

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Spring 2009

NEWSLETTER

Sivan/Tammuz

Vandalism of a Jewish Cemetery in New Brunswick: A Retrospective Look

By Dr. Nathan Reiss

In January 2008, the cemetery used by Congregation Poile Zedek of New Brunswick and Congregation Etz Ahaim of Highland Park was extensively vandalized. Both congregations have been in operation for many years, and the cemetery is more than 100 years old. I was involved in dealing with some of the consequences of this sad affair, and in the process made observations and gained some insights that might be of interest to those of us concerned with community history.

A cemetery is one of the few things that cultures and religions all over the world all hold sacred. One reason for this may be that human remains cannot be a threat to anyone, so it is particularly cowardly and obscene to molest them or the surroundings in which they are placed. Also, societies recognize that most of their members and their beloved relatives will eventually end up in cemeteries themselves, so keeping cemeteries sacred is in everybody's self-interest.

As with most cemeteries around the world, this cemetery was not locked. People should be able to visit graves unhampered by locks and fences. In any case, locks and fences are generally not of much use unless they are particularly onerous, in which case they can greatly detract from the character of the cemetery. In this cemetery's long history, there was only one previous, very minor, act of vandalism that anyone could remember.

On January 1, 2008, both congregations were notified that some stones had been turned over in the cemetery. The president of Congregation Etz Ahaim and I investigated and we found that about ten stones, all in a row, had been tipped over. They were all in the Poile Zedek section. Three days later, on the morning of January 4, a day when the funeral of one of our long-time members was scheduled to take place at the cemetery, we were informed that there had been a major act of vandalism, and that hundreds of gravestones, almost all the stones in the cemetery, had been overturned or broken. The funeral of course had to take place anyway, in the middle of what looked like a war zone. Nearly every stone in the cemetery was turned over. It is not difficult to imagine what the feelings were of the family members who attended the funeral that morning.

Naturally, we began to consider who would do something like this, and why. There was no anti-Semitic graffiti, and no other vandalism apart from the stones being tipped over. Many of the stones that were tipped over shattered when they hit the ground. It clearly wasn't the act of a single drunken or drug-crazed individual. Too much effort had been needed for that, and there had been two separate incidents, three days apart, so it was clearly something that was planned and executed by several people.

The lack of anti-Semitic graffiti diminished, but did not eliminate the possibility of an anti-Semitic motive. However, the

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President's Message

Our Society has been putting a lot of effort into improving our Web site, which can be accessed directly at www.jewishgen.org/jhscj, or found by typing "Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey" into your favorite Internet search engine. Some of our site's new features:

- * Up-to-date information about our Lecture Series.
- * Information about our Speaker's Bureau, including our list of speakers and the topics on which they can speak. If you know of an organization that might be interested in hosting one of our speakers, you can direct them to our Web site or suggest that they phone our office for more information.
- * We are also gradually adding information to our Web site about our Society's collections. There is now a list of synagogues, educational institutions, service organizations, individual families, etc. about which there are materials included in our archives. This greatly improves the accessibility of our resources. For example, a person anywhere in the world who is seeking information about the "Roosevelt Congregation of Loving Justice" can now type that name into Google and our Society will be shown as a source of information about it. If you know anyone who is doing research having to do with Jewish families or institutions of Central New Jersey, suggest our Web site as a source of information.

Thanks to David Borowik, our recent intern, for helping us to get started in designing and communicating with our Web site.

Nathan Reiss



Archives Corner

Two student interns are currently working at the JHSCJ offices. Danielle Winter, a senior at Rutgers, has spent some time organizing material that came into the Hadassah collection after last year's 90th Anniversary celebration. Danielle has also interviewed several residents at the Stein Assisted Living Center, capturing their memories on tape for our Oral History collection. Yitzchak Schwartz, a student at Yeshiva University, is creating a new collection based on the documents donated by Adath Israel of Woodbridge when they merged with Congregation Neve Shalom. It is a great pleasure to see young people become excited about the history of the Jews of Central Jersey, and their help is greatly appreciated.

