

## Fifty Additional Grave Markers Unveiled in September Moving Ceremony Honors "Pushete Yiddin"

**I**n contrast to the initial unveiling in June, 1991, the skies were not weeping when members of the board of directors and friends of the Hebrew Free Burial Association met to uncover 50 monuments on September 15. In fact, the sun was shining and the event could have been an outing. But the mood was solemn as Rabbi Chaskell Besser, a member of the board and esteemed rabbi of Congregation Bnei Israel Chaim proclaimed

the act "a great chesed to the dead."

Each simple monument was adorned only with the name of the deceased and the date of birth and death. They were placed over the graves of 50 men and women who died in the years following World War II and whose families could never afford to erect any type of grave marker.

### Important remembrance of our past and our present

President Gerald E. Feldhamer talked about the men and women buried in

the cemetery on whose behalf they had come together that morning.

"The fifty men and women who lie beneath these simple monuments died half a century ago. Many if not all were immigrants, simple Jews who came to this country to escape the growing anti-Jewish sentiment and actions in Europe. They were Jews, *pushete yiddin*, as they might have called themselves.

"None of the men and women here became financially successful, but

some of them might have considered themselves lucky nevertheless. At least in America they could live as Jews. And thanks to the Hebrew Free Burial Association, when they died, they could be buried as Jews as well, laid to rest among their brethren in consecrated Jewish ground."

Mr. Feldhamer described the importance of Jewish burial to these people as "paramount", emphasizing that all had probably lost relatives and

*(cont. on page 2)*

## In This Issue

- ...New grave markers unveiled (page 1)
- ....Annual *Chayei Sarah* appeal most successful (page 3)
- ....Board member honored in first HFBA breakfast (page 3)
- ...HFBA moves to new quarters (page 4)

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Please call us at 212 239-1662.



Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, member of the HFBA's advisory board and executive director of the Queens Va'ad HaRabbanim Chevra Kaddisha (burial society), Gerald Feldhamer, Rabbi Chaskell Besser and HFBA treasurer Jack Gross reveal three of the fifty grave markers unveiled at the September 15th ceremony.

# From The President's Desk

**I** often wonder about the people buried in our two cemeteries. None of them are celebrities, but each of them is a part of history.

Not long ago I had the opportunity to read through some of the HFBA archival material. Some of it dates back 100 years. I also spoke with Anne Leist, our administrative assistant, who has interviewed bereaved relatives and friends for more than two decades, and Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, our associate administrator in charge of cemetery operations. As I suspected, the stories were incredible and poignant at the same time.

There was the father of stillborn twins who called for help. His wife was too overcome with grief to even acknowledge that her babies would never come home with her. We buried the infants on a windy day, with no one present but the rabbi to chant *Kale Mole Rachamim*.

There was a group from a social service agency who accompanied an old man on his final journey. He had touched the lives of everyone who came in contact with him and they all wanted to say goodbye.

There were pages and pages of death certificates with the cause of death listed as pneumonia or diphtheria from the same year in the beginning of the century. An epidemic had run its course. I had tears in my eyes when I saw the ages of its victims: all were little children, cut down in the first years of life.

What would have happened to these people had there been no Hebrew Free Burial Association? Some of them would be buried in other Jewish cemeteries, of course. If their relatives or friends knew the "right person", they might have asked for charity. Most I think would have been buried in mass graves in Potter's Field, one on top of another. This is the final resting place for those without relatives to intercede with "right persons".

It struck me that this was the essence of the Hebrew Free Burial Association. We provide simple and dignified people for those who never knew "the right person", for those too timid or too proud to ask for charity or simply too broken up by grief to know where to turn.

There are over 55,000 people buried in Mt. Richmond and Silver Lake Cemeteries. None of them were famous. None were wealthy. As far as we know, no one even had their fifteen minutes of fame in their time. But they deserved Jewish burials nonetheless.

Thanks to people like you, they got them.

*Gerald E. Feldhamer*

## 50 Additional Grave Markers Unveiled in Sept. (Cont. from page 1)

Holocaust and were mindful that Jewish burial was not available to six million of their brethren in Europe.

### Rabbi Chaskell Besser: "Maintaining our cemeteries is critical"

In a moving address, Rabbi Besser related a recent experience in Eastern Europe, where he is involved in the ongoing effort to maintain the remaining Jewish cemeteries. A Roman Catholic priest discovered after a lifetime of serving the Church that he had been born Jewish and in fact had a brother living in Israel. While he decided to remain in the service of the Church, he acknowledged his Jewish roots and asked if he could be buried in a Jewish cemetery when he died.

An halachic ruling was given that permitted the priest to make plans for his burial in the cemetery. He then announced to the townspeople that he was born a Jew and would be buried with his family and his brethren. He pleaded with them to take care of the Jewish cemetery in their midst. The next day, hundreds of people arrived at the cemetery to upright tombstones, clear debris, forge paths and plant flowers.

"If they could do this in Europe, how important it is for us to maintain our own cemetery, to take care of our own poor," Rabbi Besser stated as those assembled said a heartfelt "amen".

