

CHESED

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Weinberg Foundation Helps Right Fallen Monuments



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Room 501 363 Seventh Avenue
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Thanks to a grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the scene on the left is becoming less common at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. The Weinberg Foundation grant has allowed us to replace that picture with the photo on the right by building new foundations and re-erecting monuments that have fallen due to age, erosion and vandalism.

**Different Faces,
Same Problems:
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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

We recently passed the High Holiday season. For me, this is always a time of intense reflection as I look back on the year gone by and think of what I would like to accomplish in the year ahead.

This year I can honestly say I am pleased with our collective stewardship of the Hebrew Free Burial Association. Together with our Board of Trustees and you, our supporters, we have managed to put our Association on a very sound footing. We have shown that we won't let a few feet (literally) of snow stop us from fulfilling our mission of burying the Jewish poor according to the traditions of our fathers: traditions that demand that the deceased be buried immediately. We have alleviated the sufferings of the families and friends of our clients by treating them with dignity when they ask our help instead of as charity cases. We have increased the numbers who support our work, helping to ensure that a Jewish burial remains the birthright of every Jew, rich or poor.

I am especially pleased to see that so many of our donors became our saviors when the harsh weather threatened to cripple Mt. Richmond Cemetery. What was an inconvenience to most people became a race against devastation as the high water table rose with every slight thaw and our 85 year-old infrastructure let us know that it could not take another pounding.

As you might expect, drainage is not a "sexy" cause. We can't put someone's name on a pipe or dedicate the new system to a family. And, as everyone who owns a house knows, no one can see it and therefore few will appreciate the work that goes into its planning and execution. At Mt. Richmond, however, the drainage system is the foundation of the cemetery infrastructure. If it doesn't work, the cemetery cannot function.

Thanks to your help, we are now able to make major renovations to the drainage system which, when completed, will help us lower the water table and sustain whatever nature will dish out. Although you won't see it, I hope you will take pride in knowing that every visitor will feel the difference.

Gerald E. Feldhamer

HFBA Heroes Rescue Mt. Richmond Cemetery

As with many overwhelming events, few will ever forget the winter of 1993-94, when record snows and extreme weather ravaged the east coast. At Mt. Richmond Cemetery, the combination of relentless snowstorms, record precipitation, high winds and freezing temperatures damaged already overloaded and aging structures, including the main roadway and our century-old caretaker's cottage.

The cost of much-needed repairs was several times greater than our budget would allow, and for a while it seemed that repairs would be impossible, at least in the short run.

Enter a group of regular HFBA donors who contributed over and above their usual annual gifts to ensure that the proper maintenance of Mt. Richmond Cemetery would not be lost to the winter. These men and women responded to a special appeal immediately following the winter season. Due to their generosity, repairs to two major structures will ensure that Mt. Richmond will withstand all types of weather in the future.

The exterior of the caretaker's cottage, which had been hit heavily by the storms, already has been returned to its pre-winter condition. Additionally, plans for repair work on the eroded main roadway that leads from the front gate into the cemetery are proceeding. A new drainage system that will augment the existing one and help to alleviate pressure on the high water table is being developed by a consulting engineer. Work will begin as soon as the plans are completed.

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Second Siyum Mishnayos Memorializes HFBA Dead

A group of West Side men have completed their study of the Mishnah on behalf of those who were buried by HFBA during the months comprising the Jewish year of 5754 for the second time in two years. The end of the cycle of Mishnah study was commemorated at a *siyum mishnayos*, held Sunday, September 11th, on New York's West Side.

The year of Torah study was organized by Jack Weiss, a resident of New York's West Side, who was moved to coordinate the group when he heard that HFBA buries 400 indigent Jews each year. "We don't often think that there could even be that many people who need HFBA every year," he explained last year. "We are gratified that we can perform this *mitzvah* for these poor souls, particularly those who died without family to act on their behalf."

The *siyum* was held on the Sunday between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, one of the holiest periods of the Jewish year. Over 100 HFBA supporters gathered to listen to Rabbi Yissocher Frand of the Ner Israel Talmudic College of Baltimore.

Gerald E. Feldhamer, HFBA president, stated, "A *siyum* marks the end of a concentrated period of learning. It is an auspicious and joyous occasion. When we recite *kaddish* on behalf of those who have been buried by HFBA, we will remember that many of these people died with no one to say *kaddish* for them. For us, it is an honor to be able to do this for them."

