

Jewish Cemeteries in Buffalo, NY

By Chana Revell Kotzin, Ph.D.

The Jewish Buffalo Archives Project has worked hard over the years to survey, document and uncover institutional, organizational and agency records. Along the way, this has often included personal and family records as many institutions, even larger ones, have lay leadership or involvement, and so collecting institutional records has often also meant tracing records associated with individuals over the years. Each of these “finds” has added to our greater understanding, not just of the organization concerned, but the nature of individual interests, actions, and perspectives. You can see how small individual collections have added to our larger story by looking at the guides to collections and weblinks to the “finding aids” (online guides) through the Bureau of Jewish Education’s website, and clicking on

the Jewish Buffalo Archives Page (www.bjebuffalo.org). These small personal records linked to organizational records reflect the connected and interlinked nature of Jewish communities, especially pronounced in smaller communities like Buffalo. They are a real benefit to our broader history and they continue to be added on a regular basis.

Three areas, however, continue to prove challenging when it comes to documentation, images and stories. These are Jewish business, independent fraternal and social organizations and Jewish owned and managed cemeteries. In many articles in The Jewish Journal of Western New York and the Buffalo Jewish Review, over the last year, I have identified these areas, focusing on Jewish businesses, landsmanschaften, hometown and social organizations. For this article, however, I’d like to concentrate on cemeteries.



Beth Jacob Cemetery on Doat Street. Courtesy: FJP/Don Dannecker

While synagogues have maintained histories of their congregations, histories of their associated cemeteries are generally much less detailed. Temples can pull up lists of their past presidents and significant events and dates, but this is less easy for the administrators of cemeteries associated with the synagogues, as their focus has been on recording internments rather than keeping histories of themselves. Now, however, anyone who visits a cemetery recognizes that they are archival monuments of the community, helpful in genealogy, immigration patterns and organizational affiliation and much more, and through this lens, we see cemeteries as a place of memory and communal significance, as well as personal connection. The stories of who created and maintained the cemeteries, and cemetery development are interesting too.

Not all the synagogue-linked cemeteries have synagogues that are still active, and while they are carefully maintained by the Jewish Federation Cemetery Corporation, their detailed histories are harder to come by, especially

as these communities closed many decades ago, so the memories of those who founded and organized them are sparse.

Synagogue related cemeteries are not the only Jewish cemeteries in Greater Buffalo. On Pine Ridge, several cemeteries grew out of social clubs, or landsleute and landsmanschaften, like the Workman’s Circle, North Park and Holy Order. Other cemeteries have even more complicated histories. A case in point is B’nai Israel, on Pine Ridge, next to the Ahavas Sholem. It is likely that B’nai Israel was used by successive smaller shuls from the East Side (other than Beth Jacob which is located on Doat Street) and orthodox shuls located in the Ferry section of Buffalo and elsewhere, as well as small fraternal associations, but that information is limited and we need your help to add to the histories of our unique places of community memory. If you have any historical materials relating to these cemeteries, and the groups associated with them, like clippings, photographs, or documents, we’d love to hear from you.

Please contact me if you can help: Chana Revell Kotzin, Director, Jewish Buffalo Archives Project, or would like to discuss a particular donation at 716-204-5388. You can also email archivesproject@bjebuffalo.org. You can also visit the Jewish Buffalo Archives Project at 2640 North Forest Road, Getzville, NY 14068, however as this a part-time position, and there are times when I am working offsite, it is always best to make an appointment to avoid disappointment.



JEWISH FEDERATION
CEMETERY CORPORATION



*Laughter and lament, joy and pain
succumb to affirmations of life well journeyed
– to loving testaments etched in stone*

PLOTS AVAILABLE
For more information, call 204-2246.