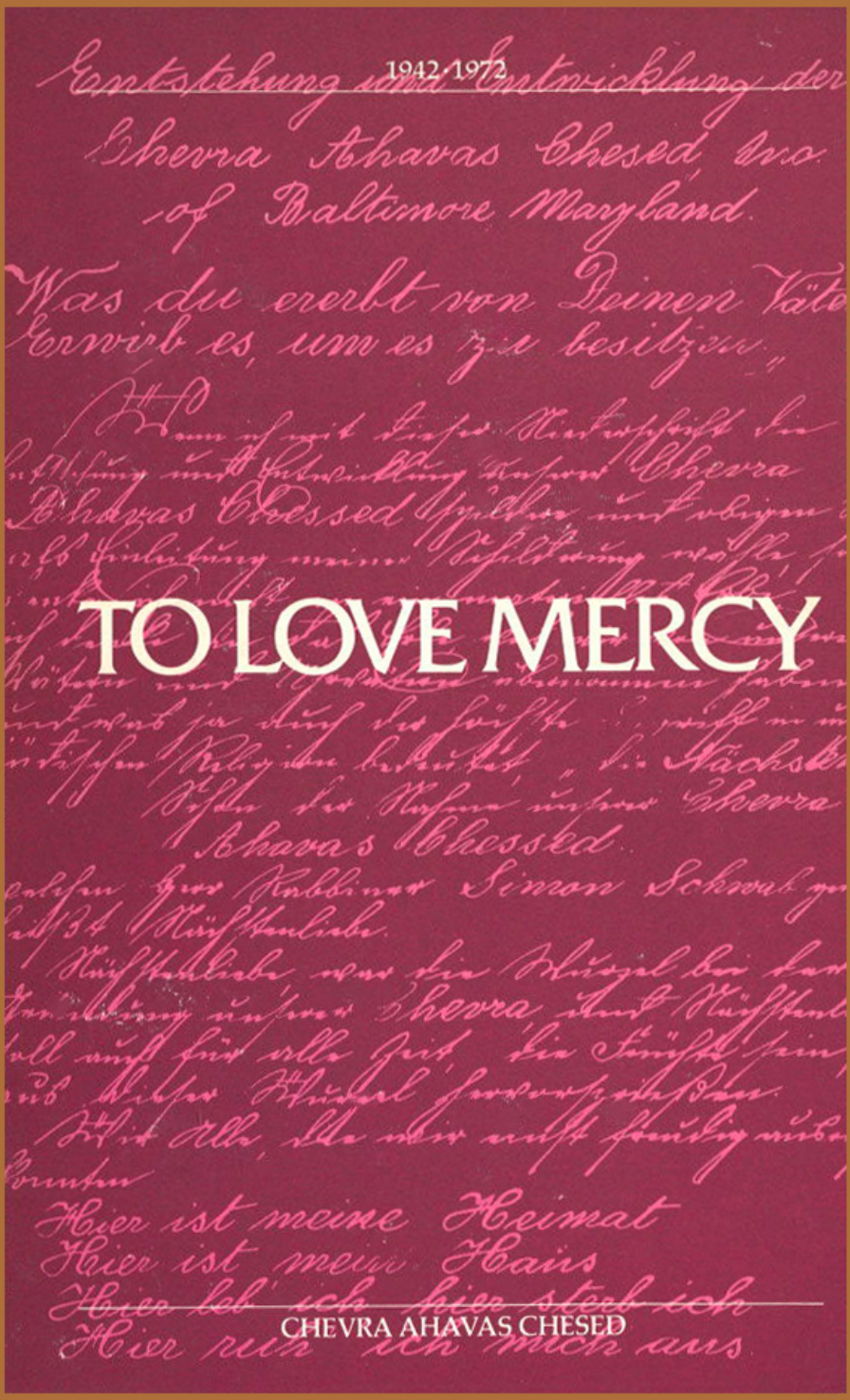


TO LOVE MERCY

CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED

TO LOVE MERCY

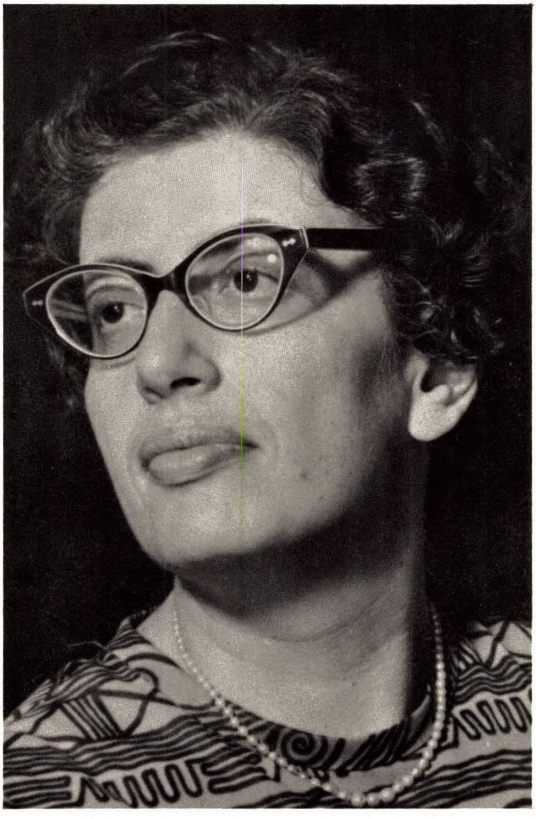
The Story of The Chevra Ahavas Chesed of Baltimore

by

Gertrude Hirschler

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GERTRUDE HIRSCHLER, *Author*

PREFACE

This book is dedicated to the memory of Alfred Loebenberg, the first president of Chevra Ahavas Chesed and to the founders and unnamed members who by their dedication and good deeds made the Chevra a living force in this community.

Chevra Ahavas Chesed lives today in its younger members, the Mini-Chevra, who either came to this country as young children, or are themselves American born. This so-called second generation has never known any other homeland than America and to them this book is an opportunity to get to know better the world of their parents. In some ways the theme of this book bears the imprint of the change, transition and tragedy, as well as the success of the Jewish immigrant who came to this country from Central Europe in the decade immediately prior to the American involvement in World War II.

The term "refugee" has been used in this book to describe those who escaped from Nazi persecution. It is apparent that these new immigrants, like the waves of immigrants before them, soon became acclimated to America and that they, each in his own way, through courage, thrift, industry and perseverance, achieved success.

The founders of the Chevra, as a self-help organization, of necessity had to have all of these qualities. However, it was the spirit of independence of these new immigrants, together with the desire of each of them, to carry his own weight, that made that first generation akin to the early American pioneer. That wave of immigration made its own very real and substantial contribution to America. Their know-how, craftsmanship and talent enriched America's art, music, architecture, business, science and industry. They furnished

new ideas and old fashioned adherence to high standards of quality, men to do the job that had to be done: butchers and bankers, doctors and lawyers, shipping clerks and executives, artists and chicken farmers; little men and big men; men like Einstein to American science and Kissinger to international diplomacy.

We are grateful to Gertrude Hirschler for her selfless effort in preparing this history.

Arnold Fleischmann
President
Chevra Ahavas Chesed

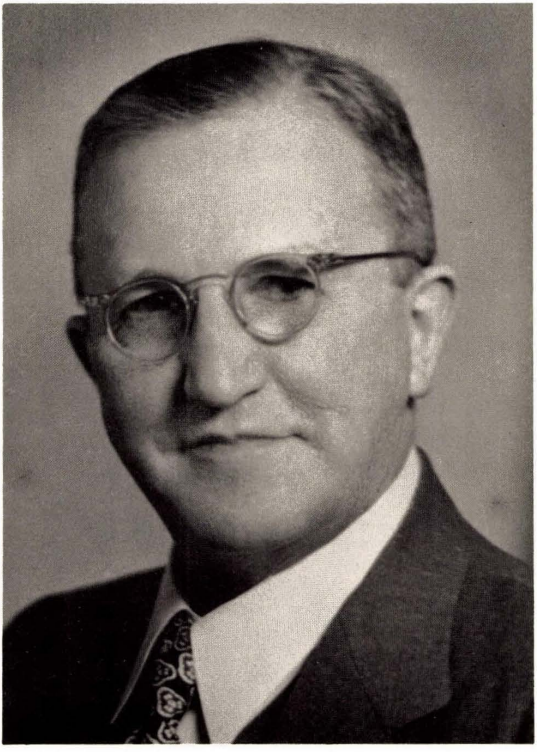
It has been told you, O man, what is good
And what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do justly,
And to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God.

– Micah 6:8

8 הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מַה־טּוֹב
וּמָה יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמְּךָ
כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד
וְהַצְנֵעַ לֶכֶת עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

In Memoriam

ALFRED LOEBENBERG
1880–1972



PARABLE

Die Eiche ragt im Tallis
jetzt bröckelnder Blätter
gegen das Grau
des hohlen Himmels.

So hat sich mancher Baum
entwelkt.
Wir stehen als Zeugen
des Wechsels
und trauern –
ein jeder aus der Tiefe
seiner Gründe.

Dennoch bleiben wir
die Kinder
des Zukünftigen
und werden,
wie auch diese Eiche,
das Vermächtnis
unseres Stammes
mit neuem Laub
verewigen.

The oak now stands wrapped
in the tallith of ochre leaves
against the gray
of a hollow sky.

Thus, many a tree
has withered.
We stand witness
to change,
and mourn –
each from the depth
of his reasons.

Yet, we are
the children
of the future
and shall, like this oak,
commemorate
the legacy
of our tree of life
with foliage renewed.

– Hans Juergensen

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INTRODUCTION

The High Holiday season of 1941 was over, and the Jewish community had settled down to a busy round of synagogue activities, organization meetings, and social affairs for various worthy causes. The mails, which only a few weeks before had been laden with New Year's greetings, now bore their share of congregational bulletins and meeting notices.

Among the invitations that went out to Baltimore Jewry during the month of October, 1941, there was a simple communication, laboriously typed out in German, which reached the homes of members of a special group – the "refugees" who had come to Baltimore from Central Europe only two or three years before in the wake of Hitler's war against the Jews.

New Immigrants to Found a Chevra

The opening meeting will be held on Saturday, November 1, 1941, at 8 P.M. at Schanze's Hall, Pennsylvania and West North Avenues (in the building of Schanze's Motion Picture Theatre). We are taking the liberty of inviting you to this meeting and trust that you and your friends will attend. Our most important objectives are to extend aid in cases of illness and death, and to establish a mutual-aid burial fund.

(signed) The Planning Committee

Since we do not have all the addresses [of the newcomers] *we are asking you to bring this notice to*

the attention of all those [who might be] *interested.*[1]

This invitation spelled out the beginning of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed of Baltimore, which in 1972 celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of its official founding in January, 1942. These three first decades of its existence – years of global war and human struggle, hope and uncertainty, holocaust and rebirth – have seen the Chevra Ahavas Chesed grow from a group of some 200 newcomers from Germany and Austria into an organization of over 1,400 members, including a newer generation of immigrants that came to these shores after the war, and several hundred native-born Americans. Originally founded for the purpose of mutual aid in cases of illness and death in its immediate circle, "the Chevra," as it is affectionately known to its members, has evolved into a service organization which has not only succeeded in preserving the strong ties by which its membership is bound together, but has also become a proud and active constituent of Baltimore Jewry.

Many members of the Chevra have achieved prominence in the wider Jewish community as presidents of old-established congregations, brotherhoods and sisterhoods, and as Jewish educators and social workers. One of the early members, the late Dr. Eugene Kaufmann, was executive director of the Baltimore office of HIAS from 1945 until his death in 1964. Rabbi Dr. Herbert Birnbaum, the Chevra's spiritual counselor, was appointed executive director of Baltimore's Board of Jewish Education early in 1972. The

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[1] This is the English translation of the German text of the notice as given in *Entstehung und Entwicklung der Chevra Ahavas Chesed in Baltimore*, a handwritten history of the early years of the Chevra set down by the late Abraham Wartensleben in 1943. Copies of the actual notice are not extant.

"refugees" of the 1930s and 1940s have prospered; the Chevra Ahavas Chesed is well represented on the rosters of substantial donors to Baltimore's various Jewish charities. In short, the Chevra and its members have become an integral component of the Baltimore Jewish scene. Some of the men and women who were middle-aged and older when the Chevra was first founded are no longer here, but their sons and daughters, the children and teenagers of the early years, have carried on the tradition of solidarity and mutual concern which they saw in action in the lives of their parents. Now mature men and women, with children – and in some instances grandchildren – of their own, they have remained with the Chevra not merely as dues-paying supporters but in many cases as devoted workers and officers.

