September 2013 e-newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

We wish our friends a Happy and Healthy New Year surrounded by family and friends. May 5774 bring peace throughout the world. May we continue to grow and flourish. May our wealth be counted, not in material possessions but, rather, in the love of family, friends and community. L’Shanah Tovah, Xronia Polla, Anos Muchos y Buenos. Attached to this e-newsletter you will find our Holiday schedule. Do join us for services. Our seats are free and our hearts are open.

Happy New Year from Kehila Kedosha Janina

Join us for Holiday Services-schedule in attachment.
This newsletter, our 68th, will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website (www.kkjsm.org).

We now reach close to 6000 households worldwide, with our community of ‘friends’ continually growing with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net.

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up (papusoup@mindspring.com) so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Passings

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Jean Matsil Fishman (3/16/1917-d. 8/12/2013) at the age of 96. Jean was born in Ioannina in 1913 and came with her parents (Rabbi Bechoraki Matsil and Amelia Levy Matsil) to New York in 1919. She is survived by her children, Melvin, Amelia and Edward.

The Family of Bechoraki and Amelia Matsil

We learned of the passing of Nissimakis Ezras from his relative Izzy Tiano, husband of Zanet Battino. Nissimakis passed in Athens on August 14th. He had a long life and left many loving family and friends around the world.

This month was extremely painful as we mourned the loss of two young children from our community.
Talia Castellano, the daughter of Marc Winthrop, a member of the Board of Directors of Kehila Kedosha Janina, left us just short of her 14th birthday. Talia had fought cancer since the age of 8. During her short life she made a tremendous impact, appearing on the Ellen DeGeneres show, winning over the world with her smile and talent, poignantly telling the message of the fight to find a cure for childhood cancers. Talia was the granddaughter of Esther Akkos Winthrop who survived the Holocaust in Greece as a hidden child along with her mother and siblings.

Marc Winthrop family. Talia is center rear.

Akkos family in Athens before the deportations

Alexander Huertas, grandson of Alan Mazza, great-grandson of Meyer Mazza and great-great-grandson of Avraam Mazza, died in a freak accident on August 24th at the age of 8.

Mazza family in New York-circa 1904/1905

This Yom Kippur, these names, along with others in our community, will be read from the bema of Kehila Kedosha Janina.
Simchas

It is with great joy that note the marriage of Jeffrey and Kari Binder. Jeffrey is the grandson of Annette Binder (Josephs, Politis and Batis families).

We celebrate the birth of Gabriella Solomon, the second daughter of Richard & Michelle Solomon, and the fourth granddaughter of Rhea and Solomon Solomon. (Papu will be saving for those dowries).
We celebrate the wedding of Tzvi and Malkie Hametz. Tzvi is the son of Denise and Irwin Hametz, grandson of Isaac Hametz and the great-grandson of Rabbi Israel Hametz. When the Hametz family applied for immigration to the USA, the quotas (put into law in 1924) had already been filled. The Kehila Kedosha Janina wrote a letter to the authorities requesting that the Hametz family be allowed to come to the USA since the services of Rabbi Israel Hametz were needed at the synagogue at 280 Broome Street. A copy of the original letter is on display in the Museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina.

The family of Israel Hametz-1924

Malkie and Tzvi Hametz

Isaac and Pearl Hametz

Aikoi Mas, Los Muestros (Our Own) Come Home

We were honored to welcome Orit Levy Dor and her family to Kehila Kedosha Janina. Orit lived in Israel for many years and descends from both the Negrin and Bechoropoulos (David) families.

Orit and her children
Photo given to us by Orit of her Greek-Jewish family. We are researching IDs.

Louise Bassman brought her cousins Sydelle and Marissa from the David family to Kehila Kedosha Janina. All three are descended from Avraam David who had a shop on Allen Street.

Sydelle Pineiro, Louise Bassman & Marissa Shedd
Great-Granddaughters of Avraam David

Louise is also the granddaughter of Rabbi Davidson
The ketubah behind her was signed by Rabbi Davidson

Avram David in front of his shop on Allen Street
Karen and Mark Georgevic visit from England. Karen is descended from Jessua Samuel Levy of Ioannina.

We apologize for our appearance during our extensive restoration of our basement (communal room). We were privileged to receive a generous bequest from the estate of Ada Finifter of Blessed Memory. Ada’s grandfather (Leon Colchamiro) was one of the founders of Kehila Kedosha Janina. (see Romaniote issue 68 of August 2013). Our restoration has turned into an archeological site as we uncovered a wall from a previous tenement dating to before 1879 and the original floor from a 1891 small residential building.

