

SIMCHAS

As part of our revival and as an extension of our continuance, 2008/2009 has seen a record number of simchas celebrated at Kehila Kedosha Janina. Adam Kofinas, the son of Chaim Kofinas and the grandson of Sol and Koula Kofinas, celebrated his ouf ruf, as did the son-in-law of Marty & Marla Genee, Josh Sternberg. The great-granddaughter of Becky Mionis-Pardo and Isaac Pardo, daughter of Raanan and Michael Baratz, was named Elia Meyer Baratz on the bema of Kehila Kedosha Janina. The wedding of Lana Soyfer and Stan Mitelman took place in November, and in December there was a Brit Milah of Richard Micah Sherman, son of Michael Sherman and Sara Nisman Sherman. On March 21st, Ethan Marcus, youngest son of our President, Marvin Marcus, celebrated his Bar Mitzvah and, G-d willing, we will be celebrating another wedding, that of Morris Levy and Daniela Smolov. Morris is the great-grandson of one of our first rabbis, Jessoula Levy, and, as he receives his nuptials at Kehila Kedosha Janina this August, his great-grandfather will be smiling down with joy. These simchas now being celebrated at Kehila Kedosha Janina are a true reflection of our continuance. We are still here. We will continue to be here. Kehila Kedosha Janina has now become a chosen site for the celebration of Jewish life and Jewish life cycles.

LEON COLCHAMIRO MEMORIAL

A synagogue is not just a place of worship, or a place for study. It is, also, a place to preserve traditions and customs. When our founding fathers named their “synagogue,” they called it a “Kehila,” a congregation, a community. From the beginning Kehila Kedosha Janina was a place to gather for prayer and a place to come together at times of joy (see article on simchas) and to comfort each other when family members passed away. On September 14, 2008, our synagogue was filled to capacity, as friends and family gathered for a memorial service in honor of Leon Colchamiro, a grandson of one of our founding fathers, Leon Jessoula Colchamiro. When contemplating where to hold the memorial, Leon's sons and wife realized that no place would be more appropriate than our synagogue. We were honored.

PASSINGS

It is with great sorrow that we note the passing of our dear friends: Abe Calderon, Ben Cohen, Molly Cohen Feldman, Leon Colchamiro, Diane Colchamiro Warhit, Lillian Elias, Anna Lagari Eliasof (mother of Moses Eliasof, President of the Jewish Community of Ioannina), Ben Gessula, Manny Levy, Molly Levy Post, Esther Matza Samuels, Sonia Miller, Sarah Naftoly, Anne Negrin Mutter, Diana Negrin, Larry Salberg, Diane Serata, and Dinah Yontov Lafazan. We greatly appreciate those who made generous donations to Kehila Kedosha Janina in their memory.

IN HONOR OR MEMORY

We are grateful for donations made in Memory of: Esther & David Abraham, Mr. & Mrs. Morris Abrams, Elain Abrams, David-John Angelou, Morris & Joe Askinazi, Nissim & Esther Attas, Rita Battino, Stella Battino, Max Benjamin, Sam, Hyman & Esther Calef, Lou & Estelle Calef, Abraham & Rose Cohen, Doris Dostis Cohen, Issak & Eftihia Cohen, Leon Cohen, Leon Colchamiro, Louis & Rose Colchamiro, Mathew & Esther Colchamiro, Molly Colchamiro, Sam Confino, Ann Danchak, David Morris David, Harold Davis, Victor DeMayo, Mollie Solomon Drucker, Rachel & Abraham Elias, Morris Eliasof, Richard Eliasof, Hy Genee, Hyman Hametz, Murray Horowitz, Jack & Beatrice Jacobson, Annette Joseph, Ezra Joseph, Max Joseph, Rebecca Eliasof Kailo, Jacob Kaplan, Irving Lafazan, Elias & Ketí Levy, Manny Levy, Rabbi Jessoula Levy, Morris Matathia, Leah Mathios, Morris & Julia Mathios, Rabbi Matsliach Matsil & Amelia Matsil, Joseph & Chanesoo Matza, Isaac Meezan, Jack Michaels, Alan Moses, Max Moses, Nathaniel Naphtali, Joseph Negrin, Robert Lloyd Negrin, Betty Pardo, Larry Rawiszer, Leo Rosenberg, Gabriel & Edythe Sabat, Esther Meezan Schnapf, Emily DeCastros Schreibstein & Harry Schreibstein, Azi Sarfatti, Elle Sette, Murray Solomon, and Albert Yamali.

A special donation was made “In memory of all the Jews of Greece who were murdered in the Holocaust and have no living relatives to say kaddish for them.”

