

Chesed



HFBA honors the Jewish past, present and future at Mount Richmond Cemetery

Family research and burial application lead to a great-ancestor

Mother and daughter connect with their family history on clean-up day at Mount Richmond Cemetery

The night before The Leffell School ninth graders visited Mount Richmond Cemetery, Sara Birnbaum told her daughter Aviva about a maternal ancestor buried there named Sam Cooperman. Sara had done significant genealogical research on her great-grandfather and had always intended to visit his grave, but it was Aviva who would make the pilgrimage now from Westchester County to Staten Island.

Even after collaborating with a cousin, Sara could glean only an outline of Sam's short life. Around 1900, Sam got married in Selz, a *shtetl* in Russia (now Syalyets, Belarus). Five years later, Sam set off to New York on a steamer without his wife and three daughters. He would find work and a place to live before arranging for them to make the transatlantic voyage. In September 1910, Sam's wife and children finally joined him in New York.



Front row (left to right): Judith (Sara Birnbaum's paternal grandmother), Ida (Sam Cooperman's wife and Judith's mother), and Mae (Judith's sister). Back row (left to right): Betty, Sam Fischer (husband of Rose), and Rose.

Within two months of the family's arrival, Sam died at Beth Israel Hospital. He was 32 years old. Seven months after his death, his fourth daughter — Sara's grandmother Judith — was born.

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Cemetery upgrades enhance workplace safety

Camera, lighting and gate improvements will protect volunteers, employees and property

With antisemitic incidents in the U.S. up 140 percent since 2022,* HFBA is completing a vital set of security upgrades at Mount Richmond Cemetery.

Thanks to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Nonprofit Security Grant Program, HFBA has installed lighting, wifi-enabled cameras and an automated front gate to replace a padlocked gate in use for much of HFBA's 136-year-long history.

Two additional New York State funding sources under the rubric of hate-crime grants have improved security at HFBA's administrative building and *tahara* facility.

HFBA's goal was to ensure the safety of its female and male *chevra kadisha* members, who are often on cemetery premises after dark. They, as well as HFBA's chaplain, cemetery operations coordinator, and facilities staff, now carry key fobs that allow them quick and easy entry into the various buildings.

* Anti-Defamation League's "Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2023," April 16, 2024

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TO DONATE TO HFBA, VISIT [HTTPS://WWW.HEBREWFREEBURIAL.ORG/DONATE](https://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate)

Continued from front page

Mother and daughter pay homage to great-ancestor



Aviva Birnbaum, ninth grader at The Leffell School, stands next to her ancestor's grave

Sara had been in touch with Hebrew Free Burial Association and had a copy of Sam's burial application. It wasn't until her cousin Judy uncovered the missing link, however, that Sara could connect Sam's wife and children to him beyond a shadow of a doubt.

"Judy found the ship's manifest and learned that Sam's surname in Russia was Mokren," Sara says. "For reasons

unknown, Sam began using Kupperman as his last name in the U.S., and by the time of his death, he or his family had changed it to Cooperman."

Thanks to HFBA's "Leave Your Mark" campaign, Sam's grave has been marked with a stone that bears his American name.

HFBA's burial records helped point Aviva to her ancestor's plot.

"I was really excited to do this *mitzvah* on clean-up day," Aviva told HFBA. "It was amazing to be my parents' emissary and also get to help my classmates beautify the grounds for my great-great-grandfather and so many other Eastern European Jews."

THE STRUGGLES OF EARLIER GENERATIONS

Sara, now a student at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, takes satisfaction in seeing Aviva's connection to the family history.

"The stories we tell our children are a profound tool for Jewish continuity," she says. "In addition to performing its core mission, HFBA made it possible for my family to reach back into the early twentieth century and understand something about the struggles of the people who came before us."

"It was a special experience to make that connection," Aviva says. ■

To arrange a synagogue or school clean-up visit to Mount Richmond Cemetery, email: ereis@hebrewfreeburial.org

To submit your genealogy request to HFBA, email: genealogy@hebrewfreeburial.org

Continued from front page

Lights, camera, and security at Mount Richmond Cemetery

The lighting also inhibits nocturnal animals from venturing near HFBA's buildings.

