

## Charlotte Hebrew Cemetery Association — Past, Present, Future

Some "Final Words" or the past, present, and future of our Charlotte Hebrew Cemetery Association

By Morris Speizman

We Jews have always been in the "real estate" business. Abraham, the very first Jew, purchased a small piece of land at Machpelah in which to inter the body of his wife, Sarah. That was over 4,000 years ago. Jews have followed the same custom of finding a holy resting place for their deceased as one of the first prerequisites of any organized Jewish community.

Charlotte is no exception to this tradition. In December 1870, the Hebrew Benevolent Society was organized to purchase land for a cemetery and to operate a final resting place for the Jewish residents of our area. The original eleven acres purchased at a cost of \$25 per acre was subsequently enlarged by the purchase of additional adjacent land so that the cemetery now contains approximately fifteen to seventeen acres in all.

The ACT TO INCORPORATE THE HEBREW BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF THE CITY OF CHARLOTTE, N.C. was actually ratified at the General Assembly in Raleigh on December 24, 1870. The original incorporators included B. Koopmann, S. Frankford, S.A. Cohen, E. Nathans, J. Roessler, J. Rintels, Samuel Cohen, S. Frankenthal, D. Elias, S. Bauman, H. Frankenthal and D. Blum.

By the early 1920's, the original members of the Hebrew Benevolent Society had been gathered unto their fathers. Only Will Weill, a son-in-law of H. Bumgarten, was left. (Incidentally, his family had converted to the Christian faith.) He was the de facto head of the Hebrew Cemetery Association in more ways than one. According to the late Alfred E. Smith, he ran it in

every way, including the finances, etc.

During the early 1930's, at Mrs. Jay Hirshinger's suggestion, M.B. Smith, Arthur Goodman, Sr., and others, arranged to honor Will Weill at a banquet. During the course of the evening, expansive and complimentary speeches were made and he was presented with a diamond studded gold fountain pen. At this point, Mr. Goodman proposed that the first act of Mr. Weill with his new pen would be to sign a deed turning the cemetery over to the newly named Hebrew Cemetery Association. Mr. Weill acceded to this request whereupon Mr. Goodman stated that this honor should be shared by someone who was equally interested in the welfare of Charlotte. Before M. Weill could take umbrage at this diminution of his prestige, Mr. Goodman added, "I refer, of course, to your charming wife." Both husband and wife duly signed the document, and the tract of land and its holy contents legally became the possession of a city-wide Jewish organization. It wasn't until 1971, however, that the official charter of the cemetery was amended to carry the new name.

In passing, it seems that Mr. Weill incurred about \$500 in debts. The Sisterhood of the Hebrew United Brotherhood (now Temple Israel) graciously loaned the money to the Hebrew Cemetery Association to repay Mr. Weill. There is no record of this money ever having been paid back to the good ladies on West 7th Street.

Since that time, the welfare of the Cemetery was taken care of in turn by Morris Benjamin Smith, and later his son, Alfred E. Smith, both of whom spent many, many years seeing to it that the Hebrew Cemetery in Charlotte was a place to be proud of, as part of our Jewish heritage.

In addition to the Smith

family, there have been many dedicated volunteers who acted as officers and members of the Board of the Charlotte Hebrew Cemetery over the years.

At the present time, the officers are as follows:

Hilbert Fuerstman, President  
Nat H. Roberts, Vice Pres.  
Morris Speizman, Treasurer  
Leslie Cohen, Secretary.

The Board members include:

Ellis Berlin  
Herman Blumenthal  
Phil Guller  
Steven Hockfield  
Ben Jaffa, Sr.  
Leonard Madans  
Paul Ostrow  
Elliott Schwartz  
Marc Silverman  
George Ackerman  
M. Benjamin Sinkoe  
Maurice Weinstein  
Abe Bober  
Rabbi Harold Krantzler  
Rabbi Richard Rocklin  
Rabbi Robert Seigel  
Dr. Mark Perlin  
Al Gordon  
Jerome Levin  
Ted Holt

S.S. Fligel (CPA) serves as independent auditor.

The Cemetery consists of two sections. The oldest section on which the tombstones are permitted, is practically filled.

The remaining five to ten acres which are still available are designed for use as a memorial park (without headstones).

At the present time, we are experiencing approximately 12 to 20 funerals per year. On this basis, it would probably take three generations to fill up the balance of the memorial park. However, with an accelerated rate of increase in our population, and the "graying of America," it may be a matter of two generations rather than three before the Cemetery is completely filled.

Richard Melenson is the Executive Director of the Cemetery and is assisted in his duties by a foreman and a laborer. From time to time, extra help is needed to take care of emergencies and for servicing and beautifying the grounds.

The major problem which is incurred in operating the Cemetery by our volunteer

group is that of finances. It costs approximately \$40,000 a year to maintain the Cemetery and pay the salaries, etc., for the personnel involved. A modest allocation from the Charlotte Jewish Federation helps defray the costs of burials for indigents, etc.

At present, only 15% of the estimated 1,200 families in Charlotte are members of the Hebrew Cemetery Association and pay \$25 per year dues. The cost of plots to members is approximately one-half the

price charged to non-members.

Every Jewish member of the community should belong to the Cemetery because this is a fundamental obligation of Jews down through the ages.

Our Cemetery is not a "popular" cause, nor one in which we can raise vast amounts of money through voluntary means. It is, however, a basic part of our Jewish community, and as such, deserves the support of every Jew in the Charlotte and surrounding communities.

### "Ninety Days For Renewal"

"Ninety Days for Renewal," an intensive program designed to heighten community awareness of the United Jewish Appeal's Project Renewal campaign nationwide, was unveiled by Bernard M. Waldman, UJA National Project Renewal Chairman.

Waldman stated that the program, which will be implemented in communities from San Diego to Boston throughout the spring, offers communities "a unique opportunity to join in a national outpouring of support for a program which is improving the quality of life for more than 300,000 Israelis, including 200,000 children, living in Israel's older, immigrant neighborhoods."

Waldman said that a number of communities have already scheduled events to incorporate into their local campaigns. In Boston and Oakland, the Jewish communities are conducting Major Gifts Missions to Israel, with minimum gifts of \$10,000 to Project Renewal. Twelve other communities, including Albany, Richmond and Pittsburgh, will participate in "reverse missions," in which

representatives from Project Renewal neighborhoods will visit their twinned American communities and take part in various fundraising events.

The community of Metro-West, New Jersey, will be participating in a month of intensive Renewal programming that includes parlor solicitations, educating and soliciting local congregations, and special activities for young people to encourage their involvement in Project Renewal. In St. Louis, the Jewish youth community will be running a "people to people" program in which 1500 local youths have been photographed and paired with the same number of youngsters in their Renewal community of Tiberias. They will participate in a Walk for Israel marathon, with the proceeds designated for Tiberias. In addition, they will be involved in pen-pal correspondence and other activities with their Israeli counterparts.

"These are examples," Waldman said, "of the creativity, commitment and excitement that Project Renewal has generated both in American Jewish communities and in their twinned Israeli neighborhoods."

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