We are grateful for donations made In Honor of Abraham & Thelma Battino, Sofia Horatazis, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Jeffrey Bruce Levy, Stella Moses, Max & Eva Nachmias, Anna Sarfatti, and Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Sedacca.

Special donations were made in honor of the following occasions: the Bar Mitzvot of Shlomie and Tzvi Gewirtz, the Baby Naming of Elia Meyer Baratz, the Brit Milah of Richard Micah Sherman, and the special birthdays of Stella Besso (celebrating 90 years) and Leonard Colchamiro (celebrating 70 years).

SPECIAL DONATIONS

Often stories behind special donations are as precious as the donations themselves. Two recent donations of artwork are examples of this. Last spring, joining a group from Westchester on a lunch tour to Kehila Kedosha Janina was Saara Gallin, a world-renowned artist who is famous for her stained glass sculptures. Saara was quite familiar with our synagogue. Her son's family had worshipped at Kehila Kedosha Janina when they lived on the Lower East Side and two of her granddaughters had their baby namings here. Saara remembered the warmth of the congregation and, especially, that of Hy Genee of Blessed Memory. Seeing that the lunch group was going to visit a “museum,” Saara lamented the fact that the synagogue, in all probability, was no longer functioning. To her surprise, we were still an active Jewish house of worship. Saara donated a special stained glass sculpture “Am Israel Chai” (Israel Lives) to Kehila Kedosha Janina in honor of Hy Genee. The sculpture was unveiled in September of 2008 and is now a permanent exhibit in our entrance vestibule.



KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

Founder*: Joseph I. Josephs Life President*: Hyman Genee Life Members*: Michael Aronesty • Morris L. Cohen • Morris David • Morris Eskononts • Joseph Kassarla • Sam Nahoum • Solomon Schinasi
Museum Founder: Isaac Dostis • Trustees: Marvin Marcus, President • Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Museum Director • Chaim Kofinas, Treasurer • Solomon Kofinas, Financial Secretary • Elliot Colchamiro, Recording Secretary
Jeffery Mordas, First Vice President • Rose Eskononts, Second Vice President • Marc Winthrop, Second Vice President • Martin Genee, Vice President • Lois Ledner, Vice President
Jesse Colchamiro • Leonard Colchamiro • Ilias Hadjis • Holly Kaye • Sol Matsil • Max Nachmias • Maurice Negrin

*Deceased

The second donation, made by Joe Halio on behalf of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture (FASSAC), is also of stained glass, but this glass represents the remnants of windows that once adorned the Kehila Kedosha Janina of Mapleton Synagogue in Brooklyn, a sister synagogue of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Joe was fortuitously present as the synagogue was being torn down. He salvaged numerous panels of stained glass. The unveiling of this glass (lovingly restored by Joe) will take place at a special reception (see calendar of upcoming events). Thank you, Saara and Joe. Thank you for appreciating the struggles we have made to assure our continuance.

RECIPE FOR BOUGATSIA

According to legend (and, as we well know, so much is legend in Ioannina!) Bougatsia were made from staka, a cream that was obtained from water buffalo or sheep milk (from nursing sheep in the spring). For those who cannot find water buffalos in their neighborhood and have no access to nursing sheep, we have revised this recipe.

- 1 lb. cream cheese or fatty farmer's cheese
- 1½ cups sugar
- 6 eggs
- ½ cup melted sweet butter
- 8 sheets commercially made fylla
- Confectioners' sugar

Preheat oven to 375°. Mix cheese, sugar, and eggs in a large bowl. Beat well with a wooden spoon until very creamy. Brush the bottom of the baking pan (10x14) with melted butter, and layer fylla (5 layers with brushed butter between each layer). Butter the top layer very well and pour the filling over it. Dribble a liberal amount of butter on top and add remaining 3 sheets of fylla (brushing each with butter). Mark diamond shapes on top. Bake at 375° for 45 minutes until golden brown. Remove from oven, cool and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. Cut cake into diamonds before serving. Makes approx. 12 servings.