Meanwhile, two New York State grants, funded by the "Securing Communities Against Hate Crimes Grant Program," will facilitate the installation of security impact windows, designed to protect against break-ins and forced entry.

In addition, a generous grant from a private foundation will go to the purchase of a back-up generator for use during storm-related outages or potential acts of vandalism. Out of respect for the dead, an alternate energy source is crucial for keeping the facility's walk-in refrigerator operational at all times.

"Thanks to \$250,000 in federally and state-funded grants, and thanks to additional foundation funding, we are keeping Mount Richmond Cemetery secure today while also preparing for the future," says HFBA assistant director Efreim Reis. ■



Electronic key fob opens cemetery front gate at Mount Richmond Cemetery

Rabbi addresses misconceptions about suicide burials

Once seen as rejection of faith, suicide is viewed in our complex times as a sign of distress

Editor's note: Among the cases we handle every year, a small number consists of people who died by suicide. We turned to Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, HFBA rabbinic advisor, to help us untangle a subject painful — and confusing — to the Jewish community.



Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, HFBA rabbinic advisor

Does Jewish law allow for suicide victims to be buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery?

Yes. In the *Torah*, G-d tells Adam, "From dust you are, and to dust you will return." Every person deserves to be buried. This includes everyone, even suicide victims.

Why do people think a suicide victim cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery?

Until about a hundred years ago, traditional Jewish law viewed suicide as the abandonment of G-d and Judaism. Now, because we understand more about mental illness, we view the suicide victim as somebody who has suffered from anguish or depression. We understand that the suicide victim has not made a religious statement. They have acted out of pain or desperation.

Is it permissible to mention the suicide in a eulogy?

In Judaism, we focus our eulogy on the positives of a person's life, especially their achievements and qualities to emulate. It is a way to pay homage, not analyze the cause of death.

Do family members recite *kaddish* for a suicide victim?

Yes. We attribute the victim's death to their suffering from an emotional illness

or to a drug reaction, and family members recite *kaddish* as they would for any other family member.

Suicide is such a troubling phenomenon. Do you have any words of consolation?

I do not want to minimize the painful challenges people face. I do want to say, though, that we, the Jewish people, have a culture, a most meaningful tradition, and a set of laws that have given us direction on every aspect of life for millennia. If you are feeling despondent, I beseech you to seek help. You can turn toward a mental health professional. You might also turn to your rabbi. The *Torah's* story of creation, peoplehood and faith has shaped the character of the Jewish people for 5785 years. Its words and wisdom give us strength even in the worst of times — as individuals and as members of the Jewish nation. ■

If you or a loved one has suicidal thoughts, call or text 988. For more information visit <http://988lifeline.org>

HFBA attends to lives of lonely desperation

Suicide victims become real to us when we learn something about their back-story. We share sketches of two people to whom we gave a traditional burial with the care and respect they deserved. (Names have been changed out of concern for privacy.)

Alvin A., 71, died en route to a New York hospital after jumping off the roof of his building. We learned about his death from Josh, a friend living in California. Josh couldn't tell us anything about Alvin's occupation or work history. He did know Alvin's mother's name, though, and confirmed that she was Jewish. (HFBA verified Alvin's Jewish parentage by doing research on ancestry.com.) Nearly six months passed before the Public Administrator permitted us to bury him. Josh did not come to the funeral, but he said he might contribute money to put up a monument. Only the HFBA volunteer *miynan* attended the burial.

Boris V., 75, likely died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He was an emigrant from Ukraine and worked as a security guard in Brooklyn.

We learned about Boris's death from his ex-wife, Sofia, a social worker. Sofia confirmed that her former husband's mother was Jewish, but she knew nothing about the state of his finances. From Boris's building superintendent, we learned that Boris spent several days before his death clearing out his apartment in an apparent effort to put his affairs in order.

The signs of a life gone off the rails were evident in Boris's alcoholism.

"He would stop drinking for a while and then go back to the bottle," Sofia told us. "The last year of our twenty-year marriage was especially bad."