RECENT DONATIONS

From Ken Robinson: Books--*Genealogical Resources in New York*; *Resources for Jewish Genealogy in the Boston Area*; other genealogical research materials (newsletters, brochures, booklets); overhead projector

From Rutgers Alexander Library: Bulletins, Neve Shalom Oct. 1990-Oct. 1993

From Thelma Purdy: Items from Temple Beth O'r/Beth Torah, Clark, NJ, including 50th Anniversary Journal, temple directories, event flyers; booklet "The Story of the Jewish People", printed in 1945 by the Jewish Welfare Board and distributed by the YM-YWHA in Elizabeth, NJ

From Nat Reiss: Board of Trustees minutes for Etz Ahaim, Nov. 1977 – Sept. 1989; July 1993

From Rachel Weintraub: Etz Ahaim, Hadassah, and Ahavas Achim bulletins, 2008-9

THANK YOU

We are grateful to the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation for their generous contribution of \$5,000.

We thank these members for their donations to our Endowment Fund:

Hans and Ruth Fisher	Georgia and Charles Weiner
Joan Sassenoff	Stanley and Arlene Ferman
Doris Chilton Kahn	Ann Zar and Arthur Taub
Elizabeth and Larry McCandlish	

Membership News

Welcome to our new members: Marilyn Lipoff, Janet Fine, Myldrd B. Green, and Jessie Ellison.
Thank you for renewing at the Patron Level: Murray Sternberg, Ann Zar and Arthur Taub, and Victoria Zagorin

EDITORIAL STAFF

Contributors: Dr. Nathan Reiss
Deborah Cohn

Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

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JHSCJ OFFICERS

President	Nathan M. Reiss
Vice President	Harvey Hauptman
Treasurer	Susan Marchand

The American Jewish Experience Lecture Series

Our 12th Annual Lecture Series is currently running in two locations. The schedules for the remaining lectures are as follows:

Series #1 Monroe Township Jewish Center (Etz Chaim) 11 Cornell Drive Monroe Township	Series #2 Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple 222 Livingston Avenue New Brunswick
Lectures are held on the 2nd Monday of the month 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE	Lectures are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month* 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE
July 13 Dawn and Paul Horowitz <i>Operas with a Jewish Theme: Salome</i>	July 15 Dawn and Paul Horowitz <i>Operas with a Jewish Theme: Salome</i>
August 10 Mildred Goodwin <i>American Jewish Women and their Salons</i>	August 19 Mildred Goodwin <i>American Jewish Women and their Salons</i>
September 14 Philip Cantor <i>Jews in the World of Crime</i>	September 16 Philip Cantor <i>Jews in the World of Crime</i>
October 12 Dr. Nathan Reiss <i>Anarchists Among Us: The Modern School of Stelton</i>	October 21 Dr. Nathan Reiss <i>Anarchists Among Us: The Modern School of Stelton</i>
November 9 Ruth Marcus Patt <i>The Jewish Experience in California</i>	November 18 Ruth Marcus Patt <i>The Jewish Experience in California</i>



Speakers Bureau

Our lecturers have been very busy lately! Nat Reiss has spoken to the residents at Regency at Monroe on "The Jews of the Bronx," and to the Yiddish Heritage Club, Burlington County Hadassah, the YM-YWHA of Union County, and the new Jewish History Museum of Monmouth County on the topic of "Am I My Brother's Cousin?" Mildred Goodwin has also spoken at the new museum, as well as to the Jewish Congregation of Concordia, about "Six Brilliant Points on the Jewish Star," and to the Etz Chaim Sisterhood in Monroe Township on "Women in Reel Life." Harvey Hauptman has spoken at the JCC of Middlesex County about Adolph Ochs, and Ann Gold spoke to the same audience about the Jews of Cuba. We are most grateful to our speakers, who donate their honoraria back to the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey. If you are a member of an organization that might enjoy a lecture by one of our interesting speakers, please contact the JHSCJ office.

