

125 YEARS OF CHESSED SHEL EMET

Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emeth • Hebrew Free Burial Association

In Their Own Words...

October 25, 2013 marked the 125th anniversary of the Hebrew Free Burial Association, first organized as Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emeth.

In the Report of the Executive and Burial Committee from February 1901, we get a sense of the intense dedication of a small group of Jewish men to provide for impoverished Jews:

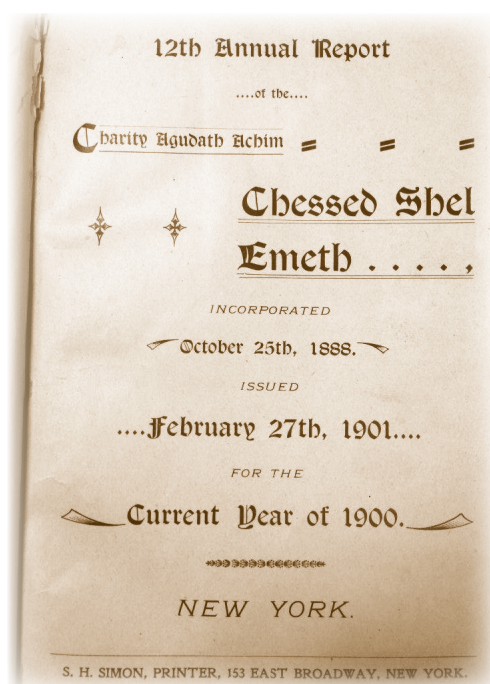
"As we look back on the vista of our laborious performances, the results, namely the records of the past 12 years herein being compiled, we stand amazed, scarce believing that we have accomplished an undertaking of such magnitude with the little means that were at our command.

"How much we have tried to honor all applications and please every applicant, will be borne out by the fact that we have actually overestimated our resources...we are so overburdened with applications that the burials now amount from 8 to 12 cases daily...

"If you would be present when the grief-stricken applicants appeal to this society, requesting that we furnish free burial for their departed, your heart would melt with pity listening to the sorrowful tales how poverty was often responsible and caused the release of sufferers from this world."

The account further relates that as of January 1,

1901, in the previous 10 months, *"we have buried a total of 732 of which 212 were adults and 520 were children....412 death cases, of which 99 were adults and 313 were children, we buried without any charge whatsoever."* By that same date, a total of 7007 people were buried from the organization's founding in 1888.



Further, *"In submitting to you our twelfth annual report, it is incumbent upon us to draw your attention to the unparalleled sufferings and utter helplessness of our poor brethren whose homes were made desolate by the loss of a dear one. What little they may have had quickly vanished for doctors' services and medicines, and even their belongings were pawned... to save their loved ones from that grim monster- death. The survivors, overwhelmed with grief, poverty-stricken, besiege our office, pouring forth agonized appeals to assign a last resting place for their departed relatives. DOES NOT SUCH A STATE OF AFFAIRS APPPEAL TO YOU (sic)?"*

HFBA is proud to continue the mission and legacy of its founders who rhetorically asked, *"Is it not obligatory on us, on all mankind, that a last resting place be assigned for the departed relative of the poverty stricken, the grief stricken applicant?"*

HFBA MISSION STATEMENT

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION devotes its resources to performing *chesed shel emet* (the ultimate act of loving kindness). It is the only agency in the NY metropolitan area dedicated to assuring that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral and burial.

HFBA *Historical Notes*

On **October 25, 1888** Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emeth (The Society of the Brotherhood of True Charity) is organized by Barnett Freedman, Louis Michilitsky, Selig Bergman and several other men on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

In **1892**, property is purchased in Staten Island for Silver Lake Cemetery.

On **July 7, 1895**, seven children were buried – ages 11 years, 4½ years, 4 months, 3 months, 5 months and two, 7 months of age.

In **1900**, the average cost of a burial was less than \$10. For the nearly 900 burials that year, the total cost for shrouds that year was \$ 295.03.

In the early years, funds were raised from a membership system as well as donations from synagogues, Jewish newspapers and benevolent societies.

In **1900**, the “charity plates on Atonement Eve” collected amounts from each congregation ranging from 9 cents to \$5.28. The total amount collected from the ninety-four participating synagogues was \$109.08.

In **1900**, a “keeper” was paid \$50 monthly “merely to keep the graves in good order and to prevent their being defiled” at Silver Lake Cemetery.

Because Silver Lake Cemetery was nearly full, a twenty five acre parcel of land was purchased in **1909** for Mount Richmond Cemetery.