### HFBA gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals and institutions to the Second Century Campaign

Westchester Jewish Center  
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Lubell  
Dr. Norman Singer  
Congregation Beth Simchat Torah  
Anonymous

**Together they allowed us to mark 50 graves this year.**

## New York-Area Congregations Join *Chayei Sarah* Appeal

**F**or the Hebrew Free Burial Association, Shabbat Chayei Sarah is like no other in the calendar. For it is this day that the organization reaches out to synagogues in the New York area to ask everyone to participate in the mitzvah of free burial for the poor.

Three years ago, HFBA designated Shabbat Chayei Sarah as the time for community-wide educational and fund raising programs within synagogues. Each year the response has been stronger as the tradition becomes more established in the congregational calendar.

The response to this

year's Chayei Sarah appeal was the best ever, according to treasurer Jack M. Gross. Over 200 synagogues cooperated in the program by holding congregational appeals or sending materials to their members.

"Shabbat Chayei Sarah is important for several reasons," said Mr. Gross. "It provides us with an opportunity to enlist community leaders in our efforts. Hearing about HFBA from a respected rabbi or receiving a mailing with the signature of the spiritual leader or president is often preferable to receiving a letter in the mail from someone you don't know. And seeing the synagogue leaders involved

in the effort makes people in the congregation want to participate as well.

"Additionally, the project is a crucial educational program, telling people about the traditions of Jewish burial and specifically of our obligation to bury those who can't afford to pay for their own funerals."

### Public "thank you" in the Jewish media

Synagogues who participated in the weekend event received a heartfelt note of public appreciation from the HFBA. A half-page advertisement in the **Jewish Week** and the **Jewish Press** listed each congregation and rabbi that agreed to raise funds that Shabbat.

### You've Made Provisions for Your Own Funeral. Now You Can Also Plan For an Indigent Burial

Won't you consider leaving instructions for your loved ones to donate a percentage of your funeral and burial expenses to HFBA? You will assure the acts of *tzedaka* and *chesed* begun during your life will continue after you.

For more information about wills, bequests and contributions, contact Jack Gross at the HFBA office. 212 239-1662.

## First L.I. Breakfast Honors Board Member Sam Krischer

**A**s a quiet, behind-the-scenes organization, the Hebrew Free Burial Association never held a public event designed specifically to honor the hours of work and other efforts of lay leadership. That "tradition of silence" was broken by a long overdue breakfast reception for Long Beach philanthropist and community activist Sam Krischer, a member of the HFBA's board of directors. The tribute was held on Sunday November 22, 1992 at the Young Israel of Long Beach.

"We are very proud to honor Sam Krischer, a devoted member of our board and a supporter of community institutions in Long Beach, the US and Israel. In addition to his guidance and contributions, he is actively helping us educate the Long Island Jewish

community about the Hebrew Free Burial Association's existence and our important activities," Gerald Feldhamer stated at the event. Mr. Feldhamer, known to supporters of the agency as its president, also served as chairman of the breakfast reception.

"Jewish tradition obligates us to bury every person, rich or poor in the same

dignified and simple manner.

Throughout Jewish history Jewish communities have established free burial societies to assure that this requirement is met. The Hebrew Free Burial Association has fulfilled this responsibility for New York's Jewish community for over 100 years," explained Mr. Krischer.

"I believe it is critical for all of us to understand and appreciate the important work of the Hebrew Free Burial Association," he continued. "In many cases, they are the only thing standing between a Jewish funeral and interment in a mass grave in Potter's Field for poor Jews. Particularly now, as new immigrants come to New York in greater numbers than ever, community support for the Hebrew Free Burial Association is vital."



*Surrounded by HFBA dignitaries and staff and his wife, Miriam, honoree Sam Krischer receives a well-earned tribute.*

## Administrative Notes

### HFBA Moves Into New Offices...

The Hebrew Free Burial Association has taken advantage of the real estate slump in Manhattan to move into larger quarters without incurring a rental increase. At the end of 1992, the agency moved into its new administrative offices at 363 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001.

"Our new office is spacious enough to handle our increased computer load and record needs. Additionally, visitors will find they are no longer bumping into desks and people while they navigate around the room. And of course, the best part of this move is that we are gaining needed space without increasing our administrative costs," said treasurer Jack Gross.

HFBA's phone number has changed, effective immediately. The new number is 212 239-1662.

### Ramaz High School Does *Chesed*

As part of its *Chesed* program, Ramaz High School has created an internship opportunity for students to help us

enhance our services to the community. Intern Charles Fagin is involved in entering old records into our computer system in our New York office and is organizing the archives at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. With his help, we will be better able to access information on those buried by HFBA, helping relatives, friends and scholars seeking information.

## From The Mailbag...

...Both my parents were buried in Mt. Richmond Cemetery in 1964. At the time of the unveiling I first looked around and was shocked at the neglect and ugliness the place was in. For years I paid for care but every time we came we had to maintain it ourselves.

The past few years the cemetery has taken on a new look and on our visit this month we were very excited that after all these years we were not leaving depressed.

Thank you for your good and caring work. And we wish to thank Rabbi Plafker for taking the time to help us...

Mrs. T.L.

*Chevra Agudath Achim Chesed Shel Emeth*  
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