The Future

As with many other Jewish congregations throughout the world, we, too, have been plagued by changes in demographics, leading to lower service attendance at our synagogue. We have persevered over the years and are now looking to the future. We brainstormed, looked for answers, some from those within our community and some from those outside our community. Fortunately, our synagogue building itself is not our problem. Thanks to our restoration and landmark status, we have an attractive building that cries for bodies to fill it. We have had a slight increase in attendance due to non-Ashkenazim moving into the Lower East Side, who felt more comfortable attending our services than Ashkenazi services.

In analyzing our attendance problems, the Board of Trustees discussed whether we should change our Romaniote services to something more acceptable to Jews in the neighborhood, to make our synagogue more inclusive to non-Romaniote Jews. While we do include some occasional Sephardic liturgy in our services, something that goes back to the 1960s when Sephardic synagogues in the area closed and a number of their former congregants joined our congregation, it was decided that we would remain a Romaniote synagogue. This concept is woven into our mission statement: “to preserve the Romaniote heritage through education and the promotion of religious, cultural and social activities that perpetuate our traditions.” This we will continue to do, while welcoming Sephardim who wish to join us.

We have joined forces with, and derived inspiration from, Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, the Chief Rabbi of Athens, Greece, himself a Romaniote. Learning from Rabbi Negrin, who has incorporated minhags from throughout Greece into his services in Athens, the inclusion of these non-Romaniote minhags does not diminish the fact that he is a Romaniote Rabbi serving a mixed Romaniote and Sephardic community. It only strengthens him and, likewise, it will strengthen us. We will always be a Romaniote synagogue but, also, an inclusive one, that respects other liturgical traditions in Greece and those from the Romaniote-Sephardic world of the Mediterranean. We have welcomed Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé, from a Sephardic Greek and Turkish family who grew up in Mexico City, to teach classes on traditional Romaniote and Sephardic customs.

Finally, Andrew Marcus, highlighted in our “Meet the Board” article, is now Kehila Kedosha Janina’s Director of Community Development. As part of his multi-faceted work, Andrew created and worked each year to organize our annual Greek Jewish Festival, an event that has become a major communal event and fundraiser for Kehila Kedosha Janina. Join us on May 19, 2019 for our fifth annual Festival. In addition, along with his brother Ethan, Andrew has created the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network, an organization that has grown since its formation in 2015 and is a reflection of the possibilities that our future holds for us. Join us. Help us to cement our future.
Message from Our President

Dear Friends,

Preservation, by definition, is to maintain something in its original or existing state. People that visit or attend Kehila Kedosha Janina welcome its authentic feel, simplicity, and warmth. When they return, whether within a week or years later, they look forward to that same experience repeated, like coming home to a familiar place. People appreciate that consistent feeling of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going.

Many visitors take tremendous joy in knowing that their family members once attended and prayed with us. I work to preserve this KKJ experience with as little change as possible. Some people take issue and say we must change with the times. The deeply rooted Romaniote experience, with touches of Sephardic culture, has broadened our horizon. We now reach out to a young community living in the city in order for them to experience their culture and heritage. KKJ’s presence is now known by many New York institutions as a place to learn more about the Lower East Side’s rich Greek Jewish and Sephardic heritage.

If you truly feel the way I do about preserving the KKJ experience, please make an effort to join us at the Kehila or the Museum on this journey, as often as you can, so others can know what it means to come home to a warm, welcoming community.

With Sincere Gratitude,
Marvin Marcus
President

Message from Our Museum Director

Now entering my 15th year as Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina, I have been so encouraged by the prospects of our future, both as a synagogue, and as a museum. I am forever grateful to my volunteers, my faithful docents Sol Kofinas, Ilias Hadjis, Stuart Chernin, and my two newest docents, Stella Bacolas and Lois Genee Ledner. Koula Kofinas has been a continuous help with our kosher Greek-Jewish lunches and Koula’s Kitchen.

I take our responsibility as an educational institution very seriously and am proud to say that Kehila Kedosha Janina offers tours to schools throughout the New York Metropolitan area, both Jewish schools and secular schools. We teach these young people about our special culture and our experience on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. On that note, my favorite group is the Lyons School, a charter school in East Williamsburg. None of the students are Jewish and most have never spoken to anyone of the Jewish faith. They come with built-in prejudices based on their experiences in their neighborhood. I explain what it means to be a Jew and my pride in Judaism. I believe that they leave with a new feeling about Judaism. I love the hugs I get as they leave.