Tributes

From:	To:	Occasion:
Muriel and Stanley Haber	Family of Marcia Hopp Spears	In memory of Marcia Hopp Spears
Betty Saltiel	Bert Sher	In memory of his wife Harriet
Betty Saltiel	Beverly Teich	In memory of her husband Stanley
Betty Saltiel	Irene and Seymour Vogel	Mazel Tov on their 50th Anniversary
Ruth Marcus Patt	Family of Frances Zagoren	In memory of Frances Zagoren

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cemetery is in an out-of-the-way location, barely noticeable by passers-by, and not the type of high-profile target usually preferred by people trying to make a public statement. It seemed more likely to us that the vandalism had been done by local people who were familiar with the area.

About six days after the second event, the New Brunswick Police announced that they had arrested four persons, all juveniles, who, when confronted, admitted to having done the vandalism. All of the boys lived in the neighborhood, and they indicated that they spent an entire night, working together, doing it.

The magnitude of the incident attracted the local media, and the photos and description of what happened quickly was picked up by TV stations, regional newspapers, and Web sites, including those of numerous Jewish organizations. Condolences and donations from throughout the U.S. and abroad began to flood in. We calculated that the damage was into six figures, and it seemed unlikely that money raised would be sufficient to cover the restoration.

One thing that most people, even the members of the two synagogues involved, never realized, was the magnitude of other problems that would be entailed by the vandalism.

Who would pay for undoing what was done? Insurance policies for cemeteries cover liability for slips and falls, for damage to the general grounds, etc. However, repairs to gravestones are not covered. After all, the cemetery owner did not purchase them and had no control over their purchase price. Our initial assessment, which proved to be correct, was that the vandals and their families would be unable to pay anything even approaching full restitution for the vandalism.

Who is the party responsible for the gravestones? The gravestones are considered to be the property of owners of the graves. We learned, much to our surprise, that many homeowners' insurance policies automatically include a clause that provides coverage for vandalism of graves of the policyholder's close relatives.

How do we locate relatives of people who were buried many years ago? This was a very difficult undertaking. A list was compiled of the names of those whose gravestones were damaged. Longtime members of the congregations were queried regarding the names and possible whereabouts of relatives whom we needed to contact. As many relatives as possible were located, primarily through use of the Internet.

What do we communicate to the relatives? We informed the relatives of what had happened and suggested that they check their homeowners' insurance policies to determine whether they were covered. We provided them with the information they needed to make their insurance claims, and strongly suggested that they file a claim, which would

help minimize the cost of restoring the cemetery.

It was determined that rather than each grave-owner contracting to have their own stone repaired, it would be more expeditious and less expensive to have one or more overall contractors do the work. Once the overall cost was determined, each identified grave-owner would contribute the portion attributable to the grave(s) that they owned. If they chose to have the work done themselves, they had the option to do so.

It turned out that, as bad as the damage appeared, most of the stones were only slightly damaged, if at all, and only needed to be re-erected. We identified a company that specializes in erecting gravestones, and they were able to do this work at a reasonable cost. Before re-erecting, each stone had to be examined to assure that there were no hidden cracks that would cause the stone to become further damaged as they were lifted.

Another company was retained to repair or replace the stones that were damaged. Here too, it was difficult to make an evaluation because the damaged portions of the stones frequently were on the side that was facing down to the ground. A company representative had to come to the cemetery to do rubbings of the writing and decorative patterns on each of the stones. In some cases it was possible to cement the broken pieces of a stone back together. In other cases, the entire stone needed to be replaced.

Since the persons who committed the crime were juveniles, the legal proceedings were private and took place in Family Court, with only one representative from each synagogue allowed to attend. Also attending were the Judge, family members of the boys, each boy's lawyer, and representatives of the County Prosecutor's office. A few additional persons from the synagogues were allowed to attend on the day of the sentencing.

The Judge ruled, after hearing the evidence, that this was not a bias crime, which could have led to more serious consequences. To those of us from the two congregations who had come to witness the proceeding, it was immediately evident that this was not going to add up to a satisfactory outcome. The boys clearly were not going to be able to pay for the damages, and because they were juveniles, the maximum sentences that they could receive were not going to be very consequential.

Before the sentencing, there was a very brief opportunity for persons who were affected by the vandalism to address the court. Those who represented the victims spoke of the mental anguish they suffered, along with a sense that their families and their history had been violated by the cruel and incompressible acts of the vandals.

