

Chesed HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

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300 New Markers To Be Installed At Mt. Richmond Cemetery

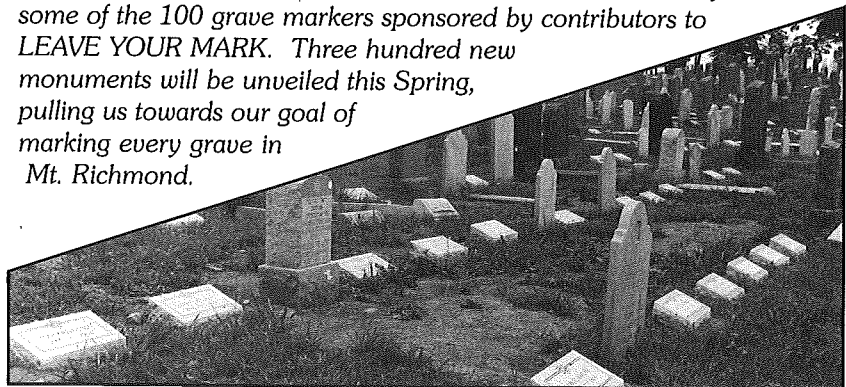
Hundreds of HFBA Supporters LEAVE THEIR MARK

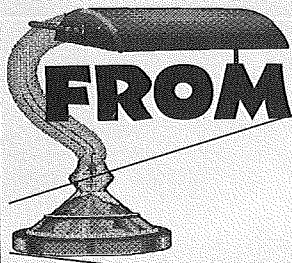
The remains of three hundred children and adults will finally be marked after years of anonymity when the next set of grave markers is unveiled this Spring.

Several sections will receive the markers, some dating back to the 1950's and 1960's. Among the most poignant for visitors are the remains of fifty children, ranging from newborns to thirteen year olds, who died at the Willowbrook State School (for the mentally retarded) during that era. (Willowbrook was later made famous by Eyewitness News reporter Geraldo Rivera, who exposed the squalid conditions and horrible care given to children at the institution. One of the results of his exposé was the shuttering of Willowbrook and the de-

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Nestled among the rows of graves in Mt. Richmond Cemetery are some of the 100 grave markers sponsored by contributors to LEAVE YOUR MARK. Three hundred new monuments will be unveiled this Spring, pulling us towards our goal of marking every grave in Mt. Richmond.





FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

WHY DO WE PUBLISH *Chesed* ?

I enjoy reading the mail that comes after every issue of CHESED. Many of you take the time to give us your opinions, for which I am always grateful. Sometimes we receive donations in response to a specific article or the entire issue. Again, I am gratified that CHESED has "hit the spot" with our readers. But last month I received a puzzling note from a new donor. "Why?" she asked. "Wouldn't the money you spend on a newsletter be better spent burying the poor?"

As I read the letter it stuck me that maybe CHESED is misunderstood, perhaps our motives aren't as clear as they should be.

It wasn't too long ago that the Hebrew Free Burial Association existed on the major contributions of a few benefactors and the burial subsidies provided by state and/or city governments. We didn't need to communicate with too many people, and to be honest, not too many people knew we existed.

In the early 1980's, the days of sitting back and waiting for checks ended as burial allowances dried up or were severely curtailed just as the cost of burying an indigent Jew rose. At the same time, we realized that we had entered a new generation: a time when we could no longer take for granted that every social service agency that dealt

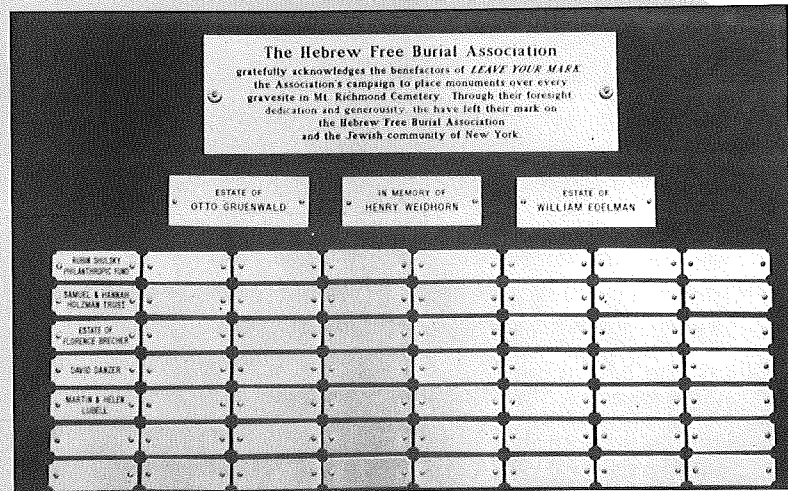
with the frail, the elderly and the poor would know us. We were afraid that people who needed our services would not find out about us in time.

