

Cemeteries rich communal history

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 4.)

"As I learned more about my beginnings, I began to feel Jewish for the first time. At the late age of 36, I felt connected. I will never let my children forget there was a Rachael," he says.

Pittsburgh's Jewish community established itself over a hundred years ago, by organizing a Jewish burial society and purchasing land for the Troy Hill Cemetery. "Roots and Branches", in a pictorial chronology, traces the beginnings of our community. A major portion of the exhibit, which opened in 1982, co-sponsored by the Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Jewish Committee and the Institute of Research and History in New York, now resides at the Riverview Center for Jewish Seniors.

In narrative accompanying the exhibit's photographs, the following is recorded:

"The first Jewish organization in Pittsburgh was a burial society called Bes Almen (House of Eternity), organized in 1847. William Frank, Emanuel Reis and David Strasburger purchased a plot of land on Troy Hill in Allegheny to be used as a cemetery by members of the society. In 1908 the Troy Hill Cemetery was turned over to Rodef Shalom Congregation which has maintained it since that time.

"The Hebrew Free Burial Society, founded in 1906, assured a religious burial for every Jewish person without family or means. The Society owns an historic cemetery plot purchased in 1853 by Congregation Shaare Shemayim. The former owner, Congregation Beth Israel, took title to the land in 1851."

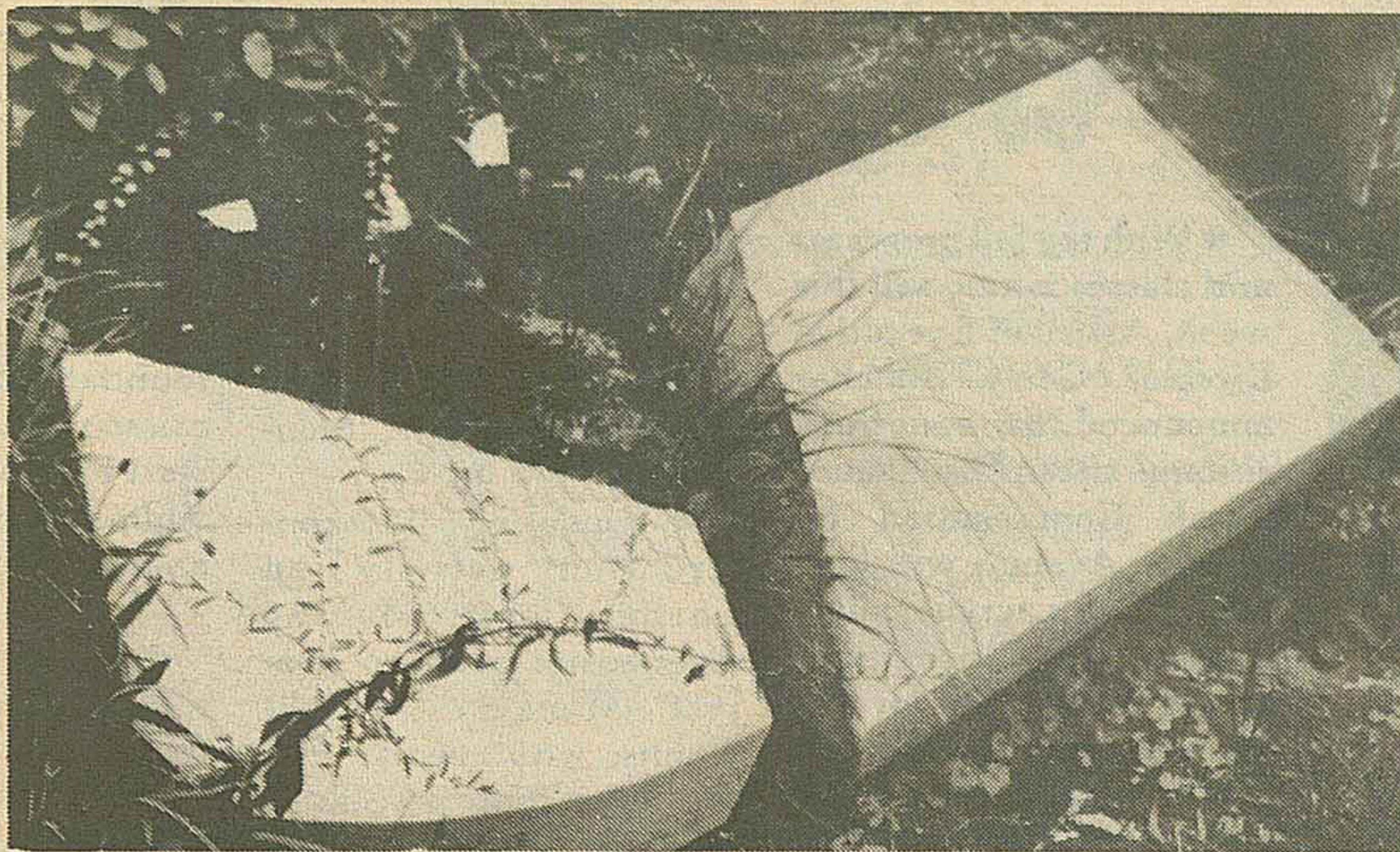
Jacob Feldman, an area historian, has written a book tracing Pittsburgh's Jewish roots, to be published this fall by the Historical Society of Western PA. He comments, "There are fairly good records of property purchases dating back to the cemetery on Troy Hill.