In **1911**, 22 victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire were buried in Mount Richmond Cemetery.

By **1916**, the organization had grown to include 4,000 members, most of whom contributed \$5 or less annually. The annual meeting attracted 500 participants and received coverage in The New York Times. HFBA was able to proudly declare that since its inception, no Jew had been buried in an anonymous grave in the city's graveyards.

A used Packard hearse was purchased for \$900 in **1917** and another for \$1400 in **1921**.

In **1928**, a fire in the Mount Richmond Cemetery stable and tool shed caused a loss valued at \$200 for the building, \$300 for a horse, \$50 for an open wagon and \$50 for two sets of harnesses.

Promissory notes to repay HFBA from the Depression years ranged in amount from \$7-\$25.

In **1942**, HFBA had a \$35,000 insurance policy “against enemy attack, including any action taken by the military, naval or air force of the United States in resisting enemy attack.”

In **1945**, the Board voted to write the minutes of the meetings in English, rather than in Yiddish, as had been done for the previous six decades.

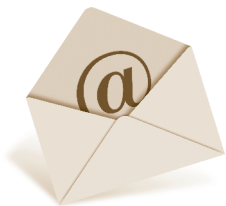
In **1965**, at the organization's annual meeting, “Hebrew Free Burial Association” is added to the official name, Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emeth, reflecting the Americanization of the membership and clients.



Today, HFBA is well known to social service and health agencies that aid the elderly, frail, sick, mentally ill and homeless. To facilitate our work, we maintain close relationships with governmental agencies such as New York City's Public Administrators, the Human Resources Administration and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

HFBA remains committed to its unique, important work of ensuring that every Jew, no matter how impoverished or marginalized by society, receives the dignity of a traditional Jewish funeral and burial. Along with this, our founding mission, we renew our communal responsibility to maintaining our cemeteries by restoring Silver Lake, continuing to preserve Mount Richmond and ensuring that all graves are marked with the names of those within.

To learn more about the history of Hebrew Free Burial Association, please go to our website, www.hebrewfreeburial.org.



In the Mail

HFBA receives many letters from people who have had experience with our organization. Below are a few recent examples.

This year marks the 100th yahrzeit of my great-grandfather, Philip Benjamin, z"l. My family knew he passed away in the United States after emigrating from Russia, but his burial place was unknown to us. Through extensive genealogical research a few years ago, I found out that he was buried by HFBA in Mount Richmond Cemetery. Having become aware that no relative had been in contact with HFBA since his demise, let alone caring for his grave, it has been an honor to uphold his memory by doing so. It is comforting to know that my great-grandfather, an indigent Jewish immigrant, was given a halachic Jewish burial which all Jews deserve. Thank you, HFBA.

Evan Benjamin

At the funeral of Victor B., Rabbi Plafker's presence was a great source of comfort to us at a time of extreme sadness. The ceremony and traditions were adhered to and gave so much solace at such a time. But above all, the rabbi's words, explanations and prayers gave us the assurance that everything was being done correctly. Thank you for your extra empathy and extra caring.*

T.J.*

*Names changed to protect confidentiality.

HFBA Helps



Jerry T. died at the age of eighty five after being mugged five years previously. The NYPD officer at the crime scene, Nadia C.*, ascertained that he had never married and had no family or friends. Nadia visited him in the hospital after the assault and managed to get him admitted to a nursing facility near her home. Nadia and her husband, mother and sister became like family to Jerry, visiting and taking him out to shop. Upon his death, Nadia planned on cremating his remains. However, as it became clear that Nadia did not have the authorization to make this decision, a local rabbi became involved. The body was ultimately released to HFBA and volunteers made up a minyan and said kaddish at his grave. Some time after the funeral,*

Nadia ultimately honored her friend by making a generous contribution towards his funeral expenses.

Michael C. committed suicide at the age of forty-five by jumping off the RFK Bridge. Troubled since childhood, he was abandoned by his parents who moved out of state to avoid the difficult situation with their son. Michael lived in outpatient housing at Creedmoor Psychiatric Hospital, with no family or friends. Upon his death, an uncle who had not seen him in twenty years authorized his burial by HFBA.*

*Names changed to protect confidentiality.

Did You Know?

Although forbidden by Jewish law, some insist on cremation as the method for the disposal of remains believing that it is more environmentally friendly.

However, in their 2011 book, *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death*, Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, conclude that "...burial is by far the most environmentally sound method of disposition. It is...a process that was, after all, predominant for the millennia leading up to the last century, and for very good reasons due for a comeback."

