

Community News

From the New President of the Hebrew Cemetery Association

By Brian Yesowich, President, Hebrew Cemetery

On March 1, I became the latest in a long line of Hebrew Cemetery Association Presidents in Charlotte. I am truly humbled to follow in the footsteps of outgoing Board President Kevin Levine, who has demonstrated tremendous community leadership and accessibility for Hebrew Cemetery members throughout his tenure. Kevin guided the Board through the development of a cemetery Master Plan, which resulted in the current cemetery expansion and the second Capital Campaign in the cemetery's 140 year history.

Further, I have so much respect for our dedicated Hebrew Cemetery board volunteers, some of whom have spent nearly 40 years in service to our cemetery, and our cemetery's warm, approachable Executive Director, Sandra Goldman, who continues to be a comfort and helpmate for our Jewish families.

But to explain a bit about how I became involved in the cemetery, I should say that my knowledge and interest in our community cemetery actually preceded my family's move here in 2007. During the summer of 2003, my travels took me to, of all places, the Renaissance Bookshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. If you are familiar with it, you know that it is a tremendous bookstore, located in the Milwaukee airport, with a large Jewish interest section.

The Renaissance Bookshop was where I picked up a book with the following passage by Harry Golden: "When the Peddler's Pack became too heavy in middle age, he picked his favorite spot and laid the foundation for the department store. The first [Jew] in Charlotte was an Aaron Cohen, a veteran of Washington's Army, who was also a silversmith. His daughter, Elizabeth, was the first to be interred in the local Hebrew Cemetery."

Harry Golden, born Herschel Goldhirsch in the Ukraine, moved to Charlotte in 1941, became a journalist for *The Charlotte Ob-*

server and soon thereafter began a 25-year career as publisher of *The Carolina Israelite*. Golden became a nationally-known essayist who championed civil rights and never shied away from controversy. He, too, is buried in our Hebrew Cemetery.

So back in 2003, I paid \$3.95 for Harry Golden's book, which many readers may recognize as *Only In America*, and \$2.75 for its sister volume, *For 2 Cents Plain*, and that was my introduction to the Charlotte Hebrew Cemetery.

Aaron Cohen is not the only peddler that came to Charlotte. All Jewish Charlotteans should know Witkowsky's Dry Goods at the corner of Trade and Tryon. Mr. Witkowsky's partner, Jacob Rintells lived above the Dry Goods store with his family. Mr. Rintells, his wife and two of their children also are buried in our Hebrew Cemetery.

And while the Cohen family is our cemetery's link to the Revolutionary War, our cemetery has representation from each of our Country's conflicts with many honored veterans finding a final resting place here. Over time, our community cemetery has become a veritable Charlotte Jewish history book.

Many people do not realize that as our community has grown and diversified, our community cemetery, which is not affiliated with any one temple, has also grown and diversified. New sections are now available for Orthodox or interfaith families and for those favoring cremation. This fall, our beautiful, new Memorial Building will be complete and new gravesites will be prepared for community access in the coming months and years. I encourage you to visit our website at www.hebrewcemetery.org to see the map and pricing structure.

The cemetery we enjoy today is the result of a lot of forethought and generosity from the Jewish



Construction progresses at the Hebrew Cemetery.

community. The original dozen or so Jewish families in Charlotte purchased a huge tract of land for our cemetery just north of the city. Fortunately, they planned with ample "room to grow."

We, in 2013, have become the beneficiaries of our ancestors' vision. Working with the dedicated volunteers of Charlotte's first and oldest Jewish institution, I will do my best to honor that vision and the memory of those who are buried at the Hebrew Cemetery in Charlotte.

Our Executive Director, Sandra Goldman, would be happy to answer any questions you might have about becoming a member of our Hebrew Cemetery Association or purchasing plots. She may be reached at director@hebrewcemetery.org or 704-576-1859. I, too, welcome your questions and comments about our Cemetery by email at byshalomch@gmail.com. ☆



Carol Sandler (left), Nancy Tarbis, and Harriet Perlin hosted a Shalom Bayit Presidents' Day Party for the children at the new Shelter for Battered Women on February 16. Shalom Bayit, a group of local volunteers working to end domestic abuse in our Jewish community, is encouraging everyone to help out at the expanded Shelter. Twin sheets, diapers size 5-6, towels, and shower caps are among the items always in short supply. Call the Shelter at 704-944-0169 to help and, for information on domestic abuse, see www.shalom-bayit-nc.org.



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