To mark the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed, the author, herself a member of the Chevra's "second generation," has attempted to record the story of the organization that has meant so much not only to her own family but to hundreds of her elders and contemporaries. In the process, she has found herself "digressing" into the history of Baltimore's "refugee community" of the late 1930s and early 1940s, but it is only proper that this should have been so, because the story of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed is inextricably bound up with the early struggles of that community and its speedy integration into the many-faceted whole that is Baltimore Jewry.

The author wishes to express her thanks to the many officers, present and past, and active members of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary for their invaluable help and guidance in gathering information for this study. They gave generously of their time and of their memories. Because their names will appear so frequently within the pages of this work, it seems redundant to list them at this point in the story. Suffice it to say that the credit for the merits this study may have goes largely to them; as for those imperfections which of necessity

afflict histories such as this, the author willingly assumes the responsibility, hoping only that their number is not too great.

While the author has made a valiant effort to be as objective as it is possible to be for one who has felt so much a part of the theme of her work, it is hoped that this study will afford some insight into an interesting aspect of the history of Baltimore Jewry, and will show how it came about that the Chevra Ahavas Chesed succeeded not only in preserving the spirit in which it was founded, but also in broadening the scope of its activities to become what it is today.

CHAPTER I

THE "REFUGEES"

The response to the invitations announcing the plans of the "new immigrants to found a Chevra" was by no means disappointing, at least not in the view of Abraham Wartensleben, who opened the meeting, as announced in the notice, at Schanze's Hall on the evening of November 1, 1941. As he shuffled his notes before taking his place at the improvised speaker's stand, Wartensleben counted about 150 people in the audience.[2]

The men and women who had gathered in the hall were a fairly representative sample of the Jews – an estimated 2,200 or so – who had come to Baltimore from Central Europe since Hitler's rise to power. These were the "refugees"[3] who

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[2] See Wartensleben's *Entstehung und Entwicklung der Chevra Ahavas Chesed in Baltimore.*

[3] Many of the early immigrants from Hitler's Central Europe resented the term "refugee," which was applied to them by the American government, the press, the general public, and even by their fellow-Jews of East European origin who had preceded them to America by a mere generation and in their day had generally been described as "immigrants." It smacked too much, the "refugees" felt, of alienhood. Actually, the writers and the molders of American public opinion who had used the term to denote the new arrivals from the Central Europe of the late 1930s and early 1940s had not meant to convey such a connotation; they called these newcomers "refugees" simply because, as at least one sociologist put it, these people, unlike the "immigrants" of an earlier era, had come to America not voluntarily, or to improve their economic position, but had been forced to flee from their native countries. In time, though not for very long, the Central Europeans themselves wryly came to describe themselves and each other as "refugees."

had left Europe in the years following the Nazi takeover first in Germany and then in Austria, but still well before the beginning of the mass deportations which were to decimate so many of their families and in the face of which their own early ordeals and struggles were eventually to appear quite insignificant.

Most of the "refugees" who were in Baltimore when the Chevra Ahavas Chesed was first founded had come from small towns in Germany; many of the "big-city" people – the emigres from Berlin or Vienna – had apparently preferred to settle in the metropolis of New York. In those early days, the overwhelming majority of Baltimore's "refugees" were of German origin; there were only a very few Austrians and just a sprinkling of Czechoslovaks.

Unlike the earlier Jewish immigrants who had come to Baltimore from Russia and Poland thirty, forty and fifty years before, the "refugees" did not settle "downtown," in the "ghettos" of South or East Baltimore, where many Jewish families of East European origin were then still living. They congregated in the "midtown" area, which was then considered a good middle and upper-middle-class section. Located in northwest Baltimore, this area was bounded by West North Avenue on the south, Bolton Street on the east, upper Eutaw Place on the west, and Lake Drive on the north. Here, scattered among the dignified apartment buildings that housed wealthy, aging descendants of the German Jews who had arrived in the city nearly a century before, and handsome homes owned by prosperous Russian Jewish families that had moved up from "downtown," there were more modest apartments, some of them in the "row houses" for which Baltimore is famous, where rents were scaled to lower-income budgets. It was in these small apartments, on such streets as Eutaw Place, Linden, Brookfield, Lakeview or Callow Avenues, that most of the early members of the Chevra

Ahavas Chesed lived during their first years in Baltimore[4] – in many instances with roomers who helped pay the rent.

The "refugees" were drawn together not only by links of physical proximity but also by common problems which they had to overcome in the process of adjusting to their new country.

To begin with, there was the language. Many of these newcomers had arrived in Baltimore without any English at all. Others had painstakingly set about learning the language from professional teachers of English before leaving Germany or Austria, only to find that they could not make themselves understood in America, because the English they had acquired with so much effort and at such great expense was not American but British, strongly colored with the heavy Teutonic accents of their instructors.

Next, and equally important, were the problems entailed in settling down and making a living. Most of the "refugees" who arrived in Baltimore during the late 1930s and early 1940s had little or no money, for by that time the Nazi authorities had already cut to a ridiculous minimum the funds that Jews could legally take out of Germany or Austria. Only a very few of the relatively well-off had been able surreptitiously to build up "nest eggs" abroad so that, once in Baltimore, they could establish themselves in business, or

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[4] A small number of refugees started out in the lower Ashburton area, in the vicinity of Ruxton Avenue or Bentalou Street. Only a few were able to make their first homes in the Gwynns Falls Parkway or Forest Park sections. There was one group, however, which moved as far to the north as semi-suburban Pimlico either immediately or within months after their arrival; these were mainly those Orthodox Jews who wanted to be near the Glen Avenue Synogogue of the Shearith Israel Congregation, where the order of worship was in the tradition of strictest German-Jewish Orthodoxy and whose rabbi, Simon Schwab, had himself come to Baltimore from Germany only a few years before.

make a down payment on a small home in a modest neighborhood with spare rooms or apartments that could be rented out for immediate income. Except for a very small minority indeed, most of the "refugees" in Baltimore could not even afford to take a few weeks to "look around" for work that fitted their skills and experience. Unfortunately, just at that time jobs were scarce. Baltimore, along with the rest of the country, was only beginning to recover from the prolonged depression of the early 1930s. As a result, even simple work that required no great proficiency in English was hard to find.[5] Wages and salaries were correspondingly low. During the months immediately preceding and following America's entry into World War II, a family of four – two adults and two children – could live, albeit very frugally, on $25.00 a week, but many of the "refugees" in the beginning earned no more than $15.00 for a week's work. As a consequence, wives, and in some cases even teenage children, had to work to supplement the family income, and many "refugee" families were forced to turn to Baltimore's Associated Jewish Charities for financial support.

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[5] A number of Baltimore business and manufacturing concerns were particularly known for their willingness to employ the "refugees." Among these were Strauss Brothers, a wholesale dry goods concern owned by Myer Strauss; M. S. Levy Company, a concern that manufactured hats; Isador Salganik Sausage Company; the Greenwald Meat Packing Company, and the Comfy Manufacturing Company, a slip-cover factory owned by the Katzner family. Among the individual Jews in Baltimore who actively helped find work for "refugees" were Myer Strauss, his wife Julia Friedenwald Strauss (who for a time was the chairman of the Refugee Adjustment Committee which worked with the Associated Jewish Charities), and the Rev. Adolph J. (Abba Yosef) Weisgal, cantor of the Chizuk Amuno Congregation on Eutaw Place and Chauncey Avenue, where many of the "refugees" attended services during their early years in Baltimore. Mr. and Mrs. Strauss, who were native-born Americans of German descent, and Mr. and Mrs. Weisgal, who had come to Baltimore from Czechoslovakia in 1920, became members of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed soon after its founding.

It is true that the immigrants of an earlier era, notably the Jews from Eastern Europe, had also had to contend with extreme poverty when they first arrived in the United States. But they, for the most part, had been young and had seen their early struggles on New York's Lower East Side or in East Baltimore merely as the beginning of a slow but steady upward climb in America, the *goldene medina,* the land of unlimited opportunities. By contrast, most of the "refugees" of a generation later had passed their years of enthusiasm and had come, if not from lives of wealth, then at least from settled circumstances. Now in the autumn of life they had to begin all over again from the lowest rung of the ladder.

For cases in point, we need only think of the men who comprised the "Planning Committee" for the meeting at Schanze's Hall. These were all men in their mature years, none below early middle age. Back in Germany, Jacob Fuld and Abraham Wartensleben had each owned prosperous dry goods stores; in Baltimore, Fuld was doing heavy physical work at a chemical plant, and Wartensleben was a handyman in the furniture department of the Julius Gutman Company. Willy Brill, formerly a cattle dealer, was now a laborer in a winery. Adolf Straus, who had been in the wholesale millinery business in Germany, had found a job as a shipping clerk, Fred Baer, who had been in the metal business, had acquired a truck and from it sold fruit and vegetables to housewives who would wait out in the street for the "Gemuesebaer" to arrive. Alfred Loebenberg had been a well-to-do businessman who had had time to be active in the Jewish war veterans' organization in Frankfort. In 1941 he was past sixty and had been working variously as a night watchman and a bricklayer. He had not lasted long at either job and eventually began to sell kosher, German-style cold cuts and *Wuerstchen,* imported from New York, personally delivering his wares to his customers in large shopping bags.

These six men, along with most of the other "refugees" who had been fortunate enough to be able to leave Hitler's

Europe before Auschwitz and Majdanek, could not view their sudden, plummeting descent down the economic and social scale – as they saw it – as an adventure or even as an interesting challenge to their resourcefulness. Unlike an earlier generation in Russia and Poland, the "refugees" from Nazi Germany and Austria had never before had to accept physical or economic persecution as an ever-present threat or fact of life; when they suddenly found themselves deprived of their civil and personal rights in a country where they had lived for generations, that loss came to them as a fearful psychological shock. The "refugees" who landed in America before the Holocaust descended in full force upon European Jewry had not lived through those horrors which caused the "displaced persons" of only a few years later to point to their naked survival as a personal victory over death and destruction. After an initial sense of relief at having left Nazi Europe behind, many a "refugee" of the period before the death camps could feel only bewilderment and a deep sense of insecurity. Husbands and fathers who found themselves confronted in middle age with the prospect of starting all over again in a strange new country were shaken in their self-assurance and in their feeling of personal worth. Wives and mothers saw themselves chained to a seemingly never-ending routine of household drudgery, coupled in many cases with hard work at some outside job, an existence of unremitting toil, unrelieved by the diversions, the social events, and the other little pleasures of life to which they had been accustomed back in Europe but for which they now had neither the time nor the money.

When one speaks of "social events" in connection with the "refugees" of those days, that term calls to mind not pointless ways of killing time or outstripping the Jones' in an endless series of dinners and teas. Rather, one thinks of the communal functions that were so familiar to the Jews of Germany and Austria, no matter how small the communities

in which they lived: gay celebrations to mark Purim and Hanukkah, and the gatherings of an incredible variety of religious and Jewish fraternal organizations within which the members met and established close personal friendships as they joined together to carry out activities of religious and social service.

It was this, even more than nights at the theater or the concert, that the "refugees" missed the most during their early struggles to strike roots in their new homes. Lacking the financial means for outside diversion, they needed, even more than in the "old country," a purpose which went beyond the trappings of mere "social life" and for which they could work together with like-minded individuals.

Added to these abstract motives of altruism, there was an even more immediate need that cried out for fulfillment: the "refugees," each and every one of them, were in need of help, the kind of help for which they could not rely solely on "refugee adjustment committees," no matter how well-meaning. Bereft of their friends and close relatives whom they had had to leave behind in Europe to an uncertain fate, they had no one to whom to turn for the emotional support and for the thousands of little acts of affection and compassion with which kinfolk and close friends stand by one another in times of trouble. And the troubles of the "refugees" were many; especially to those past their early youth, every little step in the long process of readjustment was trouble indeed. There were real and fancied slights from an American boss, and the first report cards with the red marks of failure brought home by children who had never scored below an *Einser* or "excellent" in Germany but who did not know enough English to be able to follow their American teachers. Then came the many childhood ailments which, bad enough in themselves in those days before antibiotics, became seemingly insurmountable problems when the mother and father both had to go out to work and there

was no one at home to see to it that Junior remained in bed and got what he needed. Even worse, the mothers themselves, unaccustomed to the hot summers of Baltimore, and under the double strain of heavy housework in cramped quarters without the benefit of maid or modern household appliances, plus work outside to bring in a few more badly needed dollars, would collapse and there would be no grandmother, no sister or neighbor to come to the rescue and cook and clean for the family during the mother's illness. And finally, most dreaded of all calamities, there was death, and the fear that for lack of money and friends one might even be deprived of the final privilege of all men – a dignified funeral with family and friends present for a loving farewell.