"It becomes complicated because so many of the congregations and organizations broke into splinter groups, causing the names of congregations and cemeteries to change with frequency.

"Max Sobel, a president of Shaare Torah Congregation in the 1880's, had his name on the purchase records of many of the area's Orthodox cemeteries--the smaller ones were apparently overseen by the larger.

"These name changes," he adds, "can floor you. They occurred so frequently that it's hard to keep track of all the transactions that were made."

The United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh now manages the cemetery founded by the Hebrew Free Burial Society, Chesed Shel Emeth. Anshe Lubovitz, a Shaler cemetery, is now looked



WEATHER damages softer stones, but no one knows what 300 years of acid rain will do to granite.

after by New Light Congregation. When Chofetz Chaim, a small Squirrel Hill congregation, closed its doors, B'nai Emunoh took on the responsibility of managing their Wilkins Township cemetery.

The "Roots and Branches" collection, which was researched by Dr. Corinne Krause, details the following evolution: "Rosalia Rauh, Henrietta Hanauer and Bertha Benswanger were among the founders of Hebrew Ladies Aid Society in the 1850's. Over 100 members served on committees that visited the sick and watched over the dead before burial. In 1880 the Ladies Aid Society and Men's Benevolent Society merged to form the United Hebrew Relief Association. The origins of Jewish Family and Children's Service can be traced to this organization."

As the community has grown, its congregations and organizations have undergone a multitude of changes, adapting in parallel with our changing needs. As names have shifted and deeds have changed hands, the cemeteries have remained constant, becoming only more populated and more weathered.

Joseph A. Cibulas, vice president of Donatelli Granite Co. on the North Side, studied journalism at Duquesne University before opting to enter his family's monument business. His grandfather, George Donatelli, founded the business which serves the Jewish community as well as others in Pittsburgh.

Cibulas, familiar with the older cemeteries and some of their history, says, "I feel so at peace when I go to some of the older ones, because I recognize all the hard work and dedication that went into establishing them. You see one stone leaning this way and another leaning toward it, so they touch, and it's very moving."

He notes that children and grandchild-

ren have begun to replace the older monuments on their relatives' graves. "You can't really repair an old stone," he explains.

How do markers fall into disrepair? The older ones, made of limestone, sandstone and marble, were softer than the granite used now. Cibulas notes, "Before the advent of the carbide tip chisel, they used steel tip chisels which wore down right away, so that you had to stop to sharpen them." There was less wear, he says, if softer stones were used, "but around 1930, people began to realize that stones only 20 years old were beginning to deteriorate, so many cemeteries adopted a rule that only granite or bronze could be used."

