The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

The Association continues to make a difference. This past year we joined with Kehila Kedosha Janina and with the Sisterhood of Janina we are making a substantial donation to the Jewish Community of Ioannina for the repair of tombstones damaged by an act of vandalism in January of 2009. Unfortunately, when visiting Greece on our annual tour to Jewish Athens (see a full report on the tour on our website (www.kkjsm.org) under E-newsletter of July 2009) Join us on a future tour. Get on our mailing list! Join the Association. Make a difference.

JEWISH CEMETERY OF IOANNINA

The history of the Jewish Cemetery of Ioannina is typical of that of Jewish cemeteries in Europe; especially in communities that lost so many of their members during the Holocaust. The present cemetery is physically within the city limits, although when deeded to the Jewish Community by the Ottoman Turks it was outside the city. It is believed that the present cemetery is the fourth such burial ground used by the community, the others appropriated by either the Ottoman Turks or the Greek municipality as the city expanded.

Unfortunately, the modern history of the cemetery, after 91% of the community perished in the Holocaust, is one of attempts by the City of Ioannina to take back the cemetery grounds, extreme derisement due to the inability to adequately maintain it and, most recently (three within the past two years), acts of vandalism. Kehila Kedosha Janina (along with the Sisterhood of Janina and the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry) contributed funds to repair the damage in the January 2009 vandalism. We at Kehila Kedosha Janina have, and will continue to be, vigilant in our attempts to preserve the resting grounds of our ancestors and to support the Jewish Community of Ioannina in their efforts to save their cemetery.

The Yohanans were typical of the early Yanniote immigrants who founded Kehila Kedosha Janina. Joseph and Esther came to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. Their families have scattered us around the world. The story of the Jews of Ioannina who came to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century may not have been highly educated but, more important, they knew how to do the right thing. They took care of their families, preserved their religion and passed on important values to their children and grandchildren. This, in essence, was their legacy. A beautiful example of one of these founding families was that of the Yohanans. Joseph Chaim Yohanan and his wife, Esther, exemplified the values of these early Yanniote families and are remembered by many as an example of those who always knew “how to do the right thing” (see article on the Yohanah Family).

The Yohanah Family

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The “apple does not fall far from the tree.”

Members of the group who visited Ioannina in June 2009 (Sydney Levy, Joana Schecter and Jonathan Alcantara) have photographed a number of the tombstones and we will begin the process of translation and documentation. There is still a great deal of work to be done.

Our July 2009 E-newsletter highlighted the damage done to the cemetery on June 2, 2009. If you wish additional information (including photos), please access our website or contact us (kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net). A measure of a people is how they care for their deceased. We have measured up. Let the City of Ioannina do the same.

Dear Friends,

Behind two aging doors on Broome Street lies a history of a people that is centuries old. We, as Jews, have experienced countless upheavals that have scattered us around the world. The story of Greek Romanote Jews is both fascinating as well as remarkable. Could a people so removed from the mainstream of religion continue to be observed? The answer is yes, because our strength has always been the Torah and what it teaches both present and future generations.

Kehila Kedosha Janina’s founding fathers continued this tradition when they opened the synagogue in 1827.

The Romanote

Newsletter of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

LEGACY

In creating The Holy Congregation of Janina (Kehila Kedosha Janina), the founding fathers did more than just build a sanctuary; they created a legacy, one that they would pass on to their children and grandchildren. More than just bricks and mortar, Kehila Kedosha Janina encompasses traditions inherent in Judaism. The Jews of Ioannina who came to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century may not have been highly educated but, more important, they knew how to do the right thing. They took care of their families, preserved their religion and passed on important values to their children and grandchildren. This, in essence, was their legacy. A beautiful example of one of these founding families was that of the Yohanans. Joseph Chaim Yohanan and his wife, Esther, exemplified the values of these early Yanniote families and are remembered by many as an example of those who always knew “how to do the right thing” (see article on the Yohanah Family). As expressed to us by his grandson Len Neuhaus, who lovingly conveyed to us by his grandson Len Neuhaus, who lovingly donated a High Holiday prayer shawl in memory of his parents and grandparents, “My Grandfather had one child, all growing up on the Lower East Side, living on Delancey Street, a short walk to Kehila Kedosha Janina. Joseph, as was the case with many other Yanniote immigrants, found his niche in the garment industry by selling women’s housecoats and aprons. His business was Success Apron Company located at 51 Allen Street.

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Esther and Joseph had three daughters (Estelle, Sophie and Annie) and each of the daughters had one child, all growing up on the Lower East Side. As his grandson Len Neuhaus conveyed to us, “My grandparents and family were devoted to the Kehila, having dedicated to Sefer Torah and being steadfast members in the congregation and community.” We, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, are extremely grateful for the legacy Joseph and Esther Yohanah passed down to their children and grandchildren. The “apple does not fall far from the tree.”

They were third cousins, a not unusual arrangement with marriages (and sometimes, as in the case of the Fardo/Mioni, and Cohen/Mussey families) this is always an emotional experience. This year we visited Rhodes, Salonika, Ioannina and Athens (see a full report on the tour on our website (www.kkjsm.org) under E-newsletter of July 2009) Join us on a future tour. Get on our mailing list! Join the Association. Make a difference.

