

The Romaniote

Newsletter of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum

ON THE SHOULDERS OF OUR ANCESTORS

You cannot know who you are until you know where you came from, and you certainly cannot know where you are going until you access what brought you to the present. This is not only the individual story of successful people, but also the basis of achievement for successful institutions. Kehila Kedosha Janina has been very fortunate in having a wealth of inspiring history to fall back on, and, as has been shown by our renaissance in recent years, a path for a productive future. This past year, 2017, has been an inspiration, not only for members of our growing community, but also for other synagogues and Romaniote (and Sephardic) communities who have joined us in this revitalization.

When our founders created this community, they certainly did not envision the changes in the surrounding neighborhood. Their intention was to create a house of worship to serve the Greek-speaking Jews on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. They drew their inspiration from their synagogues back in Greece, and because of their love for the world they had come from, they preferred to duplicate that spiritual environment within the walls of the small synagogue on Broome Street. The neighborhood changed. Most of the immigrant communities moved into the surrounding boroughs or into neighboring suburbs. In 2018, out of the hundreds

of Jewish houses of worship that once flourished on the Lower East Side, Kehila Kedosha Janina is one of only four from the 1920s that still remains. As the congregation diminished, we had to decide what we were going to do. For years we plodded on, unsure of what the answer would be, whether we should close our doors as so many others had done, or whether we should continue as best we could.

Fortunately, with uncertainty and without a clear path, we continued to offer services, created a museum with the hope that this would attract people, and then, small miracles started to happen. We became an historical landmark, we underwent an extensive renovation with the help of

many benefactors, and drew the attention of many who fell in love with our synagogue and were, in turn, inspired by what we were doing.

We are forever grateful to our founders who created this special Greek synagogue. We are more than grateful for those who kept it going, especially our beloved Hy Genee of Blessed Memory, and we are so grateful for those in our present community who continue to love us. Yes, we are lucky. We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors, we know who we are, and we are blessed to see the vision of who we will continue to be.



Torah Dedication by Joseph Yohanán at Kehila Kedosha Janina, circa 1957

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Many times in the course of giving tours of the Kehila, I am asked how is it possible that our Kehila is still here while so many others have disappeared. My first response is to give kol hakavod to Hy Genee, of Blessed Memory, for maintaining the congregation through many difficult years. However, I believe there exists a more profound explanation to our continued presence; in every Greek Romaniote and Sephardic Jew, there lies a deep sense of pride and identity that has lasted over centuries. The pride comes from being Jewish and the identity is connected to our responsibility to

our ancestors, history, culture, and achievements. Our forefathers could only dream of what America would be for our people. Today we live in a very diverse world made up of many cultures. To stand up and identify oneself is a statement of self-respect. As Jews we are taught to remember. "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither." Our Kehila is a representation of this unique identity in America. We are no longer just a footnote in the history of the Jewish people. Our time is now.

With Sincere Gratitude,
Marvin Marcus

MESSAGE FROM OUR MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I am truly honored to serve as Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina. This position, as I have often stated, legitimized my obsession. Otherwise they would have had to commit me long ago. I cannot believe it has been 14 years that I have been Museum Director and each year has been more exciting than the last. Of course, I never could have done anything without the support of my Board of Trustees, my faithful docents Sol Kofinas, Ilias Hadjis and Stuart Chernin. Koula Kofinas has been a continuous help with our kosher Greek-Jewish lunches and Koula's Kitchen.

Having spent 13 years getting my bearings, I now feel confident and have moved forward in planning my event schedule a full year in advance. In addition to our annual Greek Jewish Festival (now in its fourth year), we offer regular programming. This year (Fall 2017 to Summer 2018) we showcased our culture and traditions with our dear friend, Danny Elias and the Elias Ladino Ensemble opening the season with a concert on September 10th. Our October calendar was filled with a lecture by prominent Sephardic scholar Professor Devin Naar and the showing of *Trezoros*, a film about the Jewish community of Kastoria, shown in honor of Lena Elias Russo, who had passed away a few months earlier.