The museum had a full calendar in 2018 and we are looking forward to exciting events in 2019, including film screenings, lectures, music, and dancing. As Museum Director, I have also been involved in outreach, bringing the knowledge of our special Romaniote community to the outside world. On that note, I presented at the National Hellenic Heritage Weekend in October 2018 and spoke in Portland, introducing Trezoros at the Portland Sephardic Film Festival. In January, I not only presented on the Romaniotes at the Greek Embassy, but also at the US Congress at an event highlighting “Romaniote and Sephardic Narratives of the Holocaust.”

Our exhibit on rare prayer books and Shadayot of Kehila Kedosha Janina is due to open in the Spring. Andrew Marcus was instrumental in making these exhibits happen, along with Isaac Choua, our Associate Museum Curator and Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé. In addition, a priceless Megilah Esther which we acquired in Buenos Aires last year, will soon go on exhibit. The Megilah came from the Battino family of Corfu.

Now that we have finally moved into the 21st century and have WiFi, we will be working on a digital exhibit and access to our past exhibits in the museum.

Do come visit us. Access our programs on our website and our Facebook page.
Message from the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

Now, in its 22nd year, the Association is proud of what it has been able to accomplish, as we continue to be the only organization in the United States dedicated exclusively to Greek Jewry. We take this responsibility seriously. Over the years we have worked on raising funds for the restoration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, and to ensure that Holocaust memorials are present in every city in Greece where Jews were deported during WWII. We have always raised funds to help the Jewish Community of Ioannina, and towards the creation of a Holocaust Education Center in Greece (to be located in Thessaloniki). This year, we are working to raise funds to help create a Jewish Museum in Kastoria.

Two of our most rewarding endeavors have been bestowing our “Award of Moral Courage” on Greek Christians who risked their lives to save Greek Jews during the Holocaust, and our annual tours to Jewish Greece to reconnect Greek Jews in the Diaspora with their communities in Greece. The first honors our past, and the second ensures our future. This year, in Athens, in the synagogue where Menachem Ackos, the grandfather of our Board of Trustees member Marc Winthrop, was deported to his death in Auschwitz, these two founding endeavors of the Association have merged. Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, President of the Association, accompanied Mark Ettinger and Marc Winthrop, both named after their grandfather, Menachem Ackos, as they and their two sons, Simon Ettinger and Jackson Winthrop, made aliyahs in the synagogue, Beth Shalom, from where their ancestor was arrested for deportation. Haroula Sayanou, the granddaughter of Haraklia Sayanou, the brave woman who hid Rosa Ackos and her children, was present in the synagogue in Athens for the occasion. We presented our Award of Moral Courage posthumously to Haraklia and worked to get her accepted as a Righteous Among Nations at Yad Vashem. In addition, Marcia traveled with the family to Preveza, where the matriarchs of their families were born.

This year, we will be running three tours to Jewish Greece consecutively, the first to Italy (Rome, Florence and Sicily) and Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Ioannina and Athens in Greece from June 23-July 8. The second tour specially designed for the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network will occur July 8-17 and includes Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Ioannina and Athens in Greece from June 23-July 8. The third tour will run from July 17-31 and will travel to Athens, Rhodes, Thessaloniki, Kastoria, and Ioannina, highlighting the 75th anniversary of the deportations from Rhodes.

Do become a part of the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry and do join our mailing list for upcoming tours to Jewish Greece.

Message from the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network

The Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network was formed in 2015 to provide a venue where young professionals of Romaniote and Sephardic descent can come together in a fun, meaningful, and welcoming environment. We are proud of the hundreds of young adults that we have re-engaged in our community, and we are extremely excited to share our recent and upcoming programs. In 2018, we hosted more than a dozen events, including Shabbat Dinners, happy hour networking events, a Bear Mountain nature hike, a Tu BiShevat wine and fruit tasting event, a Passover customs class, and fun and delicious cooking classes. We also organized a special Sephardic Birthright Israel trip that welcomed participants from across the US. While in Israel, we visited Sephardic and Romaniote sites and synagogues, and learned about the special history that Greek Jews played in the development of Israel.