In 2013, HFBA helped prevent over a dozen cremations, the decedents now resting in HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery.

For more information about the importance of Jewish burial please visit www.peacefulreturn.com.

Leave Your Mark Campaign

To dignify the deceased, and to ensure that no one rests in an anonymous grave, the “Leave Your Mark Campaign” raises money for small monuments noting the name and years of birth and death of HFBA clients. Donors of four grave markers, at \$150 each, have their names inscribed on the **Leave Your Mark Donor Plaque** in the Weinberg Chapel at Mount Richmond Cemetery. We gratefully acknowledge the recent generosity of the following whose names have joined that roster:

Bierig and Kriva Families
Harold Bobrow

Kenneth Perry
Jennifer Gordon
Leah and Paul Lowenthal

Al Z. Spitz
Stuart Weichsel

TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS EFFORT, PLEASE CALL THE HFBA OFFICE.

Thank You to Our Volunteers!

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who gathered at the HFBA Silver Lake Cemetery to clean and clear debris from around the graves on our annual Chesed Day on October 27th.

Many thanks, too, to the volunteers from the following groups who also worked at the cemetery on other days throughout the past summer and fall:

- Areyvut
- Ashar
- Brooklyn Heights Group of Synagogue Youth
- Bruria High School for Girls
- Collegiate Leadership Internship Program
- The Frisch School (x2)
- Hebrew Academy of Five Towns and Rockaway High School (HAFTR)
- Rambam Mesivta
- Reform Temple of Forest Hills Religious School
- SAR High School
- Solomon Schechter School of Queens
- Solomon Schechter School of Westchester High School (x2)
- Stella K. Abraham High School for Girls (SKA)
- Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC) (x4)
- Troop 118 from the JCC of Staten Island
- United States Military Academy Hillel



Chesed Day volunteers
© Bonnie Geller



Brooklyn Heights Group of Synagogue Youth



*Troop 118 From the JCC of Staten Island and
United States Military Academy Hillel*

© Isaac Geld



Bruria High School for Girls

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

BELOW ARE TRANSLATED SUMMARIES OF THE
ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE OF CHESED.

Ниже приводятся сокращённые переводы статей из этого номера

125 лет истинного милосердия

Товарищество Агудас Ахим Хесед Шель Эмет - Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро

К 125-летию HFBA – словами его создателей

25 октября 2013 года исполнилось 125 лет Еврейскому Благотворительному Похоронному Бюро (HFBA), которое на момент создания называлось Товарищество Агудас Ахим Хесед Шель Эмет («Братство подлинного милосердия»). Перед нами – отчёт исполнительного комитета Товарищества за февраль 1901-го года. Он пронизан готовностью небольшой группы евреев служить своим обедневшим сородичам:

«Когда оглядываемся мы на недавние труды наши, то есть на весь свод записей о погребениях за эти 12 лет, мы поражаемся и сами с трудом верим, сколь многое было достигнуто при столь малых средствах, которые были в нашем распоряжении.»

«О том, как мы старались удовлетворить все заявки и помочь каждому заявителю свидетельствует то, что мы переоценили наши средства и теперь проводим от 8 до 12 погребений в день.»

«Если бы вы сами могли присутствовать при том, как раздавленные горем родственники призывают наше Товарищество обеспечить бесплатные похороны их усопшим близким, ваши сердца бы переполнились состраданием, слушая о печальных судьбах тех, чья бедность часто и служила причиной освобождения от страданий этого мира.»

HFBA с гордостью продолжает благородную миссию своих основателей, которые спрашивали себя: «не является ли это обязательством на нас, да и на всём человечестве – обеспечить местом последнего упокоения тех, чьи измученные горем и бедностью родственники обращаются к нам?»

HFBA – памятные даты

- 25 октября 1888 года – создаётся Товарищество Агудас Ахим Хесед Шель Эмет
- 1892 год – приобретение участка на Стейтен Айленде под кладбище Сильвер Лейк
- 7 июля 1895 года – похоронено семеро детей в возрасте от 3-х месяцев до 11 лет
- 1901 год – средняя стоимость погребения составляет меньше десяти долларов. Общие расходы на саваны в этом году составили 295 долларов и 3 цента
- В первые годы Товарищество получало деньги в качестве членских взносов, а также в виде пожертвований от синагог, еврейских изданий и благотворительных обществ.
- Организованная в 1900-м году подписка на памятные