On November 19th, our house was packed for a Greek and Israeli concert featuring Kol Dodi (with Yaron Hanoka and Avram Pengas). December showcased the first of our book presentations, with "The Jews of Southern Florida" on the 6th and "Ten Times Chai" on the 10th. In March, we continue with a long anticipated book presentation by Jennifer Abadi

with her Sephardic Passover cookbook "Too Good to Passover" on March 11th. In April, two special events, the first, the presentation and book signing of Jane Mushabac's highly acclaimed book "His Hundred Years" on April 8th and a film on the Jews of Tunisia on April 29th. Our Yom HaShoah on April 15th will tell the story of our own Sol Kofinas, who is the first recipient of the Hy Genee Legacy Award. On May 6th from 12-6pm we will celebrate our fourth annual Greek Jewish Festival with dancing in the streets. We will close out our season with our dear friend, Yvette Manassis Corporon's presentation of her most recent book "Something Beautiful Happened" accompanied by the trailer of her documentary film.

We are looking forward to the opening of two important exhibits on rare prayer books and Shadayot of Kehila Kedosha Janina. Our Museum Director will be working with Issac Choua, our new Associate Museum Curator and Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé. In addition to the actual exhibit, we are hoping to have the information digitized and available to scholars throughout the world. Isaac



Silver Shaday

will also be working on a digital index for our library.

In addition to all these programs, our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikononopoulos, has been busy spreading the word of Kehila Kedosha Janina and the story of Romaniote Jews. Marcia was honored by the Jewish Community of Ioannina this past Yom Kippur, for her "continued support of the Jewish Community of Ioannina," and presented at the Modern Greek Studies Association on "Immigration of Jews from Ioannina."

Do come visit us. Access our programs on our website www.kkjsm.org and our Facebook page.

MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF GREEK JEWRY

The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry was established in 1997. In 2017 we celebrated our 20th year. Our initial intention in creating a world-wide association of Greek Jewry was to unite us to work for important issues confronting Jews in Greece and Greek Jews in the Diaspora. Realizing that we were so small in number, we wanted to put aside the things that separated us, whether they are designations such as Romaniote versus Sephardic or insular, non-inclusive categories such as Yanniotes, Rhodeslis, and Saloniklis. It was not that we should stop being proud of where we came from but, rather, cross over these self-created barriers to work together on common needs. We also wanted to enable Greek Jews in the Diaspora to reconnect with their roots and visit Greece for life-changing experiences.

With all of this being said, there has not been a cause in any Jewish community in Greece that we have not been a part of, whether it be working to ensure that Kal Shalom Synagogue in Rhodes be saved from imminent collapse by nominating it to the World Monument Fund and seeing it declared one of the 100 most endangered Sites in the World in 1998, or working to ensure that there were Holocaust memorials in all locations in Greece where Jews were rounded up and deported. Where synagogues and cemeteries in tiny Jewish communities



needed our help to make repairs, whether in Ioannina or Trikala, we were there. We also acted as a watchdog to alert the world about anti-Semitic desecrations of Jewish sites so that fanatics in Greece would realize that that the world was watching.

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. In 2017, we sponsored our first tour for Greek Jews in their 20s and 30s (in collaboration with the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network). In 2018, our tour to Jewish Greece (July 6-20) will visit Thessaloniki, Ioannina and

Athens, and will also include the Jewish Balkans with stops in Monastir (Bitola), Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania. In the Fall of 2018, we will offer a tour to Greece for the Jewish High Holidays with Rosh HaShanah in Corfu and Yom Kippur in Ioannina.

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

Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou

President, Association of Friends of Greek Jewry

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. In just two years our Network has grown by leaps and bounds and now reaches more than 500 young adults across the New York City area. We are extremely excited to share our recent accomplishments.

In 2017, we hosted more than a dozen events and programs. These included multiple Shabbatons and Shabbat Dinners where we enjoyed delicious Greek and Sephardic foods and learned traditional Hebrew and Ladino songs. We hosted a Romaniote and Sephardic educational series led by Rabbi Nissim Elnecavé, happy hour networking events, and fun and delicious cooking classes. We traced the roots of our ancestors on our first ever Young Professionals tour of Jewish Greece, where we visited Salonika, Veria, Ioannina, Arta, Athens, and Mykonos. Special thanks to Marcia Haddad Ikonopoulou who served as our expert tour guide. The historic synagogues and museums, ancient landmarks, beautiful beaches, incredible food, and friendly participants made this an unforgettable trip. We have many more exciting programs planned for 2018, including a Sephardic Birthright trip, so please join us! We welcome young adults in their 20's and 30's. To learn more and receive information on future events, send your name and email to GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com.