A previous generation of immigrants, faced with similar problems, had formed *Landsmannschaften* in which families from the same town, village or district of Russia, Poland or Rumania had joined to give one another practical and moral support. When the "refugees" arrived in Baltimore, many of these *Landsmannschaften* were still in existence. Now, a generation later, the "refugees," too, were in need of a *Landsmannschaft* of their own that would meet the needs unique to their own situation and their own day.

CHAPTER II

"NUR MAL TIEF ATMEN" [6]

Originally, the Planning Committee that called the meeting at Schanze's Hall had not thought in terms of "founding a Chevra." When these men had first joined, the year before, to "do something" for their fellow-immigrants, it had been to organize synagogue services for those "refugees" who did not feel at home in American synagogues.

The "refugees" in Baltimore were by no means all Orthodox or even observant in their personal religious lives. But when they had attended *shul* in Germany, most of them had gravitated toward congregations which by American standards would have been classed as at least moderately Orthodox. In those houses of worship, the traditional German-Jewish ritual and melodies had been preserved unchanged for centuries. The very Orthodox found this ritual in Baltimore in the Shearith Israel Congregation, which had been established some seven decades before by an earlier generation of German immigrants, and whose "suburban" branch on Glen Avenue had as its spiritual leader a "refugee," Rabbi Simon Schwab. But there were others who did not feel they could join that strictly Orthodox congregation, where only Sabbath observers were admitted to membership; and yet, they missed the familiar order and chants of the Jewish *Gemeinden* from which they had come.

These were the people who attended the "holiday services" organized by Fred Baer, Willy Brill, Jacob Fuld, Adolf

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[6] "Just take one deep breath."

Straus and Abraham Wartensleben. They were also part of the nucleus of "refugees" that eventually, under the leadership of Alfred Loebenberg, was to form the Chevra Ahavas Chesed.

The first of these services, held on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, 1940 (hence the name of the organization, "Holiday Services, Inc."), had an attendance of over 100. Supervised by Fuld and Wartensleben, they were conducted by Aaron Goldschmidt, who had been a teacher and cantor in Upper Silesia before he came to Baltimore.[7]

From that time on, the group held services on Jewish holidays, on Friday nights, and on Saturday mornings, variously at Schanze's Hall, the Met Motion Picture Theatre, in a dance studio near North Avenue, and in the vestry of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, then on Madison Avenue.

By the summer of 1941 the members of the group were beginning to think that the time had come for them to acquire a permanent home for their congregation. But then something happened in their own immediate circle that changed their minds. The services were to continue at various rented quarters over almost two more decades, and "Holiday Services, Inc.," with Fred Baer as president, never officially became extinct, but Baer and his friends turned their energies to a project that went far beyond a desire to provide refugees with a *shul* where they could feel at home.

Fritz Rosenberg, a man in his late 30's, had come to Baltimore with his wife from Offenbach-on-the-Main. Not long after his arrival, he became ill and had to undergo surgery. He seemed to be making a good recovery and was discharged from the hospital. Suddenly, on the day after his return home from the hospital, he died. The Rosenbergs had no money, and no relatives to whom the distraught young widow could

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[7]Goldschmidt's son Fritz was to be president of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed from 1970 to 1972.

have turned for help. As a result, Fritz Rosenberg received a proper, but of necessity, rather impersonal funeral from the Hebrew Free Burial Society, an agency of the Associated Jewish Charities.

At that point, Fred Baer and Adolf Straus, who had known the Rosenbergs, decided that whatever modest funds they and "Holiday Services" had at their disposal should not be spent on a down payment for a building, but should be devoted to an effort to make sure that no other newcomer would ever find himself alone in time of trouble as had the widow of Fritz Rosenberg, and that if death struck, no other "refugee" family would be compelled to appeal to charity for a dignified burial for their loved one.

The original plan of Baer, Brill, Fuld, Straus and Wartensleben had been to set up a *Sterbekasse,* a "burial fund" which would pay the funeral expenses of its contributors. To this end they had sought the advice of Nathan Lind, who had come to Baltimore from Germany some years before the other "refugees" and who was selling insurance. Lind told them that the form in which they envisioned their *Sterbekasse* ran counter to the insurance laws of the State of Maryland.

It was at this point that the five men from "Holiday Services, Inc.," now joined by Nathan Lind and Alfred Loebenberg, decided to set up a Chevra Kadisha of the type with which they had been familiar in Germany. It was for this purpose that they arranged the meeting at Schanze's Hall.

At that meeting, after a somewhat flowery introduction by Wartensleben, Loebenberg took the floor to explain the idea to his audience. Back in Germany, Chevra Kadisha groups had been known as early as the 14th century. Each Jewish community had had its own Chevra Kadisha, literally "Holy Brotherhood," which was supported by communal funds and which saw to it that each member of the community, rich or poor, received a dignified burial in strict accordance with

Jewish religious law. Every act required for this purpose was performed by the men and women of the Chevra Kadisha themselves. The Chevra not only saw to the actual burial and to the maintenance of the cemetery but also supervised the various ritual activities connected with the *shiva,* the seven days of mourning observed by the immediate family of the departed. But since Judaism is basically oriented toward life, the Chevra Kadisha devoted a great part of its energies to the care of the living. Its members tended the sick and supplied clothing for the poor; some Chevra Kadisha groups even maintained a hospital.

This was the kind of organization which Loebenberg and his five associates wanted to establish for the "refugees" in Baltimore. The Chevra functions which he had outlined, particularly the care of the sick, would fill an important need in the "refugee community," much more so than an ordinary, impersonal *Sterbekasse* could have done.

But there were practical problems to consider. How could a Chevra Kadisha in Baltimore help its members with their most pressing concern, namely, the payment of the expenses connected with funerals in the United States? In this country, there was no *Kultusgemeinde*, no official Jewish religious community to support the Chevra Kadisha or to own and maintain cemeteries. Cemeteries, therefore, were owned by individual congregations or private organizations, which had to sell their burial lots on a business basis in order to be able to maintain the burial grounds. Aside from the expense involved in buying a grave, it was often difficult to perform the pre-burial rites for the dead at the home of the deceased, and the Chevra had no home of its own. As a consequence, the Chevra Kadisha would have to use the facilities of a funeral home. This, too, would cost money.

Loebenberg proceeded to explain how the Chevra Kadisha that was being planned would cope with these difficulties which had been unknown in Europe. To begin with, the

Chevra would seek at the earliest possible moment to acquire a cemetery of its own where members would not have to buy individual graves but would have to pay only a small burial and maintenance fee. As for the costs of funeral home facilities, the Chevra would seek a "group" arrangement with an undertaker whereby the latter would charge less for the burial of Chevra members, partly in consideration of the fact that the preparation of the body for burial would not be left to the employees of the funeral home, but would be carried out by the Chevra members themselves. In this way, no matter what their financial position, Chevra members, in return for a modest membership fee, would receive a burial which would not impose financial hardship on their families, and which would be performed in keeping with the traditions they had known in the "old country," not by some paid strangers but by the men and women whom they themselves would come to know during their lifetime as personal acquaintances and, in many cases, as neighbors and friends.

The audience showed more than a perfunctory interest in the plan set forth by Loebenberg. As a result, it was decided that another gathering should be held in the not too distant future, after the Planning Committee would have had an opportunity to meet in private and to work out the plans in detail.

Eight days later, on Sunday, November 9, 1941, the Planning Committee had its first session. That afternoon, Baer, Brill, Fuld, Loebenberg, Straus and Wartensleben were joined by four additional men—Jacob Gradmann, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, Albert Ring, Juda Rothschild, and Ludwig Seelig. Gradmann, Hecht and Rothschild had come from strictly Orthodox communities representing various segments and traditions of German-Jewish Orthodoxy; Gradmann hailed from Ichenhausen, Hecht from Cologne, and Rothschild from Rexingen. These men were not only acquainted with the Rabbinic laws pertaining to the work of Chevra Kadisha, but

also knew other strictly Orthodox men and women from the "refugee community" who had the knowledge and the interest needed to perform that part of the Chevra's work which was specifically connected with the burial of the dead.

It was decided that for the "woman's work" of the Chevra—the preparation of women for burial, the sewing of ritual shrouds for both women and men, and such "social service" activities for the living as visiting and caring for the sick—a ladies' auxiliary would be formed. As a matter of fact, Jacob Gradmann, in consultation with Rabbi Simon Schwab, had already found a lady who would serve as president of the auxiliary. That lady and her helpers, Gradmann reported, would be introduced to the Planning Committee when it met again one week hence.

At their next session, on November 16, 1941, the men of the Planning Committee were joined by six of the women who had indicated an interest in founding a ladies' auxiliary: Mrs. Siegmund Bravman, Mrs. Wally Heydemann, Mrs. Eva Kleeman, Mrs. Emanuel Schlossberg, Mrs. Julius Steinberg, and Mrs. Julius Vorchheimer.

These were not "clubwomen" who saw themselves in the glamorous role of "ladies bountiful." What they wanted was some purpose in life beyond housework and money-making, and they sought that purpose in opportunities to help other people like themselves. They were not "ladies of leisure." Some of them were "working mothers;" others were widows who had to work for a living. Mrs. Bravman was baking cookies to add to her husband's earnings. Mrs. Heydemann was a practical nurse. Mrs. Kleeman and Mrs. Steinberg took in boarders. Mrs. Schlossberg was working with her husband to build up a candy business which they ran from their apartment. Mrs. Vorchheimer, the youngest in the group, was busy raising two young sons and selling ladies' hose while her husband, formerly a manufacturer of work clothes in Wuerzburg, was establishing himself as a sales representative for men's hosiery.

Ellen Vorchheimer was the woman who had been "drafted" for the presidency of the ladies' auxiliary. The reason given for the choice was that while she was strictly Orthodox and therefore eminently suited to direct the ritual activities of the women's group, she was sufficiently sophisticated and broad-minded to obtain the cooperation also of those women who were not particularly Orthodox and who were concerned primarily with the "social work" aspects of the Chevra's tasks. At first, Ellen Vorchheimer had been reluctant to take on the job. Why, she said, she had never even gotten up to speak in public before. But Gradmann had not taken "no" for an answer. "*Atmen Sie tief bevor Sie anfangen, dann geht es schon* (Just take one deep breath before you start and everything will be just fine)" had been his fatherly advice to the young woman.

As it turned out, not only Ellen Vorchheimer, but the whole "refugee community" and, indeed, the people of the entire United States, were shortly to be in need of a deep breath. Before the ladies' auxiliary was able to hold its own first recorded preliminary meeting in the middle of December, 1941, at the home of Fred Baer[8], the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and America had been plunged into war.

There may have been some "refugees" who welcomed this crucial development with a sense of relief; at long last, America could be counted upon to bring its full power into play to rid the world of Hitler and his henchmen. But to most of the newcomers from Germany and Austria, America's entry into the war brought new worry and anguish. Now they knew that their last hope of bringing relatives and friends from Nazi Europe to a safe haven in the United States had vanished; one could only pray that somehow, loved ones "over there" would manage to survive until Hitler could be

[8]Those present at that meeting were Mmes. Fred Baer, Frieda Birnbaum, Max Gutmann, Ernst Loebl, Emanuel Schlossberg, Julius Vorchheimer and Simon Weger.

defeated. Even more tragically, the men and women who had fled from Germany and Austria found that they were being viewed by the American authorities as technical "enemy aliens." They remembered–some of them from bitter personal experience–how the authorities in England had indiscriminately seized German and Austrian Jewish refugees and interned them. To be sure, the Jewish press, including the Baltimore *Jewish Times*[9], had reassured the Jewish "enemy aliens" that no less a person than Attorney General Biddle had promised that refugees from Nazi oppression would not be hurt "so long as they conduct themselves in accordance with the law." But how long, the "refugees" wondered, could official promises be relied upon if the American people, like the British, were to panic in the hour of crisis and begin to press for the internment of all "enemy aliens" or for their deportation from "strategic" areas?

More than ever, the "refugees" in Baltimore were in need of mutual support and reassurance.