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Since our last newsletter, the museum continues to grow in attendance and to attract special visitors and events. We were honored to host the annual awards gala for the New Jersey Chapter of Israel Bonds, Solomon Schechter of Flushing, and YIVO. In addition, our database groups from throughout the New York Metropolitan area, and as far away as Canada, Minnesota, Chicago and Pennsylvania, along with family reunion visits from the Gani, Ak拃mian, Cohen and others.

One of the most emotional recent visits took place during the Solomon Schechter visit in May of 2009. Something happened that reinforced the importance of what we are doing. Among the visitors was a 10-year old girl whose great-grandfather happened to be Rabbi Jessoula Cohen, one of our early rabbis. Rabbi Cohen’s sewing machine is on display in our museum (donated by his granddaughter Roberta Holland). The look on young Ellen Leifer’s face as she posed alongside the Singer sewing machine said everything. The legacy has passed on.

We were also honored to supply visual and archival information for recent Yom Hashoah events in Middlesex County, New Jersey, and North Carolina. It is of utmost importance to us that our story be told. Our genealogical database continues to grow, along with our digital photo collection, thanks to contributions from our community.

If you have not contributed family tree info, please contact us (Kehila_kedoshah_janina@netzero.net). A recently discovered resource in tracing information on early immigrant families, are birth and death certificates. These documents in the early part of the twentieth century listed names of mother and father, and most interesting, in birth certificates, often listed numbers of pregnancies, both those that resulted in live births and those that did not.

One of the most recent new developments, our monthly e-newsletter, has enabled us to keep our community (and the world) informed on a regular basis. As with so much else, these newsletters have become a part of our website. Thousands around the world now access our website (www.kkjsm.org).

I am very excited about our upcoming exhibit on “Weddings” highlighting wedding photos of Greek Jews (both here in the USA and the first half of the 20th century) and in Greece. With these additional photos, our photo archive continues to grow. As with the “Our Gang” exhibit, these photos will become part of our website (www.kkjsm.org) due to the excellent work of Maurice Askiazi, has received praise from around the world.

Thank you all for your support, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos

Meet the Board: Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos

As the writer of the “Meet the Board” column in The Romaniote, I have avoided writing about myself. It seems so awkward, especially praising what I have done and, as these columns end, thanking the individual (in this case, me) for contributions to the Board. Therefore, this column will be a little different. I would like to start by saying that I am honored to sit on this special Board and that I am especially honored to be selected for their areas of expertise to help organize and translate the archival material so that it could be properly managed.

The story began in 1917 in Thessaloniki (Salonika). The Jewish community of the city was recovering from a massive fire, one that had destroyed archival material from centuries before. The most populous city of Sephardic Jews in the world, the Jewish Community was faced with numerous problems, the proper housing of those who had been left homeless by the fire, was only one. Having lost so much of their past, methods were established for the proper storing of newly acquired archival material.

At the beginning of our meetings, our museum had a small, round table and a white board. As the meeting progressed, the board was covered with numbers and dates. One of the main focuses was translating the archival material. The Archives were sent to Germany where they were changed since then, of course. The Sisterhood has become more diverse and our meetings are now in English, but we still have among us members who can recall those days! Please, if you aren’t yet a member of the Sisterhood, join us… have your wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, nieces join us, as well. We welcome you. You will be joining an historic organization, whose sole mission is to practice philanthropy and charity, both here and abroad.

Rose Eskinowitz, President

Salonica Archives

The Sisterhood of Janina, celebrating its 75th anniversary, continues in its eighth decade to be the viable and creative organization envisioned by its founders all those many years ago. We are pleased to have second and third generation members among us. How many of them, however, still know and say “My grandmother was a member of the Sisterhood, and I remember coming to meetings that were conducted in Greek?” Times have changed since then, of course. The Sisterhood has become a section on the distribution of matzot during Pessach.) The Archives were sent to Germany where they were housed along with other material from all over Europe. When the Allies invaded Germany, the Archives were discovered and taken by both the Americans and the Russians. The Americans did not know what they had, but realizing that they were Jewish, handed over the bulk of the Archives to YIVO, and the Russians took them into the interior of the Soviet Union. To date, part of the Archives are in Israel, part in Salonika and part in YIVO in the Center for Jewish History in New York, but the bulk of the Archives are still in Moscow. Microfilming was done of some of the Moscow collection and this information was shared with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In a new definition of chutzpah, the Russians today want to be paid for over 60 years of storage in exchange for the return of their share of the Archives.

Two years ago, under the direction of Fruma Mohrer (Archivist of YIVO) and Devin Naar, a promising young doctoral candidate at Stanford University, a committee was formed to enable the microfilming of YIVO’s share of the Salonika Archives. We were honored that our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, was part of this prestigious committee. Now, the Jewish community of Salonika will once again be in possession of another part of their history, the YIVO collection of the Salonika Archives. It is our hope that the Russians will one day return their share of the archival material so that the legacy will, once again, be intact.