Visiting Kahal Kadosh Yashan
Synagogue in Ioannina

MESSAGE FROM THE SISTERHOOD OF JANINA

On the shoulders of our ancestors. Looking back in time to 1932, Kehila Kedosha Janina was just five years young, and we were the brainchild of Leon Colchamiro, who determined that what was lacking in our community was a “Sisterhood,” thus, we were born! We were so proud to be “American” and members of “the Sisterhood.” But, what were we to do was the question. Our people were just adjusting to life in the country they arrived in not so long ago but, with determination, and optimism, they undertook the task and took the reins of what would become the Sisterhood we know today. Philanthropy and charity were the main goals they envisioned. And, I am proud to say that 85 years later, we are continuing in the paths they pioneered.

The Lower East Side was such a different neighborhood then than it is today. Most of the faces you met on the street were friends and/or relatives,

having come from that little town in northwestern Greece, Ioannina, with dreams of what this “new world” would bring us, along with the “ziggizuks” who spoke a very different language than we did! Little did we know that in the years ahead, a world war would bring changes that were unimaginable, but they would weather the storm. Their young men would enlist in the military without question, some never to return. All would mourn as one for the loss of these young men who never lived to succeed in their chosen paths. But, with strength and perseverance, Sisterhood found its *raison d’être* and here we are continuing in a tradition begun so many years ago on the shoulders of our ancestors, who I hope are looking down at us cheering us on to bigger and better things.

Rose Eskononts
President



MEET THE BOARD: LEONARD NEUHAUS

Leonard Neuhaus has been involved with Kehila Kedosha Janina since birth. Len’s roots run deep in the Romaniote tradition, with his grandparents arriving on the Lower East Side from Arta and Ioannina in northern Greece. With his parents and grandparents all residing on the Lower East Side of Manhattan as a youth, Len attended Friday night and Saturday services at the Kehila with his maternal grandfather, Joseph Chaim Yohanan. Len learned the Romaniote traditions during his formative years and carries on these traditions at the Kehila today, be it at our regular services or recently officiating at two bar mitzvah events at KKJ.

Professionally, Len is a financial and operations executive, having passed the certified public accounting exam just two years out of college. In addition to being a Vice President and Trustee at the Kehila and a trustee of the United Brotherhood Good Hope Society, Len’s charitable

endeavors include service as a trustee of five charitable and nonprofit entities. He also has been a chazan for the last 17 years, leading the High Holiday parallel services at Park East Synagogue, a century old Jewish beacon in Manhattan. Len has also led the Kehila’s successful efforts into social media. Len resides with his wife Beth in Manhattan. His daughter Sara, a social worker, lives in New Orleans, and his son Steven is a PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. We mourned the sudden passing of their pre-teen son Alexander three years ago.

As a third generation active member of KKJ, Len strongly believes in passing on our traditions from generation to generation and supports the Kehila and museum to keep our customs alive and vital. We are indeed lucky to have Len on our Board of Trustees.



THE LOWER EAST SIDE: THEN AND NOW

In the course of the 91 years that Kehila Kedosha Janina has been on the Lower East Side (LES) of Manhattan, much has changed. When we opened our doors in 1927, we were the 404th Jewish house of worship on the LES. We are now one of only four remaining that existed in 1927. The neighborhood surrounding Kehila Kedosha Janina was filled with Greek Jews, both Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews and Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews. The names on the mail boxes reflected our presence. At 282 Broome, next door to us, in 1910, there were a number of Greek-speaking Jews from our community: Louis Negrin, who made his living making aprons, lived with his wife, Annie and two young children, Nettie (Annette) and Jessua (Jesse), along with his brother Michael, and four boarders: Isidore Confino and his wife Mary, Morris Ganis and Harry Nachman, both bootblacks. Such was the way of life for immigrants. That has not changed.

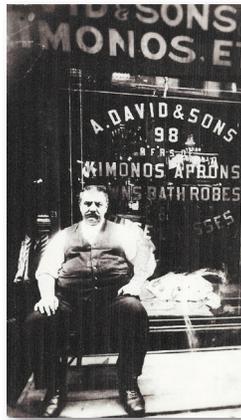
Our street, Broome Street, was named after John Broome, an American merchant and politician who was Lieutenant Governor of New York from 1804 to 1810. The corner of Broome and Allen is now officially known as Hy Genee Way, named after our former President of Blessed Memory. Times have changed. Most of us had no idea who John Broome was but we all know who Hy Genee was!