Sofia and a Staten Island-based rabbi were the only attendees at Boris's funeral. ■

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Изучение истории семьи и анкета для погребения помогли отыскать родственника

Авива, ученица девятого класса школы Лефелль, собиралась в поездку на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд со своим классом. Накануне поездки мама Авивы, Сара Бирнбаум, поведала дочери, что на этом кладбище покоится их предок по линии Саринной матери, Сэм Куперман. Ранее Сара изучила историю семьи и сама собиралась посетить могилу своего прадеда. И вот теперь именно Авива стала первой, кто совершит это «паломничество» из Вестчестера на Стейтен Айленд.

В своё время Сара выяснила, что в 1900-м году Сэм женился в Сельце, еврейском местечке в Российской империи (сегодня посёлок Сялец в Белоруссии). Пять лет спустя Сэм уехал на пароходе в Нью-Йорк, без жены и трёх дочерей. Сначала он нашёл работу и жильё, прежде чем смог перевезти семью через океан. Наконец в сентябре 1910-го года жена и дети Сэма смогли воссоединиться с ним в Нью-Йорке.

Записи о захоронениях Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA) помогли Авиве отыскать могилу её предка. «Это было удивительно – быть представителем моей семьи в этой поездке и в то же время вместе с одноклассниками помогать приводить в порядок территорию кладбища, где похоронены мой прапрадед и многие другие евреи из Восточной Европы», рассказала Авива нашим сотрудникам.

Сара, мама Авивы, была очень довольна, что та приобщила к истории семьи. «Истории, которые мы рассказываем нашим детям, очень важны для преемственности ценностей еврейской общины», сказала она.

Модернизация территории кладбища направлена на усиление безопасности

Поскольку число антисемитских нападений в США выросло на 140 процентов с 2022 года, HFBA завершает ряд мер по усилению безопасности на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд. Благодаря полученному HFBA федеральному гранту были проведено освещение, подсоединённые к интернету (wifi) камеры, а также автоматически закрывающиеся ворота, которые заменили входные ворота с цепью при входе, просуществовавшие почти все 136 лет со дня основания HFBA.

Дополнительные средства, полученные от штата Нью-Йорк, пошли на усиление безопасности административного здания, а также помещения для проведения обряда тахара (обмывание усопших).

Ещё один грант, щедрое частное пожертвование, предназначен для покупки запасного генератора на случай отключений электричества во время сильных гроз или из-за актов вандализма.

Раввин развенчивает неверные представления о погребении самоубийц

Мы задали несколько вопросов раввину Эльхону Зонну, консультирующему HFBA по галахическим вопросам, чтобы помочь нам разобраться с этой болезненной и запутанной для еврейской общины темой.

HFBA: Позволяют ли еврейские законы хоронить жертв самоубийств на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд?

Р. Зонн: Да. В Торе Вс-вышний говорит Адаму: «Из праха ты создан и в прах ты возвратишься». Каждый человек достоин погребения, это касается и жертв самоубийств.

HFBA: Почему люди думают, что самоубийц нельзя хоронить на еврейском кладбище?

Р. Зонн: Вплоть до начала двадцатого века традиционный еврейский

закон рассматривал самоубийство как отречение от Вс-вышнего и от иудаизма. В наше время мы больше знаем о психических заболеваниях и поэтому рассматриваем самоубийство как результат страданий и депрессии. Мы понимаем, что люди совершают самоубийство из-за боли и отчаяния, а не для того, чтобы продемонстрировать отречение от веры своего народа

HFBA: Читают ли члены семьи каддиш по жертве самоубийства?

Р. Зонн: Да. Поскольку мы считаем причиной смерти страдания от эмоционально-психического расстройства или реакцию на наркотики, члены семьи произносят каддиш так же, как для других родных или близких.

HFBA: Самоубийство – очень тревожное и тяжёлое явление. Есть ли у Вас слова утешения?

Р. Зонн: Если вы чувствуете подавленность или безысходность, я призываю вас обратиться за помощью. Вы можете обратиться к специалисту по психическому здоровью или к своему раввину. Рассказы Торы о сотворении мира, о возникновении нашего народа и нашей веры придавали евреям силы даже в самые тяжёлые времена.