Our new patterned tile floor is taking form

Our synagogue is open for services during the restoration and the museum is open every Sunday from 11-4.

Visitors continue to flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

Bianca and Marcio from the Jewish Museum in Rio de Janeiro
We were especially honored with a visit from Gershon Harris who writes our religious column each month.

---

Upcoming Events In New York City

**Jews: A People's History of the Lower East Side, volumes I-III**

*Tuesday, September 17, 2013, 6:30-8 PM: 365 5th Avenue at the corner of 34th.*

**Martin E. Segal Theater** Co-sponsored by the Center for Jewish Studies, CUNY Graduate Center.

Join our panel of writers and editors, **Clayton Patterson, Suzanne Wasserman, Jim Feast and Joyce Mendelsohn**, for Jews: A People's History of the Lower East Side in three volumes, a discussion of the book and its contributions to the field. An essential history of the great Jewish wave of immigration to NYC's Lower East Side, Jews covers art, literature, food, religion, and so much more.

**Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonoplous was one of the contributors to Volume I.**

---

**Shearith Israel: September 29th**

Shearith Israel is located on West 70th and Central Park West.

A Greek Sephardic Evening
A Shearith Israel League Event  
Sunday, September 29, 7:00PM  
Special event. An evening of traditional Greek Jewish food, art, and music by the renowned musicians, “the Meraklides.”

News from Jewish Greece

This August marked the 60th anniversary of a major earthquake in the Ionian Sea, devastating the islands of Cephalonia and Zakynthos. The Israeli Navy was the first to arrive with aid. We are printing this article from the Huffington Post in its entirety because we feel it is very important.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-saranga/60-years-ago-this-month_b_3759560.html

David Saranga
60 Years Ago This Month: The Israeli Navy Lay the Foundations for a Long Tradition of Humanitarian Aid
Posted: 08/22/2013 4:36 pm

During the past decade, social media have played a major part in the news coverage of large-scale humanitarian disasters, by reporting in real time the stories of the rescuers and the rescued. This was clearly evident during the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the nuclear leaks at Fukushima in 2011. Sixty years ago this month, long before the Internet was invented, Greece was devastated by one of the most powerful earthquakes Europe had ever experienced. The following comments are devoted to the Israeli Navy soldiers, who went on a mission to rescue the residents of the Greek islands.

In August 1953, Israel had just concluded celebrations of the country's fifth anniversary. The festivities weren't joyful: An economic recession and military threats were causing no end of anxiety to the country's leadership. The country was also preoccupied with the task of absorbing waves of immigrants, who had come from Arab lands and post-Holocaust Europe. Israel's international position was also precarious: On the one hand many countries had recognized the newly founded state, but on the other hand their leaders refrained from paying official visits because of the Arab boycott. A number of European countries had not yet recognized Israel, among them Germany, Austria, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Greece.

The Israeli Navy was in the process of building its force, having at its disposal only a small number of old frigate-class warships, which had been renovated and put into service, along with a mixed assemblage of young soldiers lacking experience or naval training. On Aug. 12, 1953 the navy flotilla was on its way back to Israeli shores, after four weeks of intense training in the Aegean Sea, aimed at creating a professional naval force. Suddenly S.O.S alerts were sounded off the Greek shores: A series of deadly earthquakes, measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale, had struck the area of the Greek islands, Kefalonia, Zante, and Ithaca. The commander of the Israeli flotilla reported back to naval headquarters in Haifa and requested permission to turn back and offer aid. The Israeli response was immediate: "Enter and provide assistance."

The Israeli fleet, 15 hours away from the site of the disaster, doubled back and sailed past the American and British fleets, which could not access the areas on the islands that had been hit, due to the immense size of their warships.

In his blog "Seven days - notes from the Great Blue", Yiftah Kozik vividly describes the sights encountered by the Israeli naval personnel arriving at the devastated islands:
"huge clods of earth were falling into the water at tremendous speeds, the summit of Mount Ainos on the island of Kefalonia looks as though it were split in two, pillars of smoke rising from cracks could be seen throughout the town, and fierce fires had broken out in the olive oil storerooms and were burning all that remained...in most of the island's village not a building remained standing, and thousands were wounded in critical condition, among them pregnant women, old and young, people with amputated and crushed limbs, and all were in need of immediate help...the casualty clearing station was located on a wharf of the island's central port, the flotilla's senior physician, Dr. Ashkenazi, along with his younger colleague, Dr. Seelenfreud, were in charge of medical treatment, distributing the limited medical resources, and performing triage. The Israeli teams performed emergency surgeries: a broken pelvis, skull fractures, premature births, complex fractures, hemorrhages, panic attacks, despair, and havoc everywhere..."

