

Berger Family Ner Tamid Finds Permanent Home

By Jonathan Berger with Kelly Reed Keeling

Many services now have been held at the Mindy Ellen Levine Memorial Chapel in the Memorial Building at the Hebrew Cemetery. Visitors are enveloped in the Chapel's warmth and beauty. Light bounces off the wooden clad columns and the creamy marble. The Memorial Wall is filled with names of loved ones, remembered, regardless of where they are buried. The atmosphere is intimate and peaceful. At the far end of the Chapel stands the former Temple Beth El ark, made of veined white marble, complete with its resplendent golden lions. Suspended above the Ark is a beautiful bronze Ner Tamid, an everlasting light.

But how did the Hebrew Cemetery come to have such a beautiful lamp in its chapel? Its presence is thanks to the family of Jonathan Berger of Temple Israel, who donated this family heirloom. Jonathan shares the lamp's history and how it came to grace Charlotte's Hebrew Cemetery:

The Ner Tamid was purchased in the late 1800s by Baruch and Rebecca Neu, my great grandparents. They lived in Lengfeld IM Odenwald Germany. Baruch and Rebecca had three children: Jennie, Hugo, and my grandfather, Alfred. Rebecca died in 1926. Alfred married Carola Berberich, and they had one child, my mother - Renate (b. 11/23/1930).

In 1928, two of the three siblings, Jennie and Hugo, immigrated to the United States. Jewish families were persecuted in Lengfeld, however, Alfred and his family managed to move to Frankfurt, and then immigrate with Baruch to the US in 1939. Baruch brought the lamp with him. The family lived together in New York City. In 1942, Baruch died, and shortly thereafter, Alfred, Carola, and Renate moved to Vineland, NJ, where they purchased a chicken farm. The family inherited the lamp and displayed it in a very special place in their home.

Renate Neu married my father, Stefan Berger in 1953. They had two children, Michael and me. My mother's parents passed in close succession. Carola died in 1969; Alfred died in 1970. My mother inherited the lamp, and my parents always displayed it in a special place in their homes in Erie, PA.

In 2006, my parents, Stefan and Renate, moved to Charlotte to be closer to my family. They lived at Sunrise across the street from Shalom Park. The lamp, once again, found a special place in their home.

My mother cherished the lamp



The Berger family with the ner tamid.

and its history. It brought back fond memories of her parents, grandparents, and life in Vineland and Germany. Her goal was to find a special place for the lamp to be where many people could appreciate its beauty and history forever. She approached a couple of museums and synagogues, but was unable to find the special place for which she was looking.

My father, Stefan, died in Charlotte on April 27, 2013, and

my mother, Renate, died in Charlotte on August 6, 2013. They were soul mates, very much in love and very dependent on one another. They are buried side by side in the Hebrew Cemetery in Charlotte, very close to the new Cemetery building.

I inherited the lamp and continued the journey to find a permanent home for it where people could enjoy its beauty and history. As the new cemetery building was being constructed with its beautiful ark, I noticed that there was no Ner Tamid (everlasting light) in front of the ark. I approached the team that was designing and building the building, showed them the beautiful lamp, and told them its story. They felt it would be a great addition. Today my mother's shabbat lamp is being utilized as the Ner

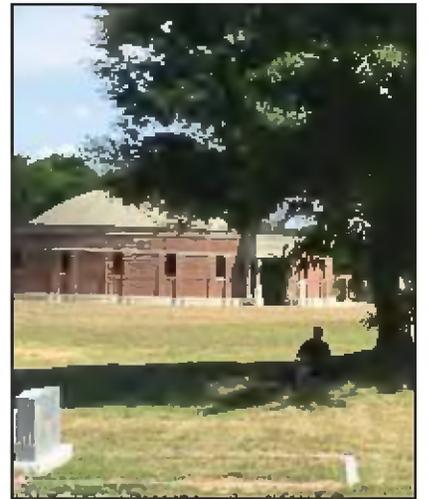
Tamid for everyone to enjoy in the building, hanging in front to the Ark.

I can see my parent's graves from the entrance of the Cemetery Building. It brings a smile to my face and a tear to my eye, having the lamp on display in a special place so close to where my parents have been laid to rest. I am grateful that the Hebrew Cemetery has adopted this



meaningful artifact and is caring for it the way my mother wished.

The continual care of the Cemetery is the responsibility of our Jewish community. To make a meaningful financial gift, to purchase a memorial plaque (\$1000 each) or to preplan a funeral, thereby saving your family thousands of dollars and making the transition easier, please contact Director Sandra Goldman at 704-576-1859 or director@hebrew-cemetery.org. ☆



Michael Berger at his parents' graveside.



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