Fifth Annual Chayei Sarah Campaign Underway

Over four hundred times a year, an indigent Jew needs a Jewish burial but can't afford the cost. Each time, the Hebrew Free Burial Association is there to provide it. That simple fact, known to all of us, is a secret to thousands of Jews in our area. This year, for the fifth time in a row, synagogues across metropolitan New York will join together with HFBA to raise awareness and funds as part of our annual *Chayei Sarah* Campaign.

On Shabbat Chayei Sarah, which falls on October 29th this year, rabbis and synagogue presidents in over 300 synagogues will distribute literature and speak about HFBA from pulpits. Many will have planted the seeds prior to this date by inserting letters or articles into synagogue bulletins. Others will use the time to introduce the subject to congregants and continue the follow-up in the days and weeks following that Shabbat.

Two communities hold major fund raisers

Two of New York's most prominent Jewish communities will honor members of their communities for their exceptional support of HFBA

and free burial in conjunction with Shabbat Chayei Sarah.

The Riverdale community will come together on behalf of HFBA for the first time on Sunday, October 23, to honor Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblatt, spiritual leader of the Riverdale Jewish Center, and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, his counterpart at the Young Israel of Riverdale. Rabbi Avi Weiss, rabbinic leader of the Hebrew Institute at Riverdale will be one of the speakers at the morning event to be held at the Riverdale Jewish Center.

HFBA board member Bjorn Bamberger will receive the Anshei Chessed Award in recognition of his generous support and active involvement in the organization at a breakfast that same morning in Long Beach, New York. The breakfast will be held at Young Israel of Long Beach on Sunday morning, October 30th. Rabbi I. Nathan Bamberger, brother of the honoree, will make the presentation.

For more information about how you and your community can become involved in the Chayei Sarah campaign and/or attend the event in your area, contact the HFBA office at 212 239-1662.

Same Faces. Different Problems. HFBA Documents the Relentlessness of Jewish Poverty

They say that death is the great equalizer and that statistics don't lie. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than at Mt. Richmond, the cemetery for the poor, where indigent Jews have been buried by the HFBA for eighty five years.

In honor of the 85th anniversary of Mt. Richmond Cemetery, HFBA recently surveyed the records of clients buried in 1914, the fifth year of operations at the cemetery, and the final year for which statistics are available, 1993. The data indicate that while the faces of our clients have changed, the insidiousness of poverty remains as serious an issue for our community as ever.

Advances in medical care have benefitted children living in poverty, giving them the opportunity to grow to adulthood. In 1914, over half of all those buried by HFBA were children under the age of 13. Most were children who succumbed to childhood diseases like measles or who were felled in the diphtheria epidemic. About one third were stillborns, babies whose parents never heard their first cries. Of the 466 Jews interred in Mt. Richmond Cemetery in 1993, only three were children.

America Still "The Goldena Medina" For Russia's Jews

In the years before World War I and isolationism cut off emigration from eastern Europe, tens of thousands of Russian Jews made the perilous journey from Russia each year in search of religious tolerance and economic opportunity. Most of the adults buried in 1914 were people born in those countries which would make up the USSR. Another quarter immigrated from other European countries. Today fully half of HFBA's caseload are Russian Jews.

The comparison of caseloads illustrates how the nature of poverty has changed for New York's Jews in other ways as well. For example, in 1914, more than a quarter of those who died were in the United States less than three years. Another third were here less than ten years. The deceased was 20% more likely to be male than female. Chances were he died young, under the age of 50.

Today, two thirds of those we bury have been in the United States for less than three years. Another 14 percent have resided in the US more than three years, but less than a decade.

The proportion of men and women are just about equal, and more than three quarters lived to at least 65 years of age. Thirty one percent of those we buried in 1993 were born in the US, up from almost none in 1904.

Accidents Less Common Today

Workplace accidents and the overriding despair that apparently caused many of the poorest Jews to end their lives by their own hands have almost disappeared in today's world. The cause of the death of many clients buried in 1914 was listed as non-natural. By comparison, almost all of last year's caseload died of old age and/or related illnesses.

Confirming our knowledge of the role Jewish immigrants played in the needle trades, the data show that almost one quarter of those buried in 1914 worked in the garment industry. Today, the percentage has dropped to almost nil.

If there is a lesson to be learned from studying the statistics of burials, it is that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The numbers may differ, and the demographic makeup may be altered, but the reality is that Jewish poverty still exists, and with it the continued need for the Hebrew Free Burial Association to ensure that every Jew can have a Jewish burial.

HFBA Heroes Rescue...

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HFBA is extremely grateful to all its contributors for coming to our aid when we most needed it and making sure that Mt. Richmond Cemetery can be properly maintained in all seasons.