When we first opened our doors, the neighborhood was populated by recent immigrants, not only Jews but also Italians,

Germans, and Greek Christians. Now, most of our neighbors are Asian and Spanish. The languages have changed but the aspirations have remained the same; a desire to improve the lives of the families, especially the children. Most of the tenement apartments had businesses on the ground floor. They still do. In 1939, Victor Menahem established his business, Wyse Wear Manufacturing, at 263 Broome Street. His mother, Esther, sewed the aprons in the back room and Victor sold them up front. When Victor's brother, Mike, joined the firm, they expanded to include ladies' housedresses and lingerie. The business was open until 1990.

We still have a business presence on the LES. Harry (Ari) Negrin just celebrated 50 years in business with his hat shop at 145 Orchard Street. Ari joined our community in the 1950s when he came with his family after an earthquake in Volos. Economy Candy, established by Morris Cohen, a Sephardic Jew from Salonika, is still in operation with his grandson, Mitchell, running the business. The store was originally opened as a shoe and hat repair shop, with a pushcart that sold candy, but when Morris and his brother-in-law returned from WWII, it became a full-fledged candy store. Morris passed away in 2015 at the age of 97.

Now, with a feeding frenzy of construction surrounding us, we remain an oasis showcasing life on the LES and highlighting the important story of immigration.



Avraam David, circa 1910



Harry and Doretta Negrin, 2017

RECIPE FOR PRASOPITA

This is a traditional Greek recipe for a vegetarian leek pie (Prasopita) from Metsovo, a small village in the mountains outside of Ioannina where there was once a small Jewish community, closely aligned with Ioannina.

Ingredients:

- 12-15 phyllo sheets, thawed
- 3 lbs of leeks sliced (only the white part is used)
- 3-4 spring onions (scallions), finely chopped
- ½ a glass of white wine
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 cup milk or cream
- 5 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
- 3.5 oz Graviera cheese, or hard yellow cheese
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Olive oil or butter for brushing the pan
1 egg and 1 tsp water to brush the top

Start by making the filling. Wash the leeks and trim them, keeping only the white part and cut in slices (2cm width). Heat a saucepan, add olive oil, the leeks and scallions and season with salt and pepper. Sauté, while stirring, until tender. Deglaze with the white wine and wait for it to evaporate. Remove the pan from the stove and allow them to cool down for a while.

In a bowl add 1 egg yolk and the milk or cream and whisk. Stir in the leeks mixture, feta cheese, graviera cheese, season with pepper and blend to combine.

Brush a medium sized baking tray with

olive oil and lay one sheet of phyllo dough, allowing it to exceed the pan. Brush the phyllo sheet with olive oil or melted butter and continue with 5-6 more phyllo sheets (brushing each one with olive oil or melted butter). Tip in the filling and even out using a spatula. With a knife trim some of the excessive phyllo, and fold the excess phyllo sheets flaps over the mixture. Add 5-6 more phyllo sheets, making sure to oil or butter each one, before adding the other. Trim some of the excessive phyllo and roll the rest on the edges.

In a bowl whisk the egg and the water, brush the top of the leek pie and scar into pieces. Bake in preheated oven at 180C (350F) for about 50 minutes, until nicely colored.

*Since our last newsletter the following donations were made to
Kehila Kedosha Janina. We sincerely thank the donors.*

IN HONOR

Ralph Battino, Joe Besca, Isaac Dostis, Irene Mathios Dresner, Rose Eskononts, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, Stella Levi, Marvin Marcus, Sol & Irene Matsil