On Saturday evening, January 10, 1942, a bitter cold night–the Weather Bureau predicted a record low of 6 degrees above zero–the newly-organized Chevra held its formal founding assembly. Like the meeting two months before, this gathering, too, took place at Schanze's Hall. This time, over 200 persons were there.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Eugene Kaufmann. A lawyer in his native Germany, Kaufmann was now employed as a salesman with Strauss Brothers, a dry goods concern which had given employment to a number of other "refugees." The time when he was to enter the service of the larger Jewish community of Baltimore as executive director of the local HIAS office was still three years away. Now, he started the meeting off by calling upon Nathan Lind (who, as

[9] In an editorial entitled "Aliens In Our Midst," December 19, 1941.

Wartensleben was to point out with special emphasis in his minutes of the proceedings, was already a naturalized American citizen) to lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. It was the "refugees' " way of proclaiming to themselves and to all those who would hear reports of the meeting that they no longer regarded themselves as "refugees" but as new Americans, or Americans-to-be, ready to serve their new country in its hour of trial.

The next speaker on the program was Rabbi Simon Schwab, who delivered an address in German on *"Die Schicksalsgemeinschaft der Neueinwanderer"* (The Common Fate of the New Immigrants). Rabbi Schwab, who had come to Baltimore from Ichenhausen in 1937 to assume the pulpit of the Glen Avenue Shearith Israel Congregation, had been consulted from the outset on questions regarding the ritual functions of the Chevra. An adherent of the strictest school of German-Jewish Orthodoxy, he insisted that the ritual activities of the Chevra had to be carried out in strict accordance with Rabbinic law. At the same time, however, his friendliness and his conciliatory approach to religious problems despite his own uncompromising Orthodoxy – "we all have problems, so let's work together to solve them," he frequently said – won him the respect also of those officers and members of the Chevra who were in complete disagreement with his interpretation of Judaism. Rabbi Schwab became the official spiritual counselor of the Chevra; for the sixteen years that followed, he was accepted by the entire Chevra as the final arbiter on all questions of religious law.[10]

[10]The constitution of the Chevra specifies that all religious and ritual questions affecting the Chevra's functions are to be referred only to a strictly Orthodox rabbi, who was to act as the Chevra's spiritual counselor. When Rabbi Schwab left Baltimore in 1958, his function was taken over by Rabbi Dr. Herbert Birnbaum.

It was Rabbi Schwab who had suggested the name by which the Chevra was to be known– Chevra Ahavas Chesed, a brotherhood dedicated to the realization of the commandment "to love mercy," which the Rabbis translate as the *bestowal of loving-kindnesses*, meaning not only to bury the dead, but also clothing the naked, nursing the sick, and comforting those who mourn.

Following reports by Alfred Loebenberg and Mrs. Vorchheimer, the meeting was addressed by Dr. Richard Weinberger, a physician and newcomer from Vienna, who discussed various problems connected with the care of the sick.

After a short address by "Lehrer" Leo Schloss[11], the Chevra Ahavas Chesed proceeded to elect its first officers: Alfred Loebenberg, President; Fred Baer, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht and Dr. Eugene Kaufmann, Vice-Presidents; Abraham Wartensleben, Recording Secretary; Adolf Straus, Treasurer; and Kurt J. Flamm and Nathan Lind, Board Members. The Chevra Kadisha–the group that was to comprise the actual "burial brotherhood" within the Chevra–was represented on the board by its chairman, Jacob Gradmann, and Juda Rothschild.

Alfred Loebenberg was to remain president of the Chevra until 1956 when, at the age of 76, he insisted that his years and his health no longer permitted him to continue in office. In 1950, before an assembly honoring him on his seventieth birthday, one of the speakers, recalling Loebenberg's abrupt dismissal from his job as a bricklayer so many years before, quoted Verse 22 of Psalm 118: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." During his

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[11] "Lehrer" Schloss, who had been a teacher of religion in his native Aschaffenburg, was to serve as chairman of the Chevra Kadisha in the early 1950's, retaining an active interest in the Chevra even after his removal to Detroit. The chairmen of the men's group of the Chevra Kadisha following the late Jacob Gradmann were Juda Rothschild, Leo Schloss (deceased), Kurt J. Flamm, Jacob Steinharter, Rabbi Dr. Herbert Birnbaum, Meir Steinharter and (as of 1972), Dr. Adolf Birnbaum.

fourteen years as president, and later, as honorary president, of the Chevra, the name of Alfred Loebenberg became almost synonymous with that of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed. The tall man with the glasses and the kindly smile had an innate talent for making friends. He had what a later generation would call "charisma." Even when he was loaded down with bags full of *Wuerstchen* to deliver to his customers, he managed to look the part of the gentleman of the old school. Walking through the busy shopping center of Whitelock Street on his way to the small apartment on Eutaw Place where he lived with his wife[12], he frequently stopped for a chat with other "refugees." In this way, he became a traveling salesman of sorts for the Chevra; many a "refugee's" first knowledge of the Chevra's existence had come from a talk with Alfred Loebenberg in front of the bakery or the butcher store. His unaffected bearing, his homey wisdom, and his folksy speeches at Chevra meetings endeared him to all who knew him. Now in his 90's, he is still loved and revered by Baltimore's former immigrants and their children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, as the "elder statesman" of what was once the "refugee community."*

Under Loebenberg's leadership, the work to organize the Chevra proceeded at a rapid pace. While frequent general membership meetings proved impracticable, the Chevra's board met almost every week during those first months of its existence. On January 25, 1942, two weeks after the official founding assembly, the board met to appoint a committee to draw up the Chevra's by-laws. The chairmen of the committee were Drs. Ludwig J. Hecht and Eugene Kaufmann; they were assisted by Herbert Albersheim, Herman Hirschberg and Philip

[12]Martha Vogel Loebenberg, who died in 1972 at the age of 84, was a woman of charm and talent. An accomplished pianist, she also enjoyed writing humorous poems, mostly about the Chevra.

*On October 30, 1972, just as this volume was about to go to press, Alfred Loebenberg passed away at the age of 92.

Banemann. The minutes of these meetings, written out by Wartensleben in copperplate longhand and old-fashioned German, record that Fritz Bodenheimer (he was an accountant) had been asked to type up the draft by-laws and that, at a session soon thereafter, Dr. Kaufmann had been authorized to "purchase the paper necessary for the writing [and duplication] of the by-laws," for approval by the membership.

On March 5, 1942, Dr. Kaufmann was able to report that the Chevra had been incorporated under the laws of the State of Maryland and was now entitled to style itself "Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Incorporated, of Baltimore."

By the late spring, the organizers of the Chevra felt ready to call a general membership meeting. This first *Generalversammlung,* which was to become an annual tradition[13] with the Chevra, met on Sunday afternoon, May 24, 1942, in the vestry of the Har Zion Congregation at 2016 West North Avenue. About 150 members were present. The officers and board members who had been elected at the January meeting were confirmed in office, except for two changes: Kurt J. Flamm (a Hebrew teacher) and Nathan Lind resigned due to the pressure of their work, and were replaced by Hugo Fleischmann[14] and Max Gutmann.

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[13] Subsequent *Generalversammlungen* were held during the winter months. During the Chevra's early years, the ladies' auxiliary held a *Generalversammlung* of its own, separately from the men. However, the President of the ladies' auxiliary would attend the men's meeting to make her annual report. Since the 1950's, the *Generalversammlung* has been a joint meeting of both groups. The Chevra Kadisha holds its own *Generalversammlung.*

[14] This was the beginning of the Fleischmann family's long association with Chevra Ahavas Chesed. Hugo Fleischmann's nephew, Arnold Fleischmann, became president of the Chevra in 1972.

The by-laws of the Chevra were submitted and adopted. They set forth the basic aims of the Chevra as follows:

1) Mutual aid and support in cases of illness and death.

2) Performance, through its own Chevra Kadisha, of all those [religious] acts of loving-kindness, particularly the watching of the dead, and their ritual cleansing and burial in accordance with the strict observance of religious law and custom.

3) To reduce [the cost of funerals] by every possible means, particularly by seeking to acquire a cemetery of our own and by making group arrangements with undertakers and cemetery associations.

4) To practice loving-kindness in general and to perform charity as much as the means of the organization shall permit.

The three years that followed the first *Generalversammlung* were a time of tireless work and swift growth for the Chevra. By the time of its next *Generalversammlung* – on January 23, 1943 – the Chevra boasted a membership of 450, and was able to raise its quarterly membership dues from $1.05 to $1.20 for individuals, and from $1.50 to $1.75 for families (father, mother, and children below the age of sixteen).

By the fall of 1942, the Chevra had acquired its first burial ground. On May 5, 1942, a cemetery committee headed by the Chevra's vice-president Fred Baer (the other members were Jacob Gradmann, Nathan Lind and Juda Rothschild) signed an agreement with the Har Zion Congregation for the purchase of a plot of ground on the Har Zion Cemetery on Hamilton Road. The Chevra agreed on a price of $2,500.00,

to be paid in six yearly installments.[15] The cemetery had space for about 165 graves; the first Chevra member to be buried there was Mrs. Rika Baumann, who died on August 13, 1942. The cemetery was officially dedicated on Sunday morning, August 30, 1942, with about 100 members in attendance and Rabbi Schwab delivering the address of consecration.

Following the purchase of the cemetery, the Chevra entered into an agreement with Jack Lewis, Inc., a funeral home in the 2100 block of Eutaw Place, in the heart of what was then still the main "refugee" neighborhood. Under the terms of this agreement, Jack Lewis agreed to charge special low "group" fees for the burial of Chevra members. It was pointed out that the professional employees of the firm would not have to concern themselves with the preparation of the bodies; that work was to be done by the men and women of the Chevra Kadisha group of Chevra Ahavas Chesed.[16]

The Chevra Kadisha group saw to it that the cemetery and the burial services were managed along strictly Orthodox lines. In keeping with Jewish law and tradition, no flowers were permitted on the graves, and monuments were kept simple and unostentatious, with each monument subject to the approval of the Chevra's cemetery committee. Funeral services for Chevra members were conducted by Rabbi Schwab in his capacity as the Chevra's spiritual counselor.[17]

[15] As a matter of fact, the Chevra was able to make the final payment by 1946.

[16] This arrangement between the Chevra Ahavas Chesed and Jack Lewis continued until the middle 1960 s, when the Jewish community had increasingly moved into the suburbs. In 1967, the Chevra entered into an agreement with Sylvan Lewis. When Sylvan Lewis went out of business in 1971, the Chevra established contact with Sol Levinson, Inc.

[17] After Rabbi Schwab left Baltimore, funeral services for Chevra members desiring no other rabbi were conducted by Rabbi Dr. Herbert Birnbaum.

In cases where the family requested the ministrations of another rabbi or cantor, the Chevra took care to inform the family that even if the rabbi or cantor was not Orthodox, any funeral services and burial rites arranged by the Chevra had to be in keeping with Orthodox tradition. This meant, among other things, that the body could not be embalmed but had to be cleansed in accordance with prescribed ritual, dressed in traditional shrouds, and buried in a casket made of plain wooden boards. In order to make sure that no member would have to go unescorted to his final resting place and that families should not be left alone to mourn their dead, the Chevra, through an informal "telephone squad," saw to it that each funeral would be attended not only by the officers of both Chevra Kadisha and the Chevra, but also by as many members as possible, and that the mourners during the *shiva* should not only have *minyan* for their home services but also many visitors from the Chevra to show them that even if they had left relatives and friends behind in Europe, there were new friends on whom they could rely for comfort in their sorrow and for help in the adjustment to their loss.

The Chevra Kadisha group and the Chevra cooperated in arranging informal programs of religious education. Here, again, the Chevra drew on the counsel and the help of Rabbi Schwab—whose remuneration for all his services for the Chevra consisted of small monetary payments, but mostly of Hanukkah and Purim gifts of his favorite cigars.

During the winter season of 1942-1943, Rabbi Schwab gave a series of three lectures, in German, on the prayers of the Jewish liturgy. Held on Sunday afternoons in the Shearith Israel Synagogue on McCulloh and Bloom Streets—of which Rabbi Schwab's Glen Avenue congregation was considered a suburban branch—these lectures drew an attendance of about 50—70. On February 27, 1944, the rabbi delivered another lecture in the same synagogue, again in German, on "The Messianic Era."

With the men of the Chevra working long hours at desks or machines, or struggling to establish themselves independently in some trade, small business or profession, the social work activities of the Chevra during the early years of the war were left largely to the ladies' auxiliary, then led by Mrs. Julius Vorchheimer.

