

Learning from the Past, Planning for the Future

By Sandra Goldman, Director

I recently attended the Jewish Cemetery Association of North America Conference in Massachusetts. Because of its rich history, Boston was the perfect site for a conference. I first enjoyed a tour of the old part of the city, including a walking tour of the Old Granary Cemetery. It was very special to stand in front of the burial grounds of Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and "Mother Goose."

Next stop was the first Jewish cemetery in Massachusetts in East Boston: Temple Ohabei Shalom. I was stunned to hear that The Commonwealth did not grant Jews full rights of citizenship until 1821. Jews were actually not allowed to be buried in Boston until 1842, when ten men founded the first Jewish congregation.

Back at the center we enjoyed listening to the keynote speaker, Rabbi Daniel Cohen, a well-known Rabbi from Hartford, CT. He spoke about leading a life of legacy. Rabbi Cohen's talk was very inspirational as he discussed how we all can lead our lives every day with a sense of urgency and how we can create a sacred space to reflect on who we are and who we want to be so that we may realize our innermost goals and dreams. Rabbi Cohen reminded the attendees that Jewish destiny will not fail partly because Jewish cemetery directors are important guardians of Jewish traditions.

During the remainder of the conference we heard about the Jewish Community Legacy Project (JCLP). This is a resource for small congregations located outside of metropolitan areas that have an aging population, dwindling leadership, and a desire to insure their legacy. By acting as a liaison between such congregations and a variety of partners, JCLP facilitates actions to focus on short-term sustainability and long-term planning to cover perpetual care of a cemetery, preserving historic documents, and artifacts reflecting the interests and values of each community separately.

We were fascinated to learn from the director of Mount Auburn Cemetery (the first large scale cemetery in America, founded in 1831) in Cambridge. Mount Auburn cemetery is more than ten times larger than our cemetery and has committed to improve the experience of its 200,000 annual visitors. This amazing cemetery engages the public and academics and historians to interpret the art off and on the monuments. Mount Auburn uses an app to connect with the public. We can't wait to share similar information once the Hebrew Cemetery's new cemetery software program is up and running.

I attended a workshop with the New England Historic Genealogical Society and Jewish Heritage Center, focused on how to research family history. I learned about genealogical resources and available collections. The Jewish Heritage Center was founded in 1845 and is the country's largest

and oldest nonprofit genealogy library and archive. These two entities explore and preserve the histories of Jewish families and institutions in New England and really around the world. If you want to find your family, they will help you. These are valuable website for your search: www.Familysearch.org; www.Americanancestors.org; www.jgsny.org.

In addition to cemetery specific issues I was also briefed on cybersecurity and fraud. We all have been using firewalls, antivirus programs, data encryption, and great policies and procedures but it still is not enough. A large amount of time was allotted to discuss how to reduce risk.

To lighten things up we all went on a tour to Wayland, a fairly new Jewish cemetery and took a guided tour to Lexington and Concord. I walked along the historic Battle Road, followed Revere's midnight ride, and stopped along Minute Man National Historical Park and heard about the events of April 19, 1775 at Concord's Old North Bridge that led to the Revolutionary War that led to our independence.

These few days gave me a chance to learn, connect and network with cemetery directors around the country. The conference reminded me that every generation of Jews faces its own challenges of how to reconcile ancient traditions with modern new views. By continuing to honor our departed loved ones and celebrate their lives, our beloved Hebrew cemetery has embraced the entire community and fulfilled our varied needs.

For further questions or requests please contact me at director@hebrewcemetery.org or at 704-576-1859. ☆



The cemetery at Temple Ohabei Shalom.



Sandra at Concord's Old North Bridge, site of the "shot heard 'round the world."



Paul Revere's burial place.



Gravesite of British soldiers from the Revolutionary War.

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