HFBA помогает

Алвин А* скончался в 71 год по дороге в один из нью-йоркских госпиталей после того, как спрыгнул с крыши здания, в котором жил. Мы узнали о смерти Алвина от его друга Джоша, живущего в Калифорнии. Джош не знал, где работал и чем занимался Алвин. Но он знал имя матери Алвина и утверждал, что она была еврейкой. Позже HFBA подтвердило еврейство родителей Алвина, отыскав сведения о них на сайте ancestry.com. Прошло почти полгода, прежде чем городской общественный администратор Нью-Йорка дал разрешение HFBA похоронить Алвина. Джош не смог прилететь на похороны, но заявил, что скорее всего пожертвует на надгробный памятник для своего друга. На обряде погребения присутствовал только наш миньян добровольцев.

Борис В. умер в 75 лет, скорей всего застрелившись. Он был иммигрантом из Украины и в своё время работал в Бруклине охранником. Мы узнали о смерти Бориса от его бывшей жены, Софии, социального работника. Она подтвердила, что мать Бориса была еврейкой, но ничего не знала о финансовом положении Бориса. От суперинтенданта здания, где проживал Борис, мы узнали, что в течение нескольких дней до гибели Борис вычищал квартиру, по-видимому, приводя в порядок свои дела.

По словам Софии, Борис «бросал пить на время, а потом неизменно возвращался к бутылке. Последний год из наших двадцати лет брака был особенно тяжёлым».

На похоронах Бориса присутствовали только София и раввин со Стейтен Айленда.

Наши слова благодарности на праздник Хануки

Из Талмуда мы знаем о заповеди зажигать дополнительную свечу каждую ночь Хануки, чтобы увеличить нашу святость.

Каждый из дарителей Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA) подобен ханукальной свече: благодаря свету, который вы приносите в мир, HFBA может выполнять свою миссию хесед шель эмет (милосердие к усопшим): в этом году мы провели более трёхсот традиционных еврейских похорон.

Мы обращаемся ко всем, кто нас поддерживает: спасибо за то, что помогаете нам заботиться о самых уязвимых членах еврейской общины.

Счастливей вам Хануки, Ханука sameah! ■

DONOR TESTIMONIAL

A “magnificent” tribute comes to HFBA from Cleveland

A Bronx-born donor never forgot his roots and family commitments

Stanley Lasky talks about his father’s bankruptcy as if it happened last month, and not in the 1940s.

“My family moved from Brooklyn to Cleveland, where my father, a Fordham University-trained pharmacist, had been promised a job,” Stanley recalls. “He found out once we arrived that his New York State credentials weren’t honored in Ohio.”

Even so, the family hung on financially because of the great need for pharmacists — legally credentialed or not — during World War II.

The family back in New York, however, didn’t always fare well.

“When my aunt died in 2018, there wasn’t enough money to give her a traditional Jewish funeral,” Stanley told HFBA. “Hebrew Free Burial Association stepped in to do a proper burial.”

Stanley’s gratitude toward HFBA has remained strong ever since his aunt’s death.

“I have made donations over the decades to many worthy Jewish institutions,” he says. “I feel HFBA is one of the most important of these entities.”

Now 93, Stanley remembers his youth in the Bronx and Brooklyn lovingly.

“I made a life for myself in Ohio as a

teacher-administrator, and as our union’s chief steward,” he says. “But I still love New York dearly. I never wanted to leave.”

Stanley — who earned a PhD in sociology at Kent State University, and who co-authored “100 Years: Helping People to Help Themselves” — was also a dedicated volunteer for the Hebrew Free Loan Association of Cleveland, Ohio.

About HFBA, Stanley adds, “Please make my words as magnificent as possible. This is an organization that deserves the highest praise.”

From one magnificent organization to one magnificent donor, thank you. ■

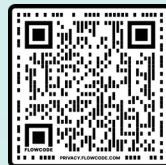
HFBA HELPS

True stories about the people HFBA serves. Names and details are anonymized to preserve confidentiality.