According to the Law of the Sea of that time, the first rescue force to arrive on the scene takes command of the operation, and since the Israeli navy was the first to land on the shores of Kefalonia it took charge and also directed the rescue operations of the American and British fleets. For three days and nights the 450 Israeli naval men struggled side by side with the Americans and the British to provide relief to the residents of the Greek islands, saving hundreds from a sure death, transporting 400 seriously wounded casualties to the mainland, and providing medical assistance to 16,000 local residents. Although at the time the Greek government had not yet recognized the state of Israel, and official recognition would arrive only 37 years later, the Greek people expressed their gratitude. The king of Greece came personally to greet the Navy soldiers to convey a message of thanks to David Ben Gurion, Israel's Prime Minister, and to award badges of merit to the commanders of the operation, Shlomo Harel and Yizhak Dviri. In an act of appreciation for the Israeli navy, the Greek press called it "the fleet of love and hope," and "the Israeli sailors of salvation."

As the Israeli fleet departed from the Kefalonia bay to make its way back to Israeli shores, the other ships that took part in the rescue operations sounded their horns in a prolonged cheer, in a spontaneous show of professional homage.

This month, the Ambassador of Israel to Greece Arye Mekel received on behalf of the Israeli Government a certificate of honor from the local authorities as a gesture of appreciation for the events that took place 60 years ago.
It was the first act of Israeli humanitarian aid operation in a disaster zone. The heroism of the Navy soldiers laid the foundations for a long tradition of Israeli humanitarian aid operations, used as a Public Diplomacy tool, as witnessed many years later in Japan, Haiti, Turkey, and many other places.

Commemoration of the Holocaust in Rhodes

We thank the Jewish Community of Rhodes for these additional photos of the events in Rhodes.

Carmen Cohen, Secretary of the Jewish Community of Rhodes lays a wreath at the Holocaust Memorial

Lucia Modiano Sulam and Sammy Modiano shortly after their return to Rhodes. Both were survivors of Auschwitz.

A group of French Jewish scouts between the ages of 16-22 recently visited the Jewish Community of Athens. They visited the synagogue and the Holocaust Memorial. Alina Matsa answered questions.
On Friday, August 2, 2013, Prime Minister Antoni Samara met with Benjamin Albala (President of the Jewish Community of Athens, Viktor Isaak Eliezer (Secretary of KIS-Central Board of Jewish Communities) and David Saltiel (President of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and former President of KIS).

Samaras was thanked for his historic visit to the synagogue in Thessaloniki the previous March and the strong message it sent against racism and anti-Semitism. During the meeting the subject of the increase in Greek anti-Semitism was discussed and the need to speak strongly against it.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Shalom to one and all!
Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel

I recently had the pleasure of visiting the KKJ synagogue and museum with my family, and we were given a full tour and explanation of the synagogue and all the exhibits, and must thank devoted director and curator Marcia Ikonomopoulos for such a wonderful and inspiring experience.

In our little "tour", Marcia mentioned the sad fact that almost all authentic and ancient Romaniote traditions and liturgy, especially as we approach the High Holy Days are virtually unknown, and even the few surviving community elders who remember them don’t know the their reasons or history. Compounding this frustrating situation is the historical fact that the small Romaniote Jewish communities were largely overwhelmed by the more dominant Sephardic communities, not to mention the unprecedented horrors of the Holocaust, and the total destruction of not only Jewish lives, but also myriads of Torah scholarship that will never be recovered. As a result, "strange" Romaniote customs are often summarily dismissed out of hand by even the most erudite Rabbis and Jewish scholars as being at best folklore or distortions of Jewish law, and at worst illegitimate intrusions of non-Jewish superstitions into Jewish life.

Yet on the one hand, ancient tradition is highly venerated in Judaism, and even in Jewish legal terms, a "minhag" - custom - can often override the "halacha" - Jewish law, especially in liturgical matters. On the other hand, however, this veneration of ancient custom must be tempered by the need for consistency and to prevent the proliferation of truly foreign influences, superstitions into Jewish life. So how does one justify a certain unfamiliar or questionable Jewish as a time-honored oral tradition that must be respected and preserved, while not being able to offer any written or oral justification of such a practice? The answer is obviously too complex for the scope of this column, but several principles must be kept in mind by anyone who questions unique and even "non-conformist" Jewish customs.

