Emeth*, the ultimate Jewish charity.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association will send a card to the person you designate informing them of your thoughtful gift.

To make a donation today, simply return the enclosed card with your check.

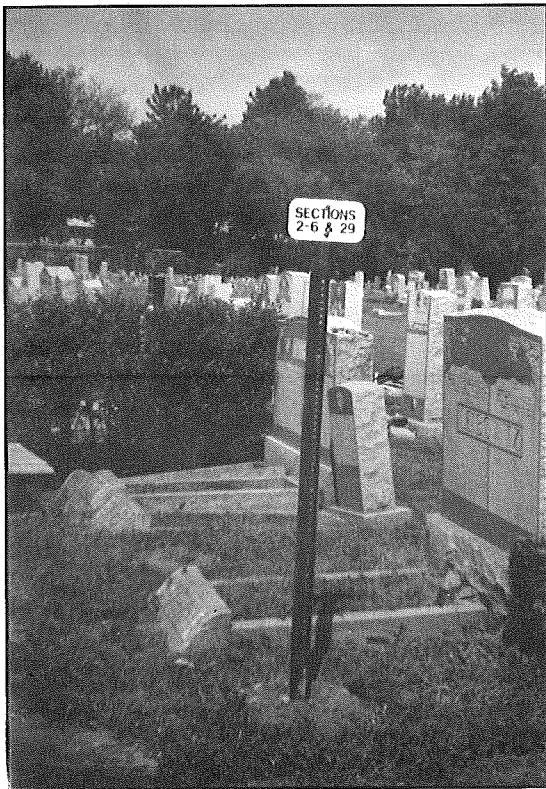
HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION FORMING CHEVRA KADISHA

Jewish tradition explains in great detail the process of preparing a body for burial. The rituals that comprise this important *mitzvah* are performed by a *Chevra Kadisha*, literally a burial society, which assures that care is taken to give the body the respect that Jewish law demands.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association is in the process of forming a *Chevra Kadisha* for men and a corresponding society for women. Volunteers will be trained and assisted by experienced *Chevra* members.

The ritual of *tahara*, cleansing the body and preparing it for burial, is performed at night. The Hebrew Free Burial Association group will use the facilities of an established funeral home in Brooklyn.

Men and women who are interested in volunteering for the *Chevra Kadisha* are urged to contact Rabbi Shmuel Plafker at 718 667-0915 for more information. Prior experience is not needed. Sensitivity, a good heart and a desire to help others are the only requirements.



Section markers like this one help visitors to locate graves. Section markers have been installed throughout the cemetery as part of the Second Century Campaign.

FROM THE MAILBOX



To: Mr. Jack Gross, Treasurer
Hebrew Free Burial Association

Dear Mr. Gross:

About ten years ago, when I was teaching English to newly-arrived Russian immigrants, one of my students had to find a burial place for her sister, who had come to the USA with her. You provided her with that place.

Some years later her husband died. Unfortunately, their finances had not improved here, so once again you provided a burial place for her husband. If I remember correctly, you also arranged for a rabbi to be present.

When I saw your ad in the paper (long ago), I sent you a check. I am glad to send this additional check with regrets it isn't larger.

My very best wishes to you for your great *mitzvah*.

Sincerely,
J.H.