благотворительные таблички для Судного Дня собрала 109 долларов. Взносы девяноста четырёх участвовавших синагог варьировали от девяти центов до пяти долларов

- К 1916-му году в Товариществе состояло уже четыре тысячи членов, большинство из которых вносили годовые взносы примерно по пять долларов. На ежегодном собрании, о котором написала газета Нью-Йорк Таймс, было не меньше пятисот участников. HFBA с гордостью провозгласило, что с момента создания товарищества ни один еврей не был погребён в общей могиле на городском кладбище для бедноты.
- Во времена Великой Депрессии многие заявители вместо денег давали HFBA расписки на небольшие суммы (от 7 до 25 долларов) с обещанием оплатить похороны близких в будущем
- В 1942-м году Товарищество приобрело страховой полис на 35 тыс. долларов «на случай вражеской атаки или на случай действий американской армии, авиации и флота по отражению вражеской атаки»
- В 1945-м году совет директоров постановил начать вести протоколы заседаний на английском, а не на идиш, который использовался в первые шестьдесят лет существования организации

HFBA отвечает

Вопрос: Как известно, татуировки запрещены еврейской традицией. Препятствует ли наличие татуировок захоронению на еврейском кладбище?

Ответ: Конечно нет. Хотя Тора запрещает наносить какие-либо татуировки на тело, практически при любых обстоятельствах еврей имеет право быть похороненным среди евреев, независимо от степени его соблюдения традиций.

Знаете ли Вы?

Хотя еврейский закон запрещает кремацию многие настаивают на предпочтительности этого способа погребения, в том числе из-за проблем с окружающей средой.

Однако в 2011-м году Джошуа Слокум и Лиза Карлсон, члены Ассоциации похоронных сообществ, выпустили книгу «Посмертные права: восстанавливая американский способ погребения». В ней делается вывод, что погребение является на сегодняшний день самым «дружественным» для окружающей среды способом устранения тел усопших. «Он доминировал многие тысячелетия за исключением разве что прошлого века, и способ этот имеет все шансы на то, чтобы снова стать основным.»

В 2013-м году HFBA помогла предотвратить больше дюжины кремаций, организовав похороны усопших на принадлежащем организации кладбище Маунт Ричмонд.

HFBA Acknowledges the Generous Donations Made in Memory of:

Herman Siederer
Dr. Herbert Rein
Beatrice Miller

Celia Lustbader
Ellen Koplow
Ruth Kramer

Florrie Sue Brafman
Celia Hersh

And in Honor of:

Anne Brandstein Miriam and Joe Gelb

Chesed Shel Emet – HOW YOU CAN HELP

DONATE your property, used vehicle or boat and receive a generous tax donation.

REMEMBER to include HFBA in your will with a bequest.

ESTABLISH an HFBA Forever Gift Annuity or Charitable Trust Plan. In addition to the guaranteed income and tax benefits, these plans ensure that HFBA's promise of a Jewish burial to future generations of indigent Jews will be fulfilled.

CELEBRATE a *simcha* or commemorate a loss with HFBA cards. Cards cost \$18 and can include a personalized message.

CONTRIBUTE to HFBA to ensure an annual *Yahrzeit* reminder for your lost loved ones.

INSTITUTE a perpetual *Yahrzeit Kaddish* for your loved one for a donation of \$180.

ARRANGE for *kaddish* to be said for the eleven month mourning period following a death of a relative or friend for a donation of \$360.

DONATE unused graves. If the graves are not part of a burial society or family plot and are located in New York or New Jersey, please consider donating them to HFBA and receiving a tax deduction for your gift.

SPONSOR perpetual grave care for an indigent's grave for \$600.

ENROLL a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our "Mitzvah Circle" by suggesting a gift to HFBA to your guests.

The generous child who shares his/her *simcha* in this way receives a framed certificate.

VOLUNTEER with your friends, classmates, fellow group members, or family at our cemeteries as part of our Cemetery Clean-Up Project.

GET INVOLVED as a professional with HFBA by donating your expertise and skills in an area that can help us.



PLEASE HELP OUT TODAY BY SENDING A DONATION IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION was formed in 1888 on Manhattan's Lower East Side by a group of philanthropic and community-minded Jews who were committed to burying their indigent dead according to Jewish tradition, rather than having them buried in a mass grave in City Cemetery. Since its inception HFBA has interred over 65,000 Jews in its two cemeteries. HFBA is also committed to retrieving the identities of those interred and is attempting to provide a gravestone for each unmarked grave.



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