Overnight we went from a small, sleepy agency to one engaged in extensive outreach to hospitals, nursing homes, anti-poverty agencies, emergency medical personnel and police. We also took a good, hard look at our cemeteries, Silver Lake and Mt. Richmond, and decided they needed to be more efficiently managed and maintained. And we reached out to you, the Jewish community, to let you know about us and our needs.

CHESED is part of our overall communications effort to the Jewish community. It is not a fund raiser, although we welcome any contributions that result from our stories. It is our way of informing you, our friends and supporters, that your contributions are used to the maximum.

We're very proud of the gains we've made in the past decade and a half. We have upgraded the infrastructure of our cemeteries and restored the historic chapel at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. Our LEAVE YOUR MARK program has enabled us to erect small monuments over the remains of hundreds of indigents buried in our cemeteries. Microfilm records ease the process of searching our archives when relatives and friends call. CHESED allows us to let you know the progress of these and other important projects.

The handsome Benefactors' Plaque that hangs in our historic chapel in Mt. Richmond Cemetery has room for eighty names. Yours can be among them when you donate four or more plaques to LEAVE YOUR MARK



Benefactors' Plaque Installed in Mt. Richmond Cemetery Chapel

The Hebrew Free Burial Association recently installed a handsome Benefactors' Plaque to recognize individuals, groups and foundations who sponsor four or more markers (a minimum contribution of \$600).

The richly-toned wood and brass plaque has already been installed on the wall of Mt. Richmond Cemetery's chapel. Its inscription reads, "The Hebrew Free Burial Association gratefully acknowledges the benefactors of LEAVE YOUR MARK, the Association's campaign to place monuments over every gravesite in Mt. Richmond Cemetery. Through their foresight, dedication and generosity, they have left their mark on the Hebrew Free Burial Association and the Jewish community of New York."

Several names have already been engraved, including the names of the three largest contributors to the campaign, the estates of Otto Gruenwald and William Edelman and "In memory of" Henry Weidhorn.

"Eighty brass plates are waiting to be inscribed with the names of benefactors," stated treasurer Jack M. Gross. "We hope to report that the plaque has been filled to capacity and that a new one is needed in the very near future."

For more information on sponsoring one or more monuments, contact our office at 212 239-1662. Contributions can be mailed to 363 Seventh Avenue, Room 501, New York, NY 10001.

FORTY NEW PARTICIPANTS JOIN ANNUAL CHAYEI SARAH CAMPAIGN

Effort Goes "From Strength to Strength" in 1995

HFBA's major educational and fund raising campaign has broken new ground again this year, adding synagogues, a new breakfast and many, many friends.

According to vice president Bjorn Bamberger, an additional 40 synagogues participated in the sixth annual event, held on Shabbat Chayei Sarah. "Congregations and their rabbis use the Shabbat to speak about the *mitzvot* surrounding free burial, the Hebrew Free Burial Association and our history and current work. Some congregations hold a formal appeal; in others, rabbis devote their sermon to HFBA. There are a number of ways to participate — and all of them are welcomed."

In addition to the synagogue appeals, two fund raising breakfasts were held during the Chayei Sarah period, in Long Beach, NY and the Riverdale section of the Bronx. Long Beach residents and philanthropists Bonnie and Leo Zucker were given HFBA's *Anshei Chesed* Award at the Long Beach event. Rabbi Abraham Kupchik, spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Long Beach received a Special Rabbinic Award in gratitude for his leadership in

the community and his efforts on behalf of HFBA. The Riverdale community honored two of its outstanding rabbis, Mordechai Willig and Jonathan Rosenblatt, at a celebratory breakfast, the first Riverdale fund raiser dedicated to HFBA.

"The Chayei Sarah campaign put HFBA 'on the map'," continued Mr. Feldhamer. It has given us exposure to thousands of people who had never heard of us before. Among the results has been an increase in referrals from synagogues. HFBA is now in the forefront of rabbis' minds. When a poor Jew dies, they immediately contact us.