As always, we are indebted to Nicholas Stavroulakis, and his *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*, for his recipes and insights.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Brotherhood

Chaim Kofinas [for membership and burials]: 845-356-0844
Steven M. Matza [dues for current members]: 732-792-0725

Sisterhood

Rose Eskononts: 718-648-7374
Esther Benjamin [dues]: 914-636-2480
Pashas

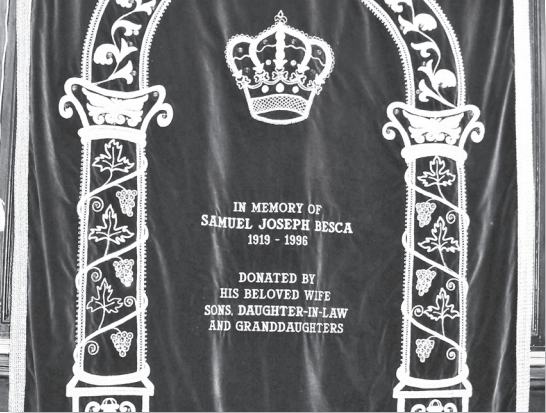
Max Nachmias: 516-481-8616
Association of Friends of Greek Jewry
Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos: 631-367-3905

The Romaniote

Newsletter of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

CONTINUANCE

When Kehila Kedosha Janina opened its doors for services in 1927, it was one of hundreds of Jewish houses of worship on the Lower East Side of New York City. Today, 82 years later, our synagogue is one of only five original synagogues from the early 20th century that still functions as a Jewish house of worship open for regular services every Shabbat and all Jewish holidays. So much of our success is due to the commitment, passion and perseverance of the founding fathers, attributes that they passed on to their children and grandchildren. They were proud of who they were, committed to their religion and culture, different from so many others on the Lower East Side but passionate in preserving their distinct liturgy and culture. In an immigrant world that adhered to the “melting pot” concept of early 20th century New York City, these proud Jews from Ioannina did not “melt”; they continued to be different. They were a minority within a minority within a minority, small in number, distinct and often unaccepted by surrounding immigrant populations. Rather than being negatives, all of this proved to be a positive. So many other synagogues are gone. We are still here. As they set the bricks and mortar of their house



of worship on 280 Broome Street, they sealed it with a passion to preserve who they were. They were observant Jews and they were proud Greeks. Where others might have found a conflict in these two ideologies, they did not. So much of the “continuance” of this community has had to do with the passing on of love and pride from one generation to the next. We see this on our “Wall of Rabbis,” where the descendants of these spiritual leaders still support our synagogue and museum. We see this in the gifts we receive, whether they are from families of early congregants or those who became part of our congregation after World War II. This past year, we received donations sponsoring the creation of two sets of parochets, one from the Besca/Besso families (see article on the Besca surname), and the second from the family of

Len Neuhaus (the Yohanan family, his mother's family, will be highlighted in the fall 2009 issue). Now, as we approach the Aron Ha Kodesh, we continue to be reminded of the love our community has for its synagogue and how this love has been passed down from generation to generation. Join us in perpetuating this tradition, this continuance. Your donations are always welcome. Your presence is always cherished.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,
The Lower East Side of New York is an ever-changing place. What once was the home of countless immigrant families at the turn of the century has now become the home of the grandchildren of those immigrants. Tall buildings now dominate the Lower East Side's skyline, with art galleries and trendy restaurants abounding.
In 2004 Kehila Kedosha Janina was given landmark status from the City of New York. For over 80 years, KKJ has made its presence known

and continues to be a destination for many who wish to learn more about Romaniote Jews.
KKJ has become woven into the fabric of the history of New York City. We can all take pride in the fact that this small immigrant group came to America for a better life, prospered, and continues to be a living memorial to their heritage.
Wishing everyone a Happy Passover.

Sincerely,
Marvin Marcus

MESSAGE FROM OUR MUSEUM DIRECTOR

The opening of the “Our Gang” exhibit on November 2, 2008, was by far the most successful exhibit opening to date. To see our museum filled with members of our community who contributed to the exhibit was very heartwarming. As I have often said since taking over the Museum from our founder, Isaac Dostis, our mission to tell the story of Romaniote Jewry to a world that knows little about them has not changed. It has just broadened. The Museum has always been, and will continue to be, a part of the community. They contributed the artifacts and they continue to contribute stories. Our next major exhibit “Weddings” will highlight photos of weddings, both here in the United States and back in Greece. Please send us your photos (the older the better!), not only of the bride and groom but, also, of other guests and members of the wedding party.

Thanks to the cooperation of Maurice Askinazi, and his overseeing of our website (www.kkjsm.org), we have been

able to add “Our Gang” to the website and will continue to do this with future exhibits.