The first membership meeting of the ladies' auxiliary was held on January 24, 1942, two weeks after the Chevra's founding assembly at Schanze's Hall. About 150 women gathered in a ground-floor room of the Northwest Talmud Torah on 2100 Callow Avenue—it was a former private residence—to elect a slate of officers and to adopt a program of activities for their group. After confirming Mrs. Vorchheimer's election as president, the auxiliary elected a board of directors consisting of Mrs. Selma Fox, Mrs. Wally Heydemann, Mrs. Helene Rothschild, Mrs. Leo Schloss, Mrs. Emanuel Schlossberg, and Mrs. Amalie Simon.

The program for the meeting had scheduled two speakers to discuss with the group its potential for Jewish community service —Rabbi Dr. Samuel Link and Dr. Richard Weinberger. Dr. Link, who had been rabbi of the Chevra Kadisha in Berlin, was to have outlined the work of women in performing the last honors for the dead. Dr. Weinberger, who had also addressed the men's meeting two weeks before, was to discuss woman's role in the care of the sick. Rabbi Link, already advanced in years, was ill and could not attend, but Dr. Weinberger came and found a most enthusiastic audience.

It was decided that the ladies' auxiliary should divide its activities into two main areas: Chevra Kadisha work and social service. Mrs. Leo Schloss, a woman well past middle age who worked in a factory to supplement her husband's small earnings, was named chairman of the Chevra Kadisha; she was to be in charge of the *Tahara* (ritual cleansing) and dressing of the Chevra's female dead for burial. Mrs. Selma Fox took charge of the "sewing group" (*Naehgruppe*) that prepared the

shrouds for both men and women.[18] Mrs. Wally Heydemann accepted the chairmanship of that function for which the auxiliary was to become best known and appreciated in the "refugee community"–*Krankenhilfe*, or neighborly help to members of the Chevra and their families when illness struck.

If the child of a working mother was sick, a lady from Mrs. Heydemann's committee would come to the house to baby-sit so that the mother would not have to lose time from her job. If the mother herself was ill, the "ladies from the Chevra" would visit the patient, bringing along a little soup, meat or cake they had prepared at home, or else they would don their aprons, march into the patient's own kitchen to cook a meal, and perhaps do a little sweeping and dusting while the food was on the fire. One of the past presidents of the Chevra's ladies' auxiliary still gratefully remembers how the Chevra ladies came to her rescue one spring in the early 1940's, when she herself, and her family, were still very recent newcomers.

"I had to choose the day before Passover to come down with the measles," she recalls. "Here I was, deathly sick, with nobody to take care of my six-year-old son or to finish the cooking for the holidays ahead. My husband couldn't afford to stay home from work. Before I knew it, a lady from the Chevra was in my kitchen, putting out the food I'd been able to get ready for that night's Seder before the measles really knocked me out. Then she left and came back with enough food to last us for almost the entire holiday week! We were luckier than most of the newcomers: we had a little money, but not much. Well, somebody from the Chevra happened to

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[18] The ladies of the *Naehgruppe* met at the homes of the various group members to cut the linen shrouds and to sew them. The group met at irregular intervals, whenever the supply of garments ran low. Shrouds for men, in addition to the *kittel* and *tallith*, consist of a cap, long pants, an undershirt and socks. Women are dressed in an undershirt, a top shirt and a cap; their faces are covered with a face cloth.

know of a practical nurse who did housework for just $1.50 a day. Thanks to that nurse, I was able to spend the next days resting and recuperating without having to worry about keeping my apartment clean and my family happy."

During the early 1940's, the Chevra ladies paid an average of 100 visits per year. Among Mrs. Heydemann's early helpers were Mmes. Eva Kleeman, Julius Lauer, Werner Nothmann, Ernest Oppenheimer, Jacob Rosenbach, Helene Rothschild and Adolf Weinberg. For Meta Oppenheimer, then still a very young woman, this was the beginning of over two decades of service for the Chevra; she was eventually to become president of the ladies' auxiliary, holding that office from 1966 to 1968 and again from 1970 until 1971.

Martha Lauer and Paula Rosenbach both had teenage daughters who early developed an interest in the work their mothers were doing for the sick.

"One day during the war," Mrs. Rosenbach recalls, "my daughter Ellen came home and told me about an old lady who had just come over from Europe and lived with her son down the street from us on Callow Avenue. 'She's smart,' Ellen said, 'She talks just like a professor.' I'd heard about that woman before, and went down to see her. Ellen was right: the woman, Mrs. B., was very cultured and polite, and could run on for hours about art and history. Obviously, she'd had what we called *eine gute Kinderstube*. Old and sick though she was, she never sat down while anybody in the room was standing, not even when it was my Ellen. When the war broke out, Mrs. B. and her son were in France, and when the Nazis got there, they were interned in Camp Gurs. They were among the lucky people who got out and managed to come to America before the real mass deportations began. Now the two of them were living in an apartment cluttered with books and magazines, but with very little food in the pantry. Mrs. B. was so helpless that she couldn't even go out to shop for food. Her son, already a man of middle age, wasn't of much

help. He was a very fine man, but a *shlemiel.* Once, he'd had a touch of TB and spent some time out at Mount Pleasant Sanatorium. Now he was working at odd jobs, such as plucking chickens for butchers. Actually, all that stood between them and starvation was a small allowance from the Associated Jewish Charities. During the next two years either Ellen or I went to visit Mrs. B. every day and we did all her shopping for her. Sometimes, I'd try to clean up her apartment for her a little. Mrs. B. and her son really became quite dependent on us. If we didn't come for a day or two, she'd call me and ask: *'Ist alles gesund?'* (Is everybody well in the family?). Then, one day, the B's were forced to move. The next thing we heard, they'd taken an apartment in a colored neighborhood, quite some distance away from us. Still, I kept on doing shopping for her; sometimes, I'd bake a cake and take it to the B's. Eventually, Mrs. B. became bedridden. One morning her son called to tell me that his mother had died during the night. I called the Chevra, and the Chevra Kadisha ladies went to the funeral home to perform the *Tahara* and prepare Mrs. B. for burial. The funeral was, of course, conducted by the Chevra. Her poor son was now all alone, without anybody in the world. After his mother died, he just didn't seem to want to live. He had a stroke and, after a while, he too, passed away. But at least we were able to do something for him during those last months of his life. Fred Junker (he later became president of the Chevra), who had some connections, got him a bed in the Jewish Convalescent Home. There, they gave him good food and made him as comfortable as they could."

The ladies of the Chevra did their ritual and social work with devotion and earnest dedication. Unlike other women's groups, they did not sponsor social functions then. The one occasion during the entire year when all the women of the Chevra got together for *Kaffee und Kuchen* was the annual *Generalversammlung* of the ladies' auxiliary. Those early

meetings featured lectures, always in a rather serious key. At the auxiliary's first *Generalversammlung,* held on December 26, 1942, there was a lecture by Mrs. Fritz (Dr. Rose) Bodenheimer on *"Frauen in der Judengasse"* (Women In The Ghetto). At the 1943 *Generalversammlung,* the speaker was Manfred Lehmann, a friend of the Vorchheimer family, who chose as his topic, *"Die Bibel und der moderne Mensch"* (The Bible and Modern Man).

"Meetings such as this," Helene Rothschild wrote in her German minutes of the 1942 *Generalversammlung,* "are so enjoyable. We hope that this evening will be followed by other functions like it."

Those war years were times of grim anxiety for the "refugees" in Baltimore, no less than in the rest of the United States. Materially, the "refugees" were beginning to be a little better off than before; as the war wore on, many of them, along with millions of older Americans, benefited from the economic boom brought on by wartime conditions. In time, many a member of the Chevra found that, after having paid for his family's food, rent and clothing, he had a little money left over. But money in the bank could do nothing to allay the fears that accompanied nearly every "refugee" through his days and often kept sleep away during the night. At first, few could really believe the reports that were beginning to seep in from war-torn Europe – accounts of concentration camps where Jews by the hundreds of thousands were not merely "interned" but were being systematically exterminated. However, as the months passed and the reports from still-neutral countries followed one another in swift and terrifying succession, thousands of the "refugees" who had found safety in America were brought face to face with the probability that their dreams of post-war reunions with their loved ones who had remained in Europe, dreams that had sustained them through their own months and years of struggle and hardship in America, might never come true. To

be sure, with postal communications disrupted by the war, the "refugees" could not expect direct news from their relatives in Europe and so, in most cases, their fears were still unconfirmed. But the nagging uncertainty was there all the time, sapping at peace of mind and joy of living.

For many "refugee" families, there was yet another ever-present dread. The "refugees" in Baltimore had their share of "service flags" in their windows, with blue stars representing husbands, brothers and sons serving in the American armed forces. In these cases, fears could turn into dread certainty, not in slow stages, but from one moment to the next, with a telegram from the War Department notifying the family that a husband, brother or son had given his life for the country which he had come to cherish as his own.

By this time, most Americans had grown to accept the "refugees" from the enemy countries of Germany and Austria as loyal, dedicated helpers in America's war effort. But to the dismay of the new Americans, there were still some die-hards in positions of authority who automatically classed even "refugees" from Nazi oppression as enemy aliens and placed difficulties into the path of hundreds who had fled from Nazi oppression and who had become eligible for citizenship in the United States.

Thus, in 1944, five Baltimore "refugees" who had fulfilled the five years' residence requirement and had applied for their final naturalization papers were informed that the U.S. District Judge for the District of Maryland was unwilling to act upon their petition. One of the group was a trained nurse, whose husband was an officer in the U.S. Army. Another, also a young woman, was anxious to get her final papers so that she could join the Women's Army Corps. The third, who had applied for citizenship together with his wife, was a noted ophthalmologist. The fifth member of the group was Rabbi Schwab, who had been living in the United States for over seven years and most of whose children had been born in Baltimore. Clearly, there was no justification for treating such people as enemy aliens.

At this point, the Chevra entered the picture. Within a short time, the officers of the Chevra had canvassed its membership and raised a total of $1,000 to pay whatever expenses might be entailed in bringing the case to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals. As it turned out, the money was not needed; Simon E. Sobeloff, the eminent Baltimore jurist who agreed to represent the group, refused to accept a fee. Sobeloff, who had served for a number of years as U. S. District Attorney for Maryland, and who, a decade hence, was to become Solicitor General of the United States, had long been active in Jewish communal affairs and had taken a particular interest in new immigrants. Simon Sobeloff and the five "refugees" won their point: the Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the district judge to take prompt action on their petition.

Before long, the officer's wife, the young candidate for the Women's Army Corps, the ophthalmologist and his wife, and the rabbi were called to the District Court to take the Oath of Allegiance as citizens of the United States.

City of Baltimore

MAYOR'S CITATION

TO

The Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.

Greetings

I, Theodore R. McKeldin, Mayor of the City of Baltimore, do hereby confer upon you the Mayor's Citation for your contribution to the civic welfare of our municipality. Wherefore, I have issued and signed this certificate and Award of Merit as an earnest expression of appreciation and a symbol of gratitude for the splendid quality of public service which you have rendered.

Given under the Corporate Seal of the City of Baltimore this fourth *day of* December, *in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and* sixty-six.

Theod. McKeldin

MAYOR

Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.

OF BALTIMORE

☆

TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Sunday, March 9, 1952, 8 p. m.

Talmudical Academy, 3701 Cottage Avenue

☆

Program

Part 1.

Star Spangled Banner and Hatikvah ..... Cantor Adolph J. Weisgal and Audience

Introduction ..... Mr. Ludwig J. Hecht
Program Chairman

Greetings ..... Mr. Alfred Loebenberg,
President, Chevra Ahavas Chesed

Mrs. Bernhard Hirschler,
President, Ladies' Group

Mr. Elkan R. Myers,
President, Asso. Jewish Charities

Mr. Fred Baer,
Holiday Service, Inc.

Mr. Fred Mayer,
Tikvah Youth Group

Liturgical Music ..... Cantor Simon Weiss

1. Acheinu Kol Beth Yisroel (Rosenblatt)
2. L'Olom Y'he Odom (Herschman)

Professor Herman Schwartz at the piano

Message ..... Rabbi Simon Schwab

Address: Americanism—Privilege and Obligation ..... Mr. Simon E. Sobeloff

Short Intermission

Part 2.

Cantor Simon Weiss, Washington, D. C.
with Prof. Herman Schwartz at the Piano

I.

1. V'ulai ..... Shertok-Lefkowitz
2. Shir Hapalmach ..... Gordis
3. Ha-emek Hu Chalom ..... Rappaport
4. Yerushalayim ..... Ruskin

II.