We have many more exciting programs planned for 2019, including a Young Professionals Tour of Jewish Greece, so please join us! Our special tour of Greece will visit many of the cities where our families came from, including Salonika, Kastoria, Ioannina, and Rhodes, and it will be an unforgettable experience. We welcome young adults in their 20’s and 30’s. To learn more and receive information on future events, email GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com.
Mother Nature, in her infinite wisdom, has in her kingdom plants and creatures that can regenerate themselves. There are many such instances in nature, and Sisterhood is one of these wonders.

For instance, the starfish can lose all of its limbs, but because its core center is still intact, all five limbs can and will be regenerated. So, too, with Sisterhood. True, we have lost members but our heart is still functioning and we will once again become the vibrant, vital organization created in 1932. What we need is the cooperation of all our existing parts. If we all pull together and recommend at least one friend, daughter, daughter-in-law, niece, cousin, sister-in-law, etc. to become a member, we will rise like the Phoenix and continue to do what our founders envisioned all those many years ago.

It doesn't take much of a commitment to become a Sisterhood member - there are no meetings to attend, except perhaps one annual meeting and an occasional Board meeting. Our mission is one of philanthropy and charity, as exhibited in the past. We have donated to the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, Kehila Kedosha Janina, the Sephardic Home, Israel, Ioannina Greece (both the synagogue and the cemetery) and towards the creation of the Holocaust Education Center for Greek Jewry in Thessaloniki (Salonika). One of our outstanding donations in the past was a fully equipped ambulance to Israel. It is a history like this that we would like to regenerate and continue; with your help, we will.

The financial commitment of dues, $18 annually (which has remained constant since 1987) and support of our Donor Card program is all we ask of you. We welcome members from all 50 states, over the age of 18. Submitting your email address always helps, eliminating the cost of mailing. Please send your recommendations to: Rose Eskononts (RoseGEsk2@aol.com) or 477 Hungry Harbor Road, Apt. 217, North Woodmere, NY 11581.

Accomplishing all this will ensure Sisterhood's future for generations to come, continuing our historically established benevolence and philanthropy since 1932. Help us and become a member of an unparalleled, historic institution, in existence for over 86 years. Thank you.

Rose Eskononts
President

Over the course of the centuries, many speculations have been made as to the origins of Romaniote Jews, most specifically, those of the communities west of the Pindos Mountain Range (Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, Corfu and Zakynthos). The oral history of the Jewish Community of Ioannina is that, at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), a Roman ship carrying Jews into slavery in Rome was forced to land on the western coast of Greece. Casting doubt on this story is the fact that if the ship went aground in a port such as Igoumenitsa, the Jews would have had to be mountain goats to make it up to Ioannina. A number of years ago, a marine archeologist informed us that the wrecks of Roman ships had been found at the bottom of the sea in the straight between what is now Albania and the Greek island of Corfu. This find gave credibility to the story of the Roman slave ship and since, of course, the fact that that the border between Greece and Albania had not been formed until 1913, if the Jewish slaves had come ashore in Sarandi (now in Albania), they could have walked to Ioannina.

In the past couple of years, with the popularity of DNA testing, there has been renewed interest in discovering the origins of Yanniote Jews. We are presently supporting two major DNA studies, both partnering with Jonathan Alcantara (of the extended Colchamiro family). One is led by Barry Myones who is tracing the migratory patterns of Greek Romaniote and Sephardic Turkish and Greek Jews through their DNA. The second is the work of Adam Brown, who is trying to get a picture of Ioannina Jewry, through the testing of the DNA of male Yanniotes, using the list of surnames of the Jews of Ioannina as a start.

If you have had your DNA taken and wish to submit the findings to either (or both) of these research projects, contact us at museum@kkjsm.org.

Sara Honan Crocker and Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos are working on gathering recipes for the creation of a Greek Jewish cookbook. Proceeds from the sale of the book will go to Kehila Kedosha Janina. To aid us in this endeavor, we started a Facebook group “Greek-Jewish Recipes.” We now have 1,100 members and are gathering recipes. Do join the group and do submit your recipes to us at museum@kkjsm.org.
MEET THE BOARD: ANDREW MARCUS

Andrew Marcus is a proud lifelong member of Kehila Kedosha Janina. As the youngest member of the Board of Trustees, Andrew has a deep connection to the KKJ community. His Papoo, Louis Marcus, immigrated to the Lower East Side in 1920 from Veria, Greece, and his Nona Lillie’s family originally hailed from Izmir, Turkey. His father Marvin grew up on the Lower East Side, and Andrew was raised on the warm stories of the vibrant Sephardic and Greek Jewish life in the neighborhood. He has fond childhood memories coming to KKJ with his family on Saturday mornings, and he is grateful to the numerous community members who helped raise him, in one way or another, and who he considers part of his extended family. Andrew is especially grateful to have studied with Hy Genee for his Bar Mitzvah at KKJ; Hy taught him the precious Romaniote melodies that Andrew helps perpetuate in our services regularly.