Our museum has helped to spread knowledge of this oft-overlooked part of the Jewish world. And this past year we were contacted by a number of other institutions asking to incorporate our story in some capacity: the Holocaust Museum in Mexico City now includes photos of the Holocaust in Ioannina; the 2009 calendar of the 92nd Street Y (in NYC) highlighted foods from different Jewish communities in the New York area; our own Koula Kofinas was “Mrs. November”; the University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin Department of Architecture used Kehila Kedosha Janina (KKJ) for a graduate school project; The Little Red School House (a progressive school in Greenwich Village NYC) now regularly visits KKJ as part of a program on immigration; Yad Vashem has included our publication (*In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ioannina*) in its Hall of Names. As part of the Yom

HaShoah program in Middlesex County New Jersey, KKJ will be supplying visuals on the Holocaust in Ioannina so that our story can be told.

This year, at our annual Yom HaShoah (see calendar of upcoming events), a new video produced by Vincent Giordano on the Holocaust in Greece, commissioned by KKJ with funds received from the Greek government, will be shown for the first time. It will then become part of our new Shoah exhibit.

The main purpose of any museum is to educate. This is always foremost in our mind. But the Museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina has another very important purpose: to reconnect our community to its center, to bring our community back to its spiritual home and, by doing so, to ensure the continuance of our little treasure on Broome Street, Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue, the only Romaniote Synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. Visit us!

Thank You,
Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos

THE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF GREEK JEWRY

As we enter our 12th year, we are truly proud of all we have been able to accomplish. We’ve been instrumental in raising funds for the preservation of Jewish monuments (synagogues and cemeteries) in Greece, helped assure Holocaust memorials in communities devastated by loss and

acted as reinforcement for Jewish life in Greece with our annual tours. Our 2009 tour to Jewish Greece (June 4–18) will visit Rhodes, Salonika, Ioannina and Athens. We are planning a Colchamiro reunion in Ioannina (June 11–15) to celebrate the 144th wedding anniversary of Jessoula

and Rachel Colchamiro. Each year, our groups are a marvelous mixture of Greek Jews returning to their roots and interested zeegazooks fascinated with our culture. Do join us in Greece! Become a member of the Association. For information, contact us at friends_greek_jewry@netzero.net.

MEET THE BOARD: SOL MATSIL

Rabbi Matsliach (Bechoraki) Matsil was born in Ioannina, Greece, in 1877 (see article on Rabbi Matsil in *The Romaniote*, Edition 8, 2005) and fathered ten children, five in Greece and five here in the United States. It would be his youngest son, Sol, who stood at his side as he chanted his prayers in the traditional style of the Yanniote Jews, and it was Sol who absorbed the liturgy from his father along with a love of the unique traditions and customs. Born in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Sol moved with his family to Bensonhurst and his father was appointed the first rabbi of Kehila Kedosha Janina of Mapleton on 65th Street. A graduate of New Utrecht High School, Sol received a degree from the City College of Business but worked most of his adult life in the family business (children’s clothing). Married for 54 years to his wonderful wife, Irene, he is the

proud father of two children, daughter Vicki and son Marc, and has three grandchildren.

Embodied in Sol Matsil are many of the reasons Kehila Kedosha Janina is still here: a passionate love for the distinct traditions and customs of Yannina Jews, a stubborn perseverance in preserving these traditions, especially the liturgy, and the knowledge that if we do not pass these traditions and customs on to the next generation, they will be lost. Sol was one of the charter members of the Pashas (see article on the Pashas in *The Romaniote*, Edition 9, fall 2006), an organization specifically created to preserve the culture of Greek Jews. Sol served as President from 1999 to 2003 of the United Brotherhood Good Hope Society of Janina (see article on the Brotherhood in this issue of *The Romaniote*), our burial society, and has been on the Board of Directors of

Kehila Kedosha Janina from its inception.

One of Sol’s most memorable moments was attending services in the synagogue of Ioannina, the synagogue where his father of Blessed Memory once conducted services. How privileged we all are when Sol Matsil comes to help conduct High Holiday services at Kehila Kedosha Janina on Broome Street, assuring a continuance of our liturgy and traditions. How fortunate we are that Sol Matsil is a member of our Board of Directors. Thank you, Sol. We know that your father is smiling down in gratitude. His youngest son learned his lessons well.



BROTHERHOOD OF JANINA

According to our records, our burial society (The Brotherhood of Janina) was founded in 1906. The unexpected death of a young member of the community in an unfortunate accident brought the realization that burial grounds must be purchased and a society formed to meet the needs of the Greek-speaking Jews from Ioannina. Immigration of Jews from Janina, then a part of Turkey, began about the year 1900. By the middle of 1906, there were perhaps two to three hundred in New York City, most of them residing in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and probably less

than 100 “uptown,” in Harlem. Most of the “uptowners” were employed by Sephardim operating a cigarette factory and warehouse on the West Side.