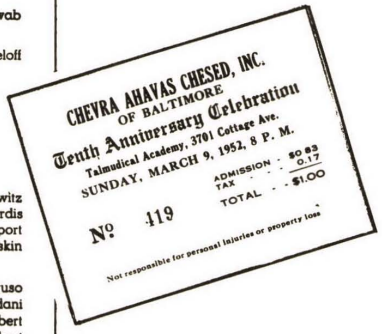
5. Dreams of Long Ago ..... Caruso
6. Caro Mio Ben ..... Giordani
7. Der Lindenbaum ..... Schubert
8. Das Staendchen ..... Schubert

III.

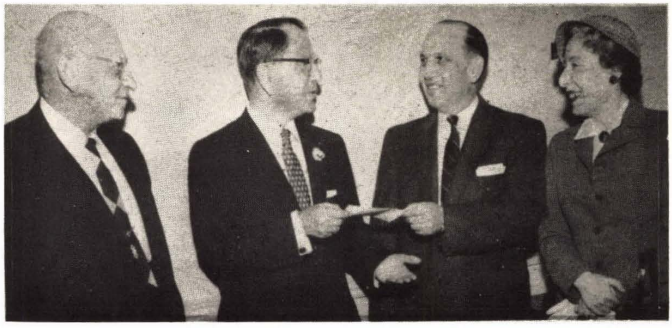
9. Rosinkes mit Mandlen ..... Goldfaden
10. Kol Yisroel (Alle Yiden) ..... Wasylosky
11. Nigun ..... Weiner

REFRESHMENTS

Catered by Baida



Program for 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Chevra, held on March 9, 1952. The principal speaker at the celebration was Simon E. Sobeloff, prominent jurist and friend of the "refugee" community.



THE JEWISH TIMES – May 3, 1957

EMERGENCY AID TO REFUGEES has special meaning to members of Chevra Ahavas Chesed. Proceeds of a special drive among the group's members were presented to Harry Greenstein (second from l.), executive director of the Associated Jewish Charities and Welfare Fund as a special contribution to the Emergency World-Wide Rescue Fund. Shown are (l. to r.): Adolf Straus, treasurer; Mr. Greenstein; Fred Baer, president; and Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht, president of the Women's Auxiliary.



Early Chevra (1631)
From Encyclopedia Judaica (German Edition)

"We have found freedom. Give thanks to God. DO NOT FORGET! Our parents, brothers and sisters were deported and murdered, houses of worship destroyed, Jewish culture obliterated."



Sonntag, 10. November 1946, 4 Uhr nachmittags

GEDENK-GOTTESDIENST

SHEARITH-ISRAEL SYNAGOGE, 2105 McCULLOH STREET

Ausführungen: Kantor Rev. A. Chaseman und Rabbiner S. Schwab

1. **Mincha Gebet.**
2. **Gemeinsame Gebete für Vermisste und Verstorbene.**
3. **Gedenk-Rede**
4. **Abend-Gebet.**
5. **El Moley Rachamim.**
6. **Kadish.**

Um die Feier würdig zu gestalten, bitten wir die verehrten Besucher, pünktlich zu erscheinen.

Gaeste Willkommen!

CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED, Inc., BALTIMORE, MD.

Invitation to the first memorial service marking the anniversary of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom that took place in Germany and Austria in November, 1938.

NOVEMBER
10
1938

UNVERGESSLICHE TAGE!

MARCHECHVAN
17
5699

"DO YOU KNOW THESE CHILDREN? These are the orphans, the people who used to be your best friends. Or . . . are these, perhaps, your own nieces and nephews? Of course, you don't recognize them. Their faces have been twisted by hunger . . . How often would YOU have to go to bed hungry if this year, once or perhaps several times, you were to send a food package (at $5.00 per package) to one of these Jewish orphans in Europe . . . "

This flyer was sent out to the membership of the Chevra in August, 1945, to announce a house-to-house collection of funds for food packages for Jewish war orphans. Under the impact of the tragic news of the fate that had befallen their families and friends in Europe, the members contributed a total of $1,600 to the campaign.

Dies sind die Waisen, Deine früheren besten

Freunde!



Oder irren wir uns?

Sind dies vielleicht Eure

NICHTEN, NEFFEN?

Du erkennst sie natürlich nicht.

HUNGER

hat ihr Antlitz verzerrt! Wir aber wollen aus ihren Augen diesen verschreckten Blick bannen. Wir wollen, dass ihre kindlichen Arme und Beine wieder rund und rosig werden, wir wollen, dass ihre Lippen wieder lachen lernen.

Helft uns dabei!!!

Wie oft müsstest

DU HUNGRIG

zu Bette gehen, wenn Du dieses Jahr, einmal oder öfter, ein Lebensmittel-Paket (Preis $5.—pro Paket) einem dieser Jüdischen Waisenkinder nach Europa schickst!

Denk darüber nach und empfange die Damen und Herren unseres Komitees, die Dich innerhalb der nächsten Tage besuchen werden, mit freigiebiger Hand.

CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED, INC.



TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED – 1941-1966

Left to Right: Werner Marx, *President,* Fred Baer, *Pa*
Frank Idestone, *Toastmaster,* Mrs. Frank Idestone
25th Anniversary Celebration.



Chevra Ahavas Chesed – 1941-1966 – Werner Marx, *President,* Meta Oppenheimer, *President of Ladies' Auxiliary,* Past Presidents.



dent,

The monument to the six million victims of the Nazi holocaust and the soldiers who fell in the defense of freedom during World War II. Donated to the Chevra by Holiday Services of Baltimore, Inc., it was unveiled during the consecration exercises by Fred Baer, Vice-President of the Chevra and President of Holiday Services, Inc.



The monument to the six million victims of the Nazi holocaust frames the Eternal Light donated by Tikvah Youth group, an organization of young people most of whom, either themselves or through their parents, were affiliated also with the Chevra.

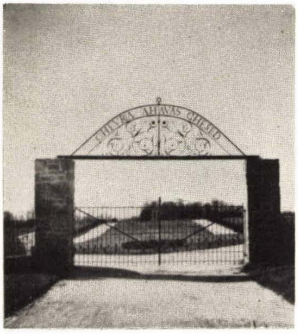


President Alfred Loebenberg delivering the address at the consecration exercises.



CONSECRATION OF THE RANDALLSTOWN CEMETERY – November 11, 1951

View of Chevra's Randallstown Cemetery shortly after its dedication.





Rabbi Simon Schwab, of Shearith Israel Congregation, officiating at the consecration exercises. Rabbi Schwab served as spiritual counselor of the Chevra from its inception until 1958 when he left Baltimore to become rabbi of Congregation K'hall Adath Jeshurun in New York City.



Martel Lauer (r.), Chairman of Visiting Committee for 24 years, Ida Eckstein (l.), Member of Visiting Committee, paying a visit to Mrs. Rosenzweig.

NACHRICHTEN-BLATT
der
Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.

$ 1.600.- ein schöner Erfolg !

Ihr habt diese Kinder erkannt!

Ihr habt nicht gefragt ob diese bleichen Gesichter Euren Nichten u.Neffen gehören. Ihr habt nur daran gedacht, dass sie Hunger leiden ! Und Ihr habt gespendet!

Im Namen der Notduerftigen sei allen Mitgliedern u.Freunden der herzlichste Dank fuer ihre bereitwilligen Gaben ausgesprochen. Besonders Anerkennung gebuehrt den freiwilligen Sammlern.
Das Ergebnis beweist den Erfolg.
Das Sammelergenis von $ 1600.- wurde den Vaad Hatzolah ueberwiesen u.zur Versendung von 320 Lebensmittelpaketen im Werte von je $ 5.- an hungernde juedische Kinder in Europa verwendet. Die Kosten der Durchfuehrung der Sammlung wurden von der Chevra getragen.

Dieser Erfolg beweist das Zusammengehoerigkeitsgefuehl unserer Mitglieder.

Alfred Loebenberg.

Nachrichten :

Kleidersammlung:

Wir haben bis jetzt ca 1000 lbs.gebrauchte Kleider zur Weiterbeförderung nach Europa nach New-York gesandt.

Wir machen darauf aufmerksam, dass wir diese Sammlung fortsetzen werden, solange unsere Glaubensgenossen in Europa in Not sein werden.

Sammelstellen:

Mrs. Salinger
1619 Gwinn Falls Parkway

Mrs. Lauer
3408 Woodbrook Ave

Mrs.Gradmann
3500 Devonshire Dr.

Mrs.Weinberg
5021 Denmore Ave

Mrs.Apt
2900 Springdale Ave

Mrs.Steinberg
1601 Buxton ave

Mrs. Hirschler
2133 Callow Ave.

Chanukah Feier

fuer Jung und Alt !
Fuer
jedes
Kind
haben
wir
eine

UEBERRASCHUNG

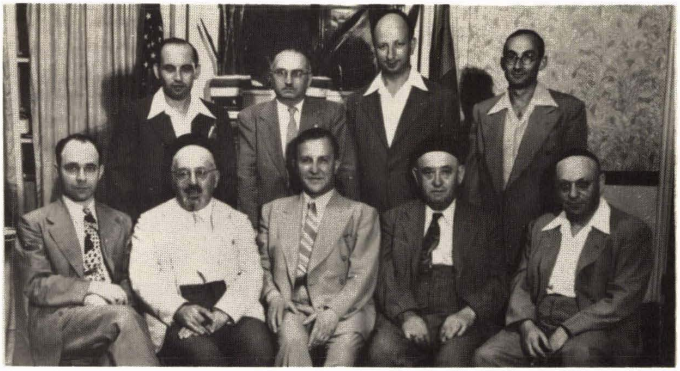
Haltet Euch den Sonntag Nachmittag
2. Dezember
frei.

HABT IHR

Wuensche ?
Wollt Ihr wissen welche Plaene wir haben ?
Wollt Ihr uns beraten ?

Dann kommt bestimmt zur Generalversammlung der Frauengruppe der Chevra Ahavas Chesed.

This two-page mimeographed newsletter, issued in the fall of 1945, was the Chevra's first publication. The headline and Column 1 report the success of the Chevra's food package campaign. Column 2 reports on the collection of used clothing for war survivors in Europe and lists the names of members who volunteered their homes as "clothing collection centers." Column 3 announces the first Hanukkah celebration to be held by the Chevra, and the forthcoming annual meeting of the women's auxiliary.



President and First Executive Board of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed

Seated Left to Right: *Dr. Eugene Kaufmann, Jacob Gradmann, Alfred Loebenberg, President, Abraham Wartensleben, Adolf Straus.*
Standing: *Fred Baer, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, Bernard Mansbach, Hugo Fleischmann.*



President and First Executive Board of the Ladies' Auxiliary

Left to Right Seated: *Selma Fox, Ellen Vorchheimer, First President of Ladies' Auxiliary, Wally Heidemann, Mrs. Hedwig Schloss.*
Standing: *Helene Rothschild, Amalie Simon, Henny Loebl.*

1942–1972

PRESIDENTS OF THE CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED

Alfred Loebenberg (1942-56)*
Fred Baer (1956-59)
Justin J. Kahn (1959-61)
Fred Junker (1961-63)
Leo Haas (1963-66)
Werner L. Marx (1966-68)
Arnold Zeller (1968-69)
Fritz Goldschmidt (1970-72)
Arnold Fleischmann (1972-)

PRESIDENTS OF THE CHEVRA AHAVAS CHESED LADIES' AUXILIARY

Mrs. Julius Vorchheimer (1942-44)
Mrs. Bernhard Hirschler (1945-56)
Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht (1956-59)
Mrs. Richard Hellman (1959-62, 1968-69)
Mrs. Sigi Kleeman (1962-65)
Mrs. Ernest Oppenheimer (1965-68, 1970-71)
Mrs. Max Weil (1971-)

* – deceased

CHAPTER III

NEW FIELDS OF ENDEAVOR

On the afternoon of Sunday, November 10, 1946, several hundred men and women of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed gathered in the main sanctuary of the old Shearith Israel synagogue on McCulloh and Bloom Streets for a service to commemorate the anniversary of *Kristallnacht,* that terrible night in November, 1938, when, as the Nazis had boasted, the slivers of broken glass from the shattered windows of synagogues and of Jewish stores and homes littered the streets of the towns and cities of Germany and Austria like so much glittering crystal. That day, and during the two days that followed, hundreds of synagogues in Hitler's *Third Reich* had been razed, and thousands of Jews had been arrested or injured.

Now, eight years later, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed, remnant of European Jewry, whose members had been spared the agony of the death camps, had come together in the first religious service to be held in Baltimore in memory of those three days of terror, the first organized countrywide outrage against the Jews of Hitler's "Greater Germany" that had marked the beginning of the catastrophe of European Jewry.