IN MEMORY

Esther Abraham, Beckie Abrams, Leo Askinazi, Abraham Asser, Bob Asser, Edward Asser, James Asser, Manny Asser, Mildred Asser, Murray Asser, James Attas, Manny Attas, Murray Asser, Joseph Attas, Nissim Attas, Rebecca Attas, Leon Atun, Rachel Atun, Ralph (Blackie) Battino, Moshe & Cecile Bechoropoulos, David Benjamin, Jerome Binder, Lawrence Blecker, Jerry Brotman, Calef Family, Stamo Cantos, Gary Caplan, Annette Cassuto, Sherri Cassuto, Stema Cohen Chernin, Rose Citron, Annetta Cohen, Isaac Cohen, Jack Cohen, Rabbi Jessula Cohen, Louis Cohen, Marco Cohen, Nessim Cohen, Mollie Cohen, Morris L. Cohen, Samuel Cohen, Solomon Cohen, Frieda Cotler, Anna Cohen Danchak, Louis Daniel, Anna Attas David, David H. David, Esther David, Esther DeCastro, Phyllis DeCastro, Claire DeMayo, Milton Dostis, Abe Eliasof, Jean Eliasof, Louise Eliasof, Esther Eliasof, Lena Eskenazi, Nissim Eskenazi, Murray Eskononts, Morris Ezra, Jerry Fayne, Lindsay S. Fayne, Lilly Samuels Fayne, Jean

Matsil Fishman, Mazal Gadol, Sebetai Gadol, Eva Kalderon Ganis, Abe Genee, Hy Genee, Lil Genee, Sally Genee, Mollie Mordecai Gladstone, David Gottlieb, Irene Gottlieb, Beverly Askinazi Griffenberg, Anna & Al Hamburg, Isaac & Pearl Hametz, Ivan Hametz, Debbie Heitlinger, Marshall Hurwitz, Mariana Mustachi Ischakis, Jack & Beatrice Jacobsen, Esther Matza Jeuda, Rebecca Eliasof Kailo, Sol & Sarah Karpoff, Mary Dostis Kestenbaum, Leah Dostis Klarsfeld, Esther Lafazan, Joseph Lafazan, Albert Levy, Ben Levy, Joe Levy, Joseph Levy, Judy Levy, Louie Levy, Louise Levy, Manny Levy, Pearl Levy, Phyllis Levy, Rae Levy, Rosalie Levy, Sally Levy, Sol Levy, Stema Levy, Yvette Levy, Irving Matsil, Milton Matsil, Roz Matsil, Aaron Matza, Abraham Matza, Ezra Matza, Mollie Matza, Molly Matza, Mildred Mazza, Norman Mazza, Hyman Menachem, Molly Menachem, Yessula Menachem, Sylvia Zacharia Messing, Samuel Mionis, Anna Mordecai, Max Mordecai, Elias Mordechai, Esther Politis Mordechai, Elias Mordos, Matilda Mordos, Minos Mordochai, Moses Family, Alan Moses, Ester Moses, Max Moses, Stella Moses, David Mussey, David Myones, Isaac Nachman, Ray Nachman, William Nachman, Eve Nachmias, Max Nachmias, Anna Negrin, David Negrin, Esther Negrin, Jane Negrin, Leo Negrin,

Morris Negrin Family, Haim Notrica, Lilly Notrica, Rachel Levy Oberman, Jim Pappas, Mathew Pardo, Vasilis Persides, Annie Politis, Isaak Politis, Esther Politis, Joseph Politis, Stama Rosenberg, Stella David Rubenstein, Besso Sabba, Rebecca Sabba, Sam Samuels, Sarah Samuels, Azi Sarfatti, Matilda Schinazi, Ben Sharf, Edith Solomon, Annette Solomon, Joseph Solomon, Marion Vallitt, Mois and Cecil Vechorolopoulos, Burton Weiser, Albert Yamali, Esther Yomtov

PASSINGS

Martin Abraham, Ralph Abraham, Sarah Attas Askinazi, David Benjamin, Shirley Patera Braun, Jerry Brotman, Annette Cassuto, Sherri Cassuto, Rose Citron, Abraham (Nino) Cohen, Jack Cohen, David Cohen, Samuel Cohen, Martin Davis, Jeanette Molho, Ivan Hametz, Mariana Mustachi Ischakis, Esther Matza Jeuda, Judith Levy, Louie Levy, Stema Levy, Yvette Levy, Nina Atoun Matathis, Tillie Malta, Dr. Raphael Matsas, Sara Matza, Ray Modiano, Anna Mordochai, Minos Mordochai, David Myones, Victor Nachman, Max and Eve Nachmias, Irving Rousso, Lena Elias Russo, Willie Osmo, Matilda Schinazi, Edith Solomon, Litzie Solomon, Nikos Stavroulakis, Jared Tepperman, Marion Vallit, Esther Yomtov, Morris Yomtov

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KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

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*Deceased