In the beginning of September 1906, a young man, a recent immigrant from Ioannina, was killed by one of the horse-drawn trucks delivering merchandise for the Shinasi Tobacco Firm. There was no workmen’s compensation law, and the firm was not required to provide burial. According to oral history, Ashkenazi burial societies refused to bury the young man, doubting his “Jewishness” because of his

surname and the fact that he did not speak Yiddish. Until recently, it was unknown where this young man was buried. In all likelihood, Shearith Israel buried him in one of their plots in Queens.

Realization of the need to provide burial for their community resulted in the organization of a number of burial societies, all of whom finally, over the years, merged to form the present United Brotherhood/Good Hope Society of Janina, Inc. For information on becoming a member of the Brotherhood, see contact information on the last page of this newsletter.

SISTERHOOD OF JANINA

The Sisterhood of Janina will be celebrating its 77th anniversary this year and we are full of pride at all we have achieved through the years. What began as an experiment of a small group of Judeo/Greek women on the Lower East Side, back in 1932, has evolved into an organization that now numbers close to 300 members. Our membership has grown, so that second and third generations, we are pleased to say, are among us...from the North, South, East and West of our

great land. It is so rewarding to welcome the children and grandchildren of our original members. We hope and pray that we may continue the work set out before us, all those many years ago, and that our forebears are pleased with our accomplishments and that we continue to prosper and flourish. If you would like to join us, please contact me, Rose Eskononts, President, 2430 Haring Street #3J, Brooklyn, NY 11235, for further information and an application form.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

We have made great strides in digitalizing family trees. We have extensive genealogical information for a number of the Ioannina families (Nahoum Matsa, Elia Negrin, Benjamin and Morris Askinazi, Eliezer David, Besso and Samuel, Rabbi Davidson, Rabbi Jessoula Levy, Jacob Eliezer, Malta, Joseph, Jessoula Colchamiro and many others). We are also establishing a data base listing the family connections and, as expected, all Yanniotes

may very well turn out to be related to each other. Please help us by sending us your family trees even if you think we may already have it. You can mail them to us at Kehila Kedosha Janina, 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 or e-mail them to us in an attachment at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net.

BESCAS IN IOANNINA

Most of the surnames of the Jews of Ioannina are derived from male Hebrew first names (Solomon, Samuel, Isaac, etc.). Naming, as traditional Jews do, their children would be given names followed by “ben” or “bat” and then, the father’s name. (For a comprehensive discussion of the names of the Jews of Ioannina, access the archives of our website, www.kkjsm.org, for the paper presented by our museum director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, at the 2006 meeting of the International Jewish Genealogical Conference.) It was not at all unusual for a male child to have a first name identical to his surname (the roster of our founding fathers is filled with Joseph Joseph, Solomon Solomon, David David, etc.). This presented no difficulty for the small community in Ioannina. They knew who they were and if there was any question which Meir Avraam was the father, the nickname (or *paratsoukli*) would be used.

In the case of the Besca family, the

actual surname was Eliezer, most likely derived from a patriarch named Eliezer. Joseph Besca’s uncle was named Eliezer Eliezer. According to recent information provided by Joseph Besca, during the Metaxas dictatorship of the 1930’s, a law was passed that you could not have a first and last name that was the same. The reason behind the ordinance is not known, but Joseph Eliezer’s grandchildren (with the exception of Eva, who came to the United States and married Morris Cabillis) would all be known as Beskas (Besca). Unfortunately, most of the descendants of Joseph Eliezer, including his son Eliezer and daughters Anna and Esther and their respective families would perish in the Holocaust. Their other son Shemu passed away at a young age of tuberculosis. Samuel Besca, the son of Joseph, would be one of the few to survive Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps. He married Matilda Besso, who survived in hiding with the help of several Christian

families in Athens, from where she then migrated to Palestine by way of Turkey and Syria with the assistance of her father, Michael, and the Greek resistance. This year, Matilda and Samuel’s two sons (Joseph and Mark) honored us with a beautiful parochet in memory of Samuel Besca (see photo on front page).

According to Joseph Besca, “My grandfather, Joseph Eliezer, had a store in Ioannina and was known throughout the community for making the best Bougatsia...ask any Ioanniote of his time...he was known as Yosef Hava Poo Fian Ta Bougatsia. My father was the only one who knew how to reproduce it and only made it once in the USA when he was challenged to...the recipe was in his head and he never gave it up. He always said that the Bougatsia which was native to Ioannina was not the same today as then.” In honor of the Bescas we print a recipe for Bougatsia (see recipe in this issue); unfortunately, not Joseph Eliezer’s.