Following the regular weekday afternoon and evening service, conducted by Rev. Abraham Chaseman, the elderly cantor of the synagogue, Rabbi Schwab ascended the pulpit to deliver the memorial address.

As Rabbi Schwab, in his simple, quiet manner, recalled the losses which the years since 1938 had brought to the Jewish people, many members of the audience strove vainly to

maintain a grip on emotions that threatened to break through. Some of the older people, the leaders of the Chevra, tried to seek a measure of comfort in the thought that while they had not been able to snatch their own friends and loved ones from the European holocaust, they had succeeded, through the Chevra, in giving hundreds of their fellow-Jews a new sense of purpose and the reassurance that, although no one could replace the parents, brothers and sisters they had lost, they were nevertheless not alone in the world.

During the years that had seen the slow coming of the Allied victory over the forces of evil, and the revelation of the full extent of the calamity that had befallen the Jewish people, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed, in quiet, unremitting work, had gone on fulfilling the purposes for which it had been founded.

The Chevra Kadisha group had continued faithfully to perform the last services of loving kindness for those who had died. As for its work with the living, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed had reason to take modest pride in its achievements.

In addition to moral support, the Chevra had come into a position where it was able to give financial "first aid" to members in time of need. Early in 1945, one of the members, Louis Segall, had suggested that the Chevra set up a special fund upon which members would be able to draw when they were faced with a financial emergency. Segall's proposal had been adopted, and the result had been the establishment of an emergency fund, a *Notstandskasse*, which, according to an amendment to the Chevra's by-laws, was to be used

> exclusively in giving assistance to deserving cases of financial need in the Chevra, especially in cases of illness.

This fund was to be built up solely from voluntary contributions made by members independently of their membership dues. Within a few months, the *Notstandskasse* had managed to accumulate reserves totalling $600.00.

A year before, in 1944, Fred Baer, Willy Brill, Jacob Fuld, Adolf Straus and Abraham Wartensleben had been able

to turn over to the Chevra an additional amount of money – $100.00 in surplus funds raised at their "holiday services" which were still being held. That money had been set aside to start a fund which, it was hoped, would eventually be used to make a down payment for a clubhouse for the Chevra. This new fund had been named the Alfred Loebenberg Fund in honor of the man who had won for himself so secure a place in the hearts of the Chevra members that it had become difficult to conceive of anyone else but Herr Loebenberg as president of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed.

Ellen Vorchheimer, too, had gained the respect and affection of hundreds of men and women who had come in contact with her as president of the Chevra's ladies' auxiliary, but she had had to resign from that office in the summer of 1944, when she and her family moved to New York, where most of their relatives were living. For a brief period, Wally Heydemann, then chairman of the committee that cared for the sick, had taken over as president on a temporary basis, assisted by Helene Rothschild as vice-president, until the next *Generalversammlung.* However, she made it clear from the start that she did not want to be elected president.

At this point, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, still a vice-president of the Chevra and "liaison officer" between the men and the ladies' auxiliary, had suggested for the presidency of the auxiliary Mrs. Bernhard Hirschler, a young woman in her middle 30's. Her husband, who had owned an old-established business concern in Vienna, had begun life in Baltimore at the age of 48 as an "office boy" at the Comfy Manufacturing Company, where many other "refugees" had already been working. Added to the psychological and economic problems of adjustment which Alice Hirschler shared with most of the other "refugee" housewives in Baltimore had been the fact that she had been tied down to her tiny apartment for over three years due to the prolonged illness of the younger of her two daughters. By 1944, however, the child had recovered completely, Bernhard Hirschler had begun his rise to an

executive position at the factory, and Mrs. Hirschler had been eager to become active once again in Jewish communal work, which she had done even during her girlhood in Budapest. Yet, at first, when Ludwig Hecht had asked her to become president of the Chevra's ladies' auxiliary, Alice Hirschler, like Ellen Vorchheimer before her, had wondered whether she really had the abilities required for leadership in an organization with several hundred members. But like Jacob Gradmann with Ellen Vorchheimer, Dr. Hecht, too, had been able to win over his candidate, and Alice Hirschler had been elected president of the ladies' auxiliary at the women's *Generalversammlung* early in 1945.

When the Chevra held its first memorial service making the anniversary of the *Zehnte November, 1938,* Alice Hirschler had almost completed her first year in office. A woman of great resourcefulness, intellectual ability and unusual human qualities, she was to remain president of the ladies' auxiliary for nearly another decade. Her work, and the ideas for broader activity which she presented in her annual addresses to the *Generalversammlungen* of the women and the men, were to have a significant influence on the subsequent development of the entire Chevra.

During the early years of her tenure, Mrs. Hirschler still could draw upon the help of a number of the "founding mothers" of the ladies' auxiliary. Eventually, however, some of these older women retired from their activities. Late in 1945, Hedwig Schloss resigned from the chairmanship of the ladies' Chevra Kadisha group. She was succeeded by Mrs. Ernst Loebl, who headed that group with single-minded devotion until 1959. Selma Fox, who had led the *Naehgruppe* which prepared the shrouds, left Baltimore in 1948 to join her children in California. She was succeeded by Mrs. Frieda Birnbaum, who remained in charge until forced by failing health to retire. Amalie Simon, the first membership chairman of the auxiliary, also left Baltimore in the late 1940s to make her home with her daughter in New York.

Shortly after turning over the presidency to Mrs. Hirschler, Wally Heydemann, too, left the city. Following her return some time later, she continued to work actively in the care of the sick until her death in 1961, but she left the chairmanship of *Krankenhilfe* to her associate, Mrs. Julius Lauer, who was to remain on the auxiliary's executive board until 1962. Gifted with tireless energy and a genuine capacity for friendship, Martha Lauer paid hundreds of visits to the sick, the elderly and the shut-ins, bringing with her small gifts, particularly before Passover and the High Holidays, and on the "special birthdays" of the people she visited.

But perhaps the most important, and the most rewarding activity of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary during the early years following the end of World War II was the support the organization was ready and able to give to the Jews who had survived the holocaust in Europe.

The Chevra began this work on a small scale as early as in February, 1945, when it collected from its members used toys and clothing for the children who, with their families, had entered America the year before by special permission from the U. S. War Refugee Board and had been placed into a refugee shelter at Fort Ontario, New York for the duration of the war.

About two weeks before "V-J Day"[19], the Chevra donated $100.00 to Selfhelp, a social service group of "refugees" in New York, to pay for food packages sent to Jewish children who had survived the war in Europe.

In August, 1945, the Chevra launched a house-to-house collection of funds for additional food packages for the children of the Holocaust. Prior to the collection, every member of the Chevra received in the mail a flyer with a haunting sketch of starving children (drawn by Alfred Loebenberg's son-in-law, Hans Juergensen-Steinhardt) and an impressive message (by Alice Hirschler) calling upon the

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[19] The Allied victory over Japan which ended World War II.

addressees to give generously to the men and women from the Chevra who would come to call on them for donations. This campaign yielded a total of $1,600.00, which paid for 320 food packages sent to Europe by the Vaad Hatzalah, a non-partisan social service organization set up by Orthodox Jews in New York.

Another door-to-door collection, held during the Passover season of 1946, brought in over $1,100.00, which was turned over to the Baltimore Jewish Welfare Fund and the United Jewish Appeal for their work in the displaced person's camps.

For about three years following the war, the ladies' auxiliary of the Chevra collected used clothing for the Jewish homeless in the DP camps. Several women volunteered their homes as "collection centers;" they received the clothing articles and stored them – this was no easy task in their small apartments – until enough had been accumulated for packing and shipment to Europe. During 1947 alone, the collection, then under the chairmanship of Mrs. Adolf Weinberg, yielded some 1,500 pounds of clothing.

But by far the most impressive aspect of the Chevra's work with the remnants of European Jewry was what it did for the Holocaust survivors who arrived in Baltimore in the years following the war to make new homes and rebuild their lives.

The arrival of this new generation of immigrants, Helene Rothschild recorded in the minutes of a ladies' auxiliary meeting held in February, 1946,

> has created a new field of endeavor for us. We are attempting to help in the integration of these people [in Baltimore] by personal contact, and to help them . . .

The people to whom Mrs. Rothschild referred were the few families from Yugoslavia and Greece who had been placed into the Fort Ontario refugee camp in 1944 and who were settled in Baltimore during the immediate post-war months after receiving permanent immigration visas. But this was only

the beginning of the Chevra's work with the post-war newcomers – who early insisted on being called that, rather than "refugees". The four years that followed saw the arrival in Baltimore of hundreds of families who had survived the concentration camps of Nazi Europe.

These new arrivals presented problems different from those of the "refugees" of the pre-war world of six or seven years before. In addition to help in finding homes and jobs in Baltimore, and in learning English, they were badly in need of genuine, active compassion and concern from those who had come to this country before the days of the death camps, so that, after having experienced the incredible barbarity of which some human beings were capable, they might come to realize that there still was in this world enough decency and humanity to make their own survival worthwhile and meaningful.

To be sure, philanthropic organizations such as the Associated Jewish Charities of Baltimore rendered outstanding services to the newcomers, giving them effective economic, medical and legal assistance as well as professional counseling. But to the men and women of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed, it seemed that they, the former "refugees," who themselves only a few years before had been uprooted from their homes and confronted with the struggle to reshape their own lives, were particularly suited – and duty-bound – to provide that individual touch which would make each newcomer feel that he or she had not only official agencies, but also personal friends to whom to turn for help and advice.

Through this work with the new immigrants, the Chevra members found new meaning in their own day-to-day lives. Often, the knowledge that they had been able to do something for those who had survived the war brought them a little comfort in the grief for friends and loved ones lost in the Holocaust. Beyond this, its activities on behalf of the newcomers infused the whole Chevra with a new sense of purpose, and eventually, also brought an unexpected reward:

some of the newcomers in time themselves joined and became active workers in the Chevra Ahavas Chesed.

Martha Lauer and her *Krankenhilfe* committee expanded their activity to include the newcomers. As soon as the first newcomers arrived in Baltimore, Mrs. Lauer and her ladies, including Mrs. Hirschler, the president of the ladies' auxiliary, would go to visit them and bring them little gifts of candies, cookies or fruit. When the new arrivals seemed reluctant to accept what they took to be "charity," the ladies would explain that they had brought these gifts in lieu of flowers or, as Alfred Loebenberg had so felicitously put it, "*als Zeichen der Verbundenheit* (as a sign of friendship)."

By 1948, the dozens of newcomers who had arrived in Baltimore soon after the war had multiplied into hundreds. Before long, the officers of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary realized that if they were to be able to reach every one of them, they would have to bring to their work a little more "system" or organization.

In their effort to help the newcomers, the men and women of the Chevra were to have the unfailing cooperation of the Baltimore office of HIAS which, since 1945, had been headed by Dr. Eugene Kaufmann, an early member and former vice-president of the Chevra. A deeply religious man, Eugene Kaufmann viewed his work in HIAS not as an impersonal service to be performed for newcomers who were referred to his office, but as a labor of love in which he himself reached out to extend the hand of help and friendship to those so desperately in need of moral and emotional reassurance. In other large cities, newcomers needing such legal and quasi-legal services as help in securing American visas for relatives still in Europe, straightening out their own legal immigrant status or, later on, assistance in applying for restitution funds from the West German government, usually had to engage the services of lawyers and *Wiedergutmachung* specialists, often for a substantial fee. In Baltimore, that work

was done for both the newcomers and the former "refugees" as a matter of course by Eugene Kaufmann – himself a former lawyer – free of charge.

In the early spring of 1948, Dr. Kaufmann began to supply the Chevra regularly with the names and addresses of all newcomers as they arrived in Baltimore, along with such pertinent information as dates of arrival, occupation, and the names and addresses of their relatives in the city.

The Chevra then formed a special committee to pay regular visits to the newcomers and to help them adjust to everyday life in Baltimore. The chairman of the committee was Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht. Through her husband, Ida Hecht had long been acquainted with the Chevra's work, but during her early years in the city, she had devoted most of her energies to the care of her household and her young son. The daughter of a family noted for its role of leadership in the Jewish community of Cracow, and the daughter-in-law of a family of equal distinction in Cologne, Ida Hecht was gifted with remarkable initiative, organizing ability, and a keen interest in people and their problems. Now, with her son approaching his teen years and spending much of his time at school, and her chemist husband successful in his profession, she readily acceded to the urging of Ludwig Hecht and Alice Hirschler that she take a more active part in the Chevra's activities. In addition to Mrs. Hirschler, the members of the Newcomers' Committee organized by Ida Hecht were Mrs. Samuel Belgrad, Mrs. Frieda Birnbaum, Mrs. Gustav Eigner, Mrs. Werner Fox, Mrs. Ludwig Futter, Mrs. Sigi Kleeman, Mrs. Bernard Mansbach, Mrs. Erna Schwartz and Mrs. Rita Sanders.

