

## GREENBURGH HEBREW CENTER -- The First Twenty-five Years

One day late in spring of 1946, Al Spiegel and Arthur Davis met to discuss the possibility of organizing a religious group which would cater to the needs of the Jewish residents of the lower Greenburgh area. Since it was agreed that such a group was vitally needed, both men began scouting villages of Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings and Irvington to locate interested families who would support such a venture.

It was determined, in October of that year, that only about two dozen families could be located who expressed a willingness to support a religious organization that would be in part a Jewish social group. Accordingly, a meeting was scheduled in November at Dr. Davis' home, at which the following men were present: Jack Baron, Meyer Camhi, Arthur Davis, Louis Ettus, Morris Lerner, Harry Reider, Morris Reider, Al Spiegel, Harry Spiegel, Sandor Smalheiser.

Although the attendance proved to be somewhat disheartening, promises were nevertheless obtained from a sufficient number of other interested families to indicate that there was a nucleus that could be counted on for support. The name Greenburgh Hebrew Center was suggested, deemed appropriate and descriptive, and adopted. So as to attract the greatest number of people, it was thought best to use the "middle of the road" approach and adopt the conservative philosophy. The Reformed people and those that leaned toward Orthodoxy accepted this decision and agreed that this would be the Center's attitude, hopefully, throughout its existence.

Arrangements were made to meet again, late in January, in the assembly room in the Hastings Municipal Building, to which all interested individuals would be invited. The second meeting of the fledgling Greenburgh Hebrew Center was held on January 28, 1947 in Hastings. Approximately 20 families participated in the meeting.

However, this was the first meeting in which the minutes were recorded. The first business was the election of officers: President Arthur Davis, Vice-President Matthew Davis, Secretary Bess Pobiner, Treasurer Moe Reider. The following committees were also set up: Executive, Membership, Program and Junior League -- to sponsor young people's activities. The members voted to rent Legion Hall in Dobbs Ferry as a permanent meeting place. It was decided that each meeting was to be divided between business and social activities. Card playing was to be barred after business meetings.

At the next meeting, February 25, 1947, a Board of Trustees was elected. Charles Joseph was in the process of getting a charter necessary to make this a legally recognized organization. The Executive Committee reported the following:

1. The Legion Hall was rented for \$125 for one year. This included ten meeting nights, four holidays, three social events.
2. The Jewish Theological Seminary was contacted for a rabbi for the High Holidays, as well as for a Hebrew teacher.
3. A census was to be taken of children who might go to Hebrew School.
4. A journal and fashion show were discussed, as well as the following:
  - a. Mrs. Joseph was to take care of publicity.
  - b. Dues were \$10 per family.
  - c. Treasurer Moe Reider reported \$242.23 on hand after expenses.
  - d. Speakers were to be planned for meetings.
  - e. Ladies were to donate refreshments.

Another busy meeting, with many activities planned, was recorded March 25, 1947.

No minutes were recorded after that until September 30, 1947. This is what the minutes recorded happened in the interim:

- a. The High Holidays had attracted 150 people. Mr. Soffen, a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, had conducted the services.
- b. Twenty-two children attended an end-of-season party.
- c. A Succoth festival for children and a trip to the Jewish Museum was planned for them.
- d. A card party was planned for November 13th, \$1.00 admission.

From then on, raising money was a prime activity. Women workers were among the most prolific fund raisers, and two leaders were Miriam Marrus and Leona Bender. There were card parties and dances in the High School gym. There were theatre parties, and a rummage sale brought in \$480.60. Several tent bazaars, dinner and journal affairs brought in much-needed cash. The men put on spaghetti dinners, beef steak picnics and, of course, Kol Nidre drives.

The First Sunday School classes were held in the Legion Hall September 1948 with 15 children. Three classes were grouped according to age. Bernice Jacobson, Helen Baron and Joseph Shiro, principal,

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each had a group. The object was to teach Bible stories, Jewish history, customs, ceremonies and current events. Classes met for two hours on Sunday mornings. Texts, story telling, crayon and paper work and the use of plays were used to teach. About that time the first permanent rabbi was elected. He took over the religious education of the children. Hebrew was introduced and classes in Hebrew were taught in the afternoon after public school sessions.

A growing congregation required expanded facilities. The result was that under the leadership of Jack Sonkin, Hyman Lipman, Al Spiegel and others, a drive was started to raise money and find a permanent home for the Center. At the present location of the Center on Broadway there was a large brick building,



*First home of Greenburgh Hebrew Center*

which was purchased. This building was remodeled and then housed the Sunday school, a sanctuary for religious services, offices and a home for the caretaker. This was all accomplished by the fall of 1949.

By this time there were about 50 member families. The Center became the focal point for these Jewish families, and it also acted as an incentive for many Jewish people to make their homes in this area. It became an outlet for their religious and social needs, and a place for their children to get religious training, as well as a place to meet their peers.

The Center continued to grow in many ways. New members brought in new ideas and new energy for the new demands. There were many divergent points of view leading to some dissension, but time proved that what the Center represented was much greater and far beyond any individual's temporary feelings. By and large, there was such a wonderful spirit of cooperation and fellowship in the early days, that it permeated the new members and so carried the spirit along even to this day.

In gleaning through the old minutes of meetings, a few names and activities were picked at random to highlight an activity. A future enlarged history would be more specific. Since no Center can succeed with officers alone, so all old members and workers can take pride in the accomplishments they helped to create.

*The foregoing article was written for the 25th Anniversary Journal by Dr. Arthur David and Joseph Shriro. Both members have passed away. Each contributed of himself in many ways to the growth of the Greenburgh Hebrew Center.*

*A second article, by Rabbi Barry Kenter, covering the last 25 years of the history of the Greenburgh Hebrew Center will appear in the next issue of The Ferryman.*

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