First of all, a lack of knowledge of the reason for a custom is no justification for its dismissal or prohibition. Quite the contrary: The "questionable" custom itself should serve as the source for the "skeptic" to investigate Jewish law in order to find its reason. Secondly, there is no question that many such customs were justified and proven in writing by great Rabbis and Sages whose scholarly works were annihilated along with them in the Holocaust. Therefore, unless someone can prove conclusively that a particular practice is unequivocally and unquestionably not Jewish
A perfect example of this is a tradition in Janina of opening the Holy Ark with a Sefer Torah inside to complete a minyan when there are only 9 men present, as if to invite God himself to complete the quorum. Though known to have been practiced in certain communities in pre-Holocaust Europe, this was never accepted as normative custom, and was more often than not dismissed as being a misinterpretation of Jewish law. Yet such a custom is mentioned explicitly in the Talmud itself, in Tractate "Brachot" (Blessings), page 47A: "R. Huna said: Nine and the Ark join together [to be counted as ten]. Said R. Nahman to him: Is the Ark a man? I mean, said R. Huna, that when nine look like ten, they may be joined together. Some say [this means] when they are all close together, 18 others say when they are scattered." Though Rabbi Huna's opinion was not accepted as normative Jewish law and practice, the fact that the Janina community (and others) did allow such a 'leniency', proves that at some point, this "minority-of-one" opinion took hold in certain locations, despite its being rejected by the Sages as normative practice.

And so it is with other such "phantom" customs from the Romaniote tradition, and especially in the High Holiday liturgy. Therefore, it is imperative that such customs be investigated and researched to find their halachic basis, which no matter how obscure, certainly exists.

So may the coming year not only bring KKJ readers and the entire Jewish world good health, peace and happiness, but may we merit the discovery and revival of ancient Romaniote customs and liturgy! Shanah Tovah to one and all!

---

**Our Readers Share Their Thoughts**

**Capturing our Collective Memories**

Each KKJ newsletter brings notice of another of our community who has passed, another lost memory of the past, memories of people, of family connections, of friends, of events and incidents which only remained in the minds of the departed.

Family history has exploded in popularity over the last few years. Technology and a small army of volunteers have successfully scanned many documents, registers and photos so that these are now readily available. However, many of the documentary sources no longer exist and so cannot be captured in this way. The various wars of the last century, the fall of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of that century, and the destruction wrought by the Nazis and other fascists have meant than most documents which would identify family lines, events, marriages and births, have been lost forever, and it is only the memories of the older members of our communities which can bring light to them.

Therefore, it is now more important than ever that that information is captured if it is to be persevered for our future generations. Sure, some of our community have gone quite far in writing memoirs and historical books, collating details and publishing them. But we all can do more.

I've been researching my family lines for many years and offer these tips to those who wish to preserve our collective memories:

1. Ask your family to name their parents, grandparents and their siblings and children. Ask them for events that they remember, birth, marriage and death dates, what the family members did for a living, where they lived. Use what stories (however seemingly amazing, wild even!) to get the conversation going.
2. Use that information to draw an initial family tree, then go back to the family members and show them what you have - I’ve found time and again that seeing the tree on paper (or on a computer screen) catalyses them to remember other details. If you have them, dig out what documents and photos you have, and ask them to do the same - again, seeing has a wonderful effect of promoting more memories sometimes long forgotten!

3. Be polite, listening, and enquiring. Ask them for any stories, funny, sad, exhilarating, tragic. Be prepared for some stories to be kept quiet, for some people to clam up and not offer up tales; there will be some things that are too painful to be retold. That doesn’t mean that the offer to listen shouldn’t be made, and I’ve found many of the older generation willing to share some of their most tragic stories, with an almost cathartic effect.

4. Share what you’ve found with the wider family. I’ve found many times that the story from one part of the family has been understood or witnessed differently by another part, and that together they paint the more complete picture. Sharing also helps people fill in missing pieces to stories, and they many will be feel happier to understand the entire story.

There are many online sources for general information, and some communities were luckier than other in spiriting away our remaining documents. I’ve found some surviving documents and records from communities in Alexandria and Cairo, Rhodes and Corfu, and the KKJ has a store of information from Ioannina and other Greek areas. However, these are too few. By capturing our oral history, we can increase the knowledge of our history and how the community is connected, and preserve it for our children and grandchildren.