Professionally, Andrew is an urban planner and serves as a Senior Project Manager at the NYC Department of Small Business Services. Andrew is a proud New Yorker, and he has pursued a career in public service to give back to the city that has given him and his family so much. He graduated summa cum laude from the Macaulay Honors College at Hunter College where he studied mathematics and physics. He has previously worked in the NYC Parks Department, the NYC Economic Development Corporation, and the Mayor’s Office.

Andrew is passionate about perpetuating our Kehila and Greek Jewish community. He helps conduct services on Shabbat and holidays, volunteers in the museum, and lends a hand whenever needed. Andrew’s dedication is evident in his many initiatives for our community. He led the effort to co-name Broome Street as “Hy Genee Way;” he spearheaded the creation of our annual Greek Jewish Festival, which attracted more than 7,000 people in 2018; and he is a founding leader of the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network.

Following the example of his father, Andrew hopes to perpetuate our unique Romaniote and Sephardic culture and traditions by engaging the next generation of our community. He is grateful for the privilege of growing up in a traditional Greek Jewish community, with our delicious food, warm sense of family, and beautiful traditions, and he hopes to continue to grow our community in the future. He believes that in today’s often-chaotic world, the teachings of moderation, love, charity, respect, and integrity from our faith and heritage are the best guide to leading a just and meaningful life.

RECIPE FOR MELITZANO KEFTEDES (EGGPLANT VEGETARIAN MEATBALLS)

This is a traditional recipe for eggplant patties, courtesy of Chef Evan Zagha who recently led a cooking class for the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network.

Ingredients:
5 Japanese eggplants
2 large eggs, beaten
1.5 cups grated cheese, such as Myzithra or Romano
2 teaspoons dried Greek oregano
1 cup chopped, fresh parsley
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste
3/4 cup fine bread crumbs
Flour, for dredging (about 1 cup)
Greek olive oil, for frying

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and blanch the eggplant. Remove from the boiling water with a slotted spoon and remove the skins.

Place eggplant flesh in a large mixing bowl. Mash them with a fork or a potato masher. Stir in the eggs, grated cheese, oregano, parsley, salt, pepper, and bread crumbs.

Sperse flour into a large plate or on a clean work surface.

Fill a deep skillet with about 1.5 inches of oil. Set the heat to medium and let it warm for a few minutes.

Form the eggplant mixture into balls about 1.5 inches in diameter.

Roll in the flour and then drop into the oil. Continue until there is no more room in the skillet. You may need to fry the eggplant balls in batches.

Remove each ball from the skillet with a slotted spoon when they’re browned on all sides. Place on paper towels so that the oil can drain. Add more oil during the cooking process when needed.

These keftedes are usually served as an appetizer (“meze”) with wine, beer or ouzo. You can also serve them as a main dish with French fries or roasted potatoes and a traditional Greek salad on the side. Add tzatziki, and you’ve got a delicious meal.

Καλή όρεξη! Bon appetit!
Since our last newsletter the following donations were made to Kehila Kedosha Janina. We sincerely thank the donors.

**IN HONOR**

Sol & Koula Kofinas, Sam Matsa’s 85th birthday, Terry & Janice Solomon’s 40th anniversary, Ralph Battino’s 99th birthday, Hy Genee’s Legacy Award, Litsy Solomon, Marvin Marcus’ 70th birthday, Stella Bacolas, Eleanor Weiser Gladstone, Esther and Albert Pardo, Hadzis family of Ottawa, Max Delman, Phyllis, Andrew and Ethan Marcus, Dean Austin Binder, Bea Zagha, Colchamiro Family, Elliot Colchamiro, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, and Rose Eskononts

**IN MEMORY**


**PASSINGS**


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