According to Steve Urbach of Urbach Memorials in Squirrel Hill, "what's really done the older stones in is the sulphur in the air, from the mills. Between the chemicals in the air, and the rain and freezing weather, stones start to spall, to flake from the outside until the inscriptions are barely readable.

"Water gets into the stone and freezes, and it causes some of the stones to crack. There's nothing you can do to stop that process. So far, granite, which is one of the hardest materials, has proven to be impervious. But no one knows what 300 years of acid rain will do," he adds.

Bronze will patina over a period of time, and must be taken back to the shop to be cleaned, notes Cibulas. "There's also a theft factor with bronze. There's a law which prohibits scrapyards from accepting stolen cemetery bronze, but we know very well that someone will always turn their head for a buck."

Time to . . .
Care More,
Share More



The photographs baked in porcelain, which appear on some Jewish markers, are guaranteed by manufacturers not to deteriorate, Urbach says. "They say if you continually wash it with hydrochloric acid, it will fade, but otherwise, they say it won't." Whatever Pittsburgh has in its rain has caused some of the older photographs to fade, however.

Monument makers point to another concern among Jewish cemeteries. Vaults, which support the space underneath an average 750 pound stone, are prohibited by Jewish law in most cases, according to rabbinic authorities, because they interfere with the body's return to the earth. Because many of our cemeteries are on hilly, unstable land, a heavy rainfall is enough to nudge markers out of alignment.

Restoration, which may involve removing a stone, putting in a foundation and repositioning the stone, can cost \$250 or more, and takes several days, according to Cibulas.

"There are variables. For a cemetery with unstable ground, it's a more difficult matter. To restore an entire cemetery, a small one with about 300 graves, would probably take nine months, and might cost \$30,000." At a cemetery without a paved road, he adds, a wooden track must be constructed in order to pull the monument up a steep hill. "It's sort of like the pyramids, only a bit faster."

Mowing and planting on the difficult terrain of older cemeteries presents additional headaches. Some congregations and cemeteries have contractors seeing to any maintenance which might be required. Others hire caretakers privately.

In either case, finding someone who is able to work around close-knit plots on a severe grade is not easy, and their efforts are costly. Finding a person or organization to oversee the maintenance has become increasingly problematic to cemeteries with dying memberships.

Who will care for our cemeteries when we are no longer able to? How will that care be financed?

"The questions are as unpopular as the solutions are elusive," David notes. "But our heritage comes with certain responsibilities--it's not all reward--and we have to honor the past and guide the future."

SHEMI

"Calman Shemi's soft paintings use an innovative technique to evoke the image and texture of natural forms."

Northern California Jewish Bulletin

"This new celebrity (Shemi) is fast making his mark in the art world..."

Greater Phoenix Jewish News

Meet Renowned Israeli artist

CALMAN SHEMI

Sunday, September 14

7:00 to 9:00

as he opens a major one-man show of soft paintings.

The exhibit continues through October 31.

CIRCLE GALLERY

5416 Walnut Street Pittsburgh 687-1336

Gallery hours: Mon.-Sat. 10 am-6 pm, Wed., Fri. 9 am-9 pm

A portion of proceeds from the opening night reception will benefit the Jewish Community Center Scholarship Fund

Quality Nursing begins with London & Neal.

London & Neal offers an extensive system of quality home health care. Staff members are available **24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week**. Our employees are screened, bonded, insured and supervised by a registered nurse. We honor insurance claims and assist in their processing. Call for our free brochure.

- Nurses, RN's and LPN's
- Home Health Aides
- Companions and Live-Ins
- Therapies: P.T., O.T., S.T., R.T.
- Child Care
- Homemakers Support
- Housekeeping
- Medical Equipment Rental/Sales
- Free Blood Pressure Exams Monday, Wednesday 2-4 p.m.
- Free Hearing Testing Wednesday 4-6 p.m.



LONDON & NEAL
HOME HEALTH CARE SERVICES

2105 MURRAY AVENUE
PITTSBURGH, PA 15217

(412) 521-HOME