Len Pannett

Thank you Len.

Requests for our help

Diarna is an online geographic museum that explores Jewish history through the prism of physical location by digitizing individual sites and memories. Synagogues, schools, shrines, cemeteries, and other structures of importance to the community are identified, mapped, and preserved within Google Earth. We then build a data-layer featuring archival and contemporary photographs, oral history interviews, immersive panoramas, and even 3-D digital reconstructions to create virtual entry points to once vibrant, yet now largely vanished, Jewish communities. Uniquely grounding Jewish history in buildings, locations, and memories in this comprehensive way, enables anyone with an Internet connection to travel across the region as if on eagles’ wings, unaffected by the often prohibitive realities below. To learn more, watch this introductory video, visit the Geo-Museum (http://www.diarna.org), and/ or send an inquiry (info@diarna.org). Please contact Diarna to share your photos, videos, memories, as well as if you are interested in supporting exhibited editions, installations, and exhibits.

Kehila Kedosha Janina has submitted photos to Diarna and is now reaching out to others who have photographed Jewish sites in Greece and wish to share them for this fascinating project. Of course, do share your best photos with us at www.kkjsm.org.

Isaac Dostis, founder of the Museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina, is presently working on a new project: a self-guided walking tour of Jewish Ioannina. If you are interested in contributing to this project, get in touch with us at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net and we will send you additional information.
Bulgaria: Sofia to host first festival of Jewish culture next month
by: EJP Updated: 28/ Aug/ 2013 10:16

Maxim Benvenisti, president of Shalom Bulgaria, the representative group of Bulgarian Jews, said that with the festival, “we want to show that we, the Jews, are an integral part of this society, as well as that we have a sense of self-irony. Through this initiative, we are reaching out and asking people to get to know us better. This is our way of saying, ‘hi!’ to everyone in Sofia”.

SOFIA (EJP)--Shalom Sofia, the first festival of Jewish culture in the Bulgarian capital city, will be held on September 15 2013, beginning after the end of this year’s Yom Kippur, The Sofia Globe reported.

Culture and traditions preserved through the ages by the Jewish community will “come alive” at stalls in front of the National Palace of Culture, NDK, organisers said.

The ambition is for the festival to become an annual tradition, according to the organisers, including Shalom, the organisation of the Jews in Bulgaria, and Sofia municipality.

Plans are for the official opening to be attended by Sofia mayor Yordanka Fandukova. Maxim Benvenisti, president of Shalom Bulgaria, the representative group of Bulgarian Jews, said that with the festival, “we want to show that we, the Jews, are an integral part of this society, as well as that we have a sense of self-irony. Through this initiative, we are reaching out and asking people to get to know us better. This is our way of saying, ‘hi!’ to everyone in Sofia”.

The festival will showcase Jewish music, cinema, literature and learning. Some of Bulgaria’s best-known Jewish directors, writers and artists are expected to participate. For younger visitors to the festival, there will be games and surprises.

Also appearing at the festival will be Bulgarian television celebrity chef Uti Buchvarov, who will be introducing visitors to some samples of Jewish cuisine.

Websites to enjoy

National Geographic voted Thessaloniki one of the top 20 places to visit in 2013

For Rosh HaShanah

https://plus.google.com/116940887176112976700/posts/SheinQERGX?gpinv=AMI$Xal9K71LtTwvAKT-3OH3CT-ZnGKnEUfe8VoK-wEdnEjktDy9Y8YaHJghRieFK31GXa-329$ki1vUZMsYd0HeGs9VHq17TvUde892FpVLdc2PKLBlIE3okLU&cfem=1#116940887176112976700/posts/SheinQERGX?gpinv=AMI$Xal9K71LtTwvAKT-3OH3CT-ZnGKnEUfe8VoK-wEdnEjktDy9Y8YaHJghRieFK31GXa-329$ki1vUZMsYd0HeGs9VHq17TvUde892FpVLdc2PKLBlIE3okLU&cfem=1

Fascinating site on former Jewish presence in Portugal


We are continually looking for photos from the Lower East Side from the Greek Jewish world (both Romaniote and Sephardic). We would love family photos, street scenes, store fronts of shops owned by Greek Jews. Send them to us at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net.

So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.
If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street. We are open for services every Saturday and all major Jewish holidays and our Museum is open every Sunday from 11-4 and, by appointment during the week.