Naomi J., 59, died from cardio-pulmonary failure. She was mentally ill most of her life, but refused to recognize her condition. She got divorced after eight years of marriage because “it was impossible to remain with her,” ex-husband Larry told HFBA. Naomi went from hospital to hospital, seeking medical help for phantom illnesses, all while denying her diagnosed psychiatric problems. Homeless, she eventually entered a facility for the mentally ill. Larry was not Jewish, but he (and his sister) contacted HFBA to ensure that Naomi receive a traditional Jewish funeral. After Naomi’s burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery, Rabbi Shmuel Plafker showed Naomi’s ex-husband and sister-in-law the grave where Naomi’s grandfather had been buried years ago.

Arnold H., 65, died at home alone, from problems related to high blood pressure and arteriosclerosis. One of ten children from his father’s four marriages, Arnold suffered from learning disabilities all his life. Fortunately, he was able to support himself as a medical transport driver. As a young adult, Arnold severed ties with his family and reconnected with his brother Steven only after Steven found him on Facebook. Steven contributed to the cost of Arnold’s burial, and attended the funeral along with a younger sister and friend. Steven told us he was deeply grateful to HFBA for handling funeral and burial arrangements.

Shirley S., 93, died in a Queens, NY nursing home. We learned about her passing from a neighbor, who knew Shirley was Jewish, and who feared she would end up in City Cemetery. A year before her death, Shirley broke her hip. While in rehab, where she suffered a stroke, her landlord initiated eviction proceedings against her based on the condition of her apartment: Shirley had been a hoarder and the place had become uninhabitable. She spent part of her childhood in an orphanage now under the auspices of the Jewish Child Care Association. HFBA’s volunteer *minyán* attended so *kaddish* could be recited. ■



SCAN TO DONATE

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW MORE THAN EVER

You can support HFBA’s mission by making a donation at www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate. To **donate** via Venmo, use @HebrewFreeBurial or our QR code.

Dear Bees: “There’s room enough for the both of us”

In a contest between Jewish tradition and nature, the two can coexist

The trees and grasses that define Mount Richmond Cemetery’s beauty have long been a draw for Staten Island wildlife. Now comes a hive of bees to share Staten Island’s ecological niche with geese and deer.

The bees, hived inside a thriving linden tree, took up residence over the summer — and weren’t always seen as welcome guests.

“The bees wouldn’t be an issue if they were in an older section of the cemetery where we no longer do burials,” says Amy Koplow, HFBA executive director. “We want to maintain an environmental balance, but the safety of our staff and visitors is our top priority.”

HFBA reached out to a beekeeper at Beezy Bees Honey to relocate the hive elsewhere on Staten Island where the bees can safely — and magnificently — produce honey.

The relocation process involves vacuum-suctioning the bees from the hive, transporting the hive in a pickup to a new location after sunset, and reorienting the bees to the hive’s new entrance.

“It’s a delicate process,” Koplow says. ■

HOW TO SUPPORT HFBA AND HELP YOURSELF

GIVE FROM YOUR IRA A tax-free IRA gift is a powerful way to support our sacred work while reducing your future tax burden and meeting your required minimum distribution for 2024.

DONATE STOCKS Many HFBA supporters donate appreciated stocks to support our mission while also legally avoiding capital gains tax.

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A LASTING IMPACT WITH HBFA



You can include Hebrew Free Burial Association in your estate plan at no cost to you. A legacy donation in your will helps HFBA in its mission to treat every Jew with the respect so integral to Jewish law and tradition, regardless of financial status. Get started by visiting www.hebrewfreeburial.org/freewill. If you’ve already included us in your will, let us know by visiting the same site. We are deeply grateful to you for your support.

A word of gratitude from us to you during Chanukah

In the *Talmud*, we learn we are commanded to light an additional candle each night of *Chanukah* as a way to increase our holiness.

Each one of HFBA’s donors is like a *Chanukah* candle: Through the light you have brought into the world, HFBA was able to pursue its mission of *chesed shel emet* by giving more than 300 Jews traditional funerals this year.

To all of our donors and supporters: thank you for helping us care for the most vulnerable souls in our community.

HAPPY CHANUKAH! CHANUKAH SAMEACH!

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CHESED IS PUBLISHED BY HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

Barbara Finkelstein, Editor · Molly Bokor, Designer
Printed by Print & Communication Services, LLC

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