The four boys were sentenced to the approximately two months that they had already served in juvenile custody, were ordered to attend a class relating to the Holocaust, and to each make a nominal restitution payment.

The cemetery has been mostly restored to its original state.

America's "Latter Day Deborah"

On *erev* Yom Kippur, 1890, in Spokane Falls, Washington, twenty-nine year old Rachel (Ray) Frank rose to address the Jewish congregation she had herself helped organize. By doing so, Frank became the first known American woman to preach to a mixed congregation of men and women at a High Holy Day service.

Born in San Francisco in April 1861, Ray Frank was the daughter of Orthodox Eastern European Jews. Her father, a peddler, claimed descent from the renowned Vilna Gaon. After graduating from high school in Sacramento, CA, Frank moved to Ruby Hill, Nevada, where for six years she taught grammar school. In 1885, she rejoined her family in Oakland, supporting herself by offering private literature and elocution lessons and teaching Sabbath school classes at Oakland's first Jewish congregation, where she was named superintendent of the religious school. She also became a journalist and took reporting assignments for several newspapers throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Finding herself on assignment in Spokane Falls on *erev* Rosh Hashanah in September, 1890, Frank inquired about holy day services and was told that there were none because the town's small Jewish community was torn apart by doctrinal disputes between Orthodox and Reform factions. When she expressed her dismay to one of the town's prominent Jewish citizens, he promised to gather a congregation that very evening if she would preach. Before sundown, a special edition of the Spokane falls *Gazette* announced that Frank would speak that night at the local Opera House. In her sermon, Frank warned about the incalculable harm that might befall the community's Jewish children if the adults failed to build a synagogue. A Christian man in attendance offered to donate a site for the synagogue if the Jewish community would erect the building.

Inspired, the Spokane Falls Jewish community invited Frank to speak again at Yom Kippur. In her famed Kol Nidre sermon, which resides in the archive of the American Jewish Historical Society, she implored the community to "drop all dissension about whether you should take off your hats during the service and other unimportant ceremonials and join hands in one glorious cause": prayer to God.

Her address that night changed the focus of Ray Frank's life. During the next several years, she traveled extensively through the West and Northwest, preaching from a variety of Jewish pulpits. She became increasingly concerned in her journalistic writing about attacks on Jews. As she later explained, "I think I may say that my predominant thought

at this time was to do battle for the Jew whenever prejudice was his foe."

More than once, Frank was called upon to heal congregational disputes, and she helped create both Orthodox and Reform congregations in a number of communities. She stressed the importance of women in Jewish life, especially in providing Jewish homes and education for children. She also urged a greater role for women in Jewish secular and religious organizations and helped found sisterhoods in several communities.

Ray Frank came to be hailed as a "latter day Deborah," after the leader of ancient Israel, and occasionally as the "Lady Rabbi," a description she rejected. In 1893, Frank briefly attended rabbinical seminary at Hebrew Union

College to gain a more thorough understanding of Judaism, but did not seek ordination. In September, 1893, she was invited to deliver the opening prayer and a formal address on "Women in the Synagogue" at the first Jewish Women's Congress, convened as part of the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago's World's Fair. Two years later, she officiated at High Holy Day services at an Orthodox synagogue in Victoria, British Columbia, but declined invitations

from several congregations to become a full-time rabbi.

In 1899, while reporting on a world Zionist meeting in Europe, Frank met a young Russian graduate student named Simon Litman. She joined him in studies at the Zurich Polytechnikum, and they married in London in 1901. Ray Frank Litman brought Simon to America, where he taught economics at universities in California and Illinois. Ray's own career as a widely traveled journalist and lecturer virtually ended as she devoted her primary attention to her family. Only occasionally would she accept speaking engagements far from home, although until her death in 1948 she remained active in the affairs of her own congregation and the Hillel chapter at the University of Illinois.

Though her public career as the "American Deborah" was brief, Ray Frank Litman was the first American Jewish woman to win public recognition as a religious leader and preacher. Her example has inspired American Jewish women ever since.

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*Major featured articles and events from this newsletter are available on our
web site: www.jewishgen.org/jhscj approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.*