"In addition, many of our donors first heard about the work of HFBA through their synagogue's participation in Chayei Sarah. A few have gone on to become our biggest supporters, contributing several times a year.

"I am extremely proud that this campaign has grown so fast to become so extensive. Every time a new person realizes the importance of free burial and HFBA to our history and our lives today, I feel very, very gratified."

The View From Mt. Richmond Cemetery

A Personal Recollection By Rabbi Shmuel Plafker,
Associate Executive

As a rabbi and the administrator for Mt. Richmond and Silver Lake cemeteries, I like to say that I wear many *yarmulkes*. My job is to respond to the many needs of families burying loved ones, individuals searching for their roots and visitors concerned about maintaining the sanctity and dignity of the gravesites.

At least one funeral is held almost every day at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. Unlike a community rabbi who frequently knows the deceased and/or the family, every person who comes into the cemetery is a stranger to me. The challenge is to ensure that the funeral is not mechanical or impersonal, but truly reflects the life of the deceased and the esteem in which he or she was held.

The most wrenching funerals are the ones where no one is present. Approximately one third of our clients die alone. They have either outlived their families or no one is able to go the funeral. No one accompanies the departed to the final resting place. At these times, I remind myself that it is for these people that the Hebrew Free Burial Association exists: to ensure that no Jew is sent to Potter's Field because there were no children, parents or siblings to claim the body.

When I am not officiating at funerals, I change *yarmulkes* to help visitors find relatives who might have been "lost." Many times callers or visitors know only that their great-grandmother or -grandfather was buried somewhere on Staten Island or in a cemetery for the poor. I help them search through burial records and archives.

When we are able to "reunite" someone with a long-lost relative, we have helped them find a part of their own history. Perhaps the most well-known of these reunions is the one that took place when we unveiled 75 monuments in the children's section a few years ago. A man recognized his sister's name on one of the front monuments: a sister who had died 60 years ago and for whom he had never stopped searching. A young man found the two great-uncles who had drowned together on the way to America's shores. They had come to seek their fortune in 1920 and to save enough money to pay their family's passage. Instead of sharing the same life, they shared the same death. Today, they lie adjacent to each other in Mt. Richmond Cemetery.

The third part of my job involves the actual management of our cemeteries. I try to make sure that the cemetery always looks neat, that everything is in running order, even that the rest rooms are fully operative. "That's not a job for a rabbi," you might say. "Nonsense," I reply. "Everything is important. People who visit should always find a place of repose where they can mourn a death and yet find comfort in the memories of life."

300 New Markers Bound For Mt. Richmond Cemetery

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institutionalization of the mentally ill more than two decades ago.)

The other sections to be marked include part of a men's section and a women's section with remains dating back to the beginning of the century.

"This is the largest number of markers unveiled at one time at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. It is an indication that LEAVE YOUR MARK has touched the hearts of so many people around the tri-state area and other parts of the country," remarked HFBA president Gerald E. Feldhamer.

LEAVE YOUR MARK Becomes Tzedaka Program for Schools

Several Jewish educators have institutionalized LEAVE YOUR MARK within their afternoon Hebrew schools, day schools and *yeshivot*. Children earmark *tzedaka* monies collected during a specific

period or allocate a portion of funds collected throughout the school year to purchase one or more monuments while learning more about the *mitzvot* of *kavod haMayt* (honoring the deceased) and *gemilas chasadim* (performing acts of kindness.)

"As seen from the letters that are mailed in with the contributions, the concepts of free burial and marking graves capture the emotions and sensitivities of the students. Rather than view *kavod haMayt* as gruesome or "too deep for children", pupils who become involved with learning about these *mitzvot* are grateful for the opportunity to understand how we can show respect and understanding to the living as well as to the dead during one of the sadder portions of life," vice president George Tice added.

Individual markers can be sponsored for a contribution of \$150. Donations to LEAVE YOUR MARK are welcome in any amount.

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Did You Know?

Making a donation to the Hebrew Free Burial Association in your will is as simple as inserting a sentence....

Call Sandra Wiesel,
HFBA Administrator,
at 212 239-1662
for more information.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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We hope that CHESED is informative and stimulating. We hope that it brings our work closer to you and that it makes you feel like you have a stake in our agency. In a very real sense, you keep HFBA afloat. Your support, financial and moral, keeps us going and assures that every Jew can have a Jewish burial.