While Alfred Loebenberg and others from the men's group did what they could to find apartments at reasonable rents for the newcomers, Ida Hecht's committee worked to integrate the new arrivals into life in Baltimore. They took the housewives shopping at groceries and department stores, and got clothes for the children. They gave the families maps

of Baltimore to help them find their way around the city, and had other Chevra members invite newcomers to their homes for Sabbath and holiday dinners. They also found positions for the immigrants. A number of newcomers were introduced to the Comfy Manufacturing Company, the employer of so many immigrants of an earlier day. Those in need of medical and psychological assistance were referred to the Jewish Family and Children's Bureau of the Associated Jewish Charities – where many of them eventually came under the care of Mrs. Manfred (Hilda) Schweitzer, a social worker who was the daughter of the Chevra's Helene Rothschild.

The men and women of the Chevra directed the newcomers to those resources which could aid them in their cultural integration. They informed them that they were entitled to a six-month free subscription to *Aufbau,* the New York German-language Jewish weekly, which brought news of Jewish affairs the world over, and gave highly intelligent, newcomer-oriented comments on world current events and various aspects of American life. To help them learn English as quickly as possible, the Chevra acquainted them with the Americanization classes held at various public schools, and obtained for them three months' free subscriptions to the Baltimore *Sunpapers,* along with free passes for motion picture shows. The *Sunpaper* subscriptions and the movie passes both came from the Baltimore Section of the National Council of Jewish Women, with which the Chevra soon was to have a close working relationship.[20]

In June, 1950, at the peak of the immigration wave, the ladies of Ida Hecht's Newcomers' Committee were invited to attend a meeting arranged by the Council's newly-organized Service to the Foreign-Born. In January, 1952, Alice

[20]In this connection, it may be of interest to note that a German-born member of the Chevra, Mrs. Julius (Lore) Levi, was to serve as President of the Council's Baltimore Section from 1957 to 1959.

Hirschler, known to the Council as an active member of the Committee and as the president of the Chevra's ladies' auxiliary, was invited to serve as moderator in an afternoon symposium sponsored by the Council on the subject of the contribution of new Americans to American culture and civilization. The following month's Council bulletin described the Chevra as

> a group of 500 members, all foreign-born themselves, all citizens now, who work with the new arrivals. They act as interpreters and help in every way possible to ease the problems of adjustment in a new country.

During those years, the Chevra itself sponsored functions at which newcomers and "old-timers" (by now the former "refugees" could consider themselves as such) had a chance to become better acquainted.

The first tea for newcomers was held as early as October, 1947. The invitation called on all Chevra members to turn out to give the new arrivals a hearty welcome. On December 11, 1948, the Chevra sponsored a Newcomers' Evening at the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association (then at 305 West Monument Street). The theme of the program was: "What Does the Baltimore Jewish Community Do For the Displaced Persons?" Dr. Eugene Kaufmann discussed the latest DP legislation passed by Congress, and a motion picture, "Placing the Displaced," produced by HIAS, was shown.

Before long, the newcomers had formed an organization of their own, under the chairmanship of Herman Taube. On April 24, 1949, that organization, which took the name of "Newcomers' Group," held a reception, also at the Jewish "Y", inviting Alice Hirschler and four other ladies from the Chevra's Newcomers' Committee to do the honors as hostesses. Another honored guest, by special invitation from Eugene Kaufmann, was Alfred Loebenberg.

By this time, the membership of the Chevra was a little over 500. It included not only a number of the new generation of immigrants but also the children of the former "refugees" who had reached adulthood. Inevitably, the Chevra had losses to record. Abraham Wartensleben, who for years had conscientiously served as the Chevra's recording secretary, died in 1949. That same year, the ladies' auxiliary mourned the passing of Mrs. Nathan (Tilly) Lind, who had long served on Martha Lauer's *Krankenhilfe* committee and had helped arrange the fledgling social affairs sponsored by the Chevra.

The burial ground which the Chevra had bought from the Har Zion Congregation in 1942 was now studded with headstones. By 1948 the Chevra had found it necessary to acquire a new cemetery – a three-acre tract of land on Liberty Road in Randallstown, which was then still largely a rural area. The farmer from whom the Chevra had bought the land had parted with it for $3,937.50.

On a Sunday afternoon in the late fall of 1951, the Chevra officially dedicated its new burial ground. The date was November 11; the exercises combined the consecration of the cemetery with the *Zehnte November 1938* memorial service, which had become an annual institution in the Chevra.

Following an address by Rabbi Schwab, the Chevra dedicated on the cemetery the first monument in the United States to honor the memory of the six million Jews who had perished in the Holocaust, and of the Jewish soldiers and partisan fighters who had died in the defense of freedom during World War II. The granite monument, consisting of two posts supporting a crosspiece, was a gift to the Chevra from "Holiday Services, Inc."[21] It was unveiled by Fred Baer,

[21] There was also an "Eternal Light," which, however, is no longer in the cemetery. It had been donated by the Tikvah Youth group, an informal group of teenagers and young adults whose parents were affiliated with "Holiday Services" and the Chevra. This group was short-lived, but many of its members eventually joined the Chevra.

Vice-President of the Chevra and President of "Holiday Services," who had been largely responsible for the layout of the Chevra's burial grounds. The posts were blank; eventually, they were to have engraved upon them the names of 200 relatives of Chevra members who had perished in the war and whose burial place was unknown. The crosspiece bears the following dedication:

IN MEMORY OF
THE SIX MILLION VICTIMS OF TYRANNY IN EUROPE
AND TO THOSE WHO FELL IN THE DEFENSE
OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND FREEDOM
1938–45

There is also the Hebrew admonition *LO TISHKAKH.*

Two months, almost to the day, after the dedication of its Randallstown cemetery, the Chevra reached the tenth anniversary of its founding. In the evening of March 9, 1952, the Chevra marked this milestone with a celebration held in the auditorium of the Talmudical Academy on Cottage and Springhill Avenues, in the lower Park Heights section.[22] The audience heard greetings from Alfred Loebenberg and Rabbi Schwab, and a musical program, presented by Cantor Simon Weiss of Washington, D.C., accompanied on the piano by Prof. Herman Schwarz, a former "refugee" who had made a name for himself in the city as an organist. Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, the chairman of the evening, introduced the main

[22]By the early 1950s, Chevra families had begun in increasing numbers to move "uptown" to the semi-suburban and suburban areas of northwest Baltimore–the Park Heights and Forest Park sections of the city. During the two decades that followed, the former "refugees" were to continue this trend, moving still further out, to the Liberty Road, Pikesville and Randallstown areas. By the early 1960s, practically all the Chevra families had left the area in midtown northwest Baltimore where they had been concentrated during the early years.

speaker, Simon E. Sobeloff, who some seven years before had helped the group of immigrants entered in the court records as "Schwab *et al.*" win the rights of American citizenship. The subject of Sobeloff's address was "Americanism – Privilege and Obligation."

That anniversary marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Chevra. By 1952, most of the Chevra's members had taken firm root in Baltimore. Almost all of them were now citizens of the United States and if, for the most part, they had not attained great wealth, they had achieved a measure of economic stability and emotional security. The days when the ladies of Martha Lauer's *Krankenhilfe* committee had had to help ailing members of the Chevra by performing nursing and housekeeping chores for them were past; most of the Chevra's members now had grown children, and friends or relatives – family members who had come to Baltimore to join them after the war, or newly-acquired in-laws – to care for them. The restitution money they received from the West German government helped make it possible for patients, in case of long-term illnesses, to hire household help. Increasingly, the visits from Martha Lauer and her ladies were valued by the sick and the shut-ins of the Chevra mainly for the good cheer, the news from the world outside, and the opportunities for a little talk which they brought. By that time, too, the immigration wave that had followed the end of the war had largely come to an end and the newcomers whom the Chevra had befriended were well on their way to finding their place in the community of Baltimore.

While the memory of friends and loved ones lost in the war would never grow dim in the hearts of the Chevra members, the dedication of the monument to the six million martyrs of European Jewry was a symbolic expression of the Chevra's resolve to turn from grief for the past to new hope for the present and the future.

Once again, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed was ready for a "new field of endeavor." This time, the immediate impetus had come from a report carried by the Baltimore newspapers in November, 1951 that Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro had appointed a commission to draw up a program for helping older people find homes, get jobs and enjoy a wide range of recreational activity.

The psychological well-being of the old had become a problem with which the members of the Chevra, too, were confronted in growing measure. While the young and the middle-aged were active at school, at work, and also to an increasing extent in local synagogue and communal life, the elderly parents and grandparents – the *Opas* and *Omas* – of the Chevra families found themselves gradually losing touch with the mainstream of the life that went on about them. The friends of their youth and maturity, with whom they would probably have grown old together had they not been uprooted from the lands of their birth, were not there to give them the companionship of shared memories; they had either been burned in Hitler's ovens or they were living scattered all over the world. While a growing number of elderly Chevra members were receiving restitution payments from West Germany, these funds were, in most cases, not sufficient to allow them to vary the rhythm of their lives with extensive travel or active participation in Baltimore's institutionalized Jewish communal endeavors. Besides, the struggles and privations of the early "refugee" years had left their scars; with advancing age and deteriorating health, most of the Chevra's elderly found it difficult to "get around." Their problem was compounded by the circumstance that, having arrived in Baltimore when already in late middle age, many of them had never succeeded in mastering the English language; at the same time, they felt that they had no common ground with the elderly of an earlier wave of emigration because they spoke only German and not Yiddish.

As early as May, 1943, the Chevra's leaders had begun to concern themselves with the future of their old and aging relatives and friends who, they feared, would not readily find their place in the "institutional" life at Baltimore's Levindale Home for the Aged and Infirm when they would no longer be able to run their own households but would have no one to give them the constant care and attention needed by the old. At the time, Alfred Loebenberg and Dr. Eugene Kaufmann had suggested that the Chevra include among its long-range plans the founding of its own home for the aged to cater to the special needs of its elderly members. A committee consisting of Fred Baer, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, Mrs. Wally Heydemann, Dr. Eugene Kaufmann, Alfred Loebenberg, Adolf Straus, Mrs. Helene Rothschild and Mrs. Julius Vorchheimer had been appointed by the Chevra's executive board to investigate the feasibility of such a project. However, it had been generally agreed that the matter would have to be held in abeyance at least for the duration of the war.

Now, in the late winter of 1952, the question was raised again by Alice Hirschler in her annual report to the *Generalversammlung.* In line with similar projects already initiated by public and private agencies for the care of "senior citizens," she suggested that the Chevra look into the possibility of forming "Golden Age" residence clubs, where the elderly could receive adequate care without feeling that they were in an "institution," and where they could spend their twilight years in the company of other men and women with social and cultural needs similar to their own.

As various other Jewish organizations applied for, and received, funds from the West German government for work on behalf of old and infirm victims of Nazi oppression, the Chevra hoped that it, too, might be able to obtain money for the purchase of a building that could be adapted to serve as a "Golden Age" residence club. How seriously the Chevra took this idea can be seen from the fact that in the fall of 1954

one of the members, Justin Weinberg, offered a donation of $500.00 for that purpose. Early in 1955, a fact-finding committee, headed by Max Gottschalk, was appointed by the Chevra's executive board to study similar projects already operated by former Central European immigrants in other cities – such as the Selfhelp House in Chicago – and to initiate a pilot study to determine the specific needs and wishes of the Chevra's own elderly members in this regard.

In March, 1955, this committee sent out to all the older members of the Chevra a questionnaire in English and German, which they were requested to fill in – of course, it was emphasized, without any obligation and without any mention of names, lest a parent's interest in a separate residence might be misunderstood by devoted sons or daughters. Among the questions they were asked to answer were the following:

1. Would you be interested in [entering] a home for the aged? [If so,] would you prefer a Chevra home to other institutions, and if so, why?
2. Would you prefer a larger home, or a smaller place?
3. Would you want a single room even if the cost [should be higher as a result,] or would you be satisfied with a double room?
4. Would you want to bring your own furniture?
5. Would you [consider] it important to have a synagogue nearby?
6. Would you want to work for 1–2 hours each day in the kitchen, office, or elsewhere [in the home]?
7. What kind of health care would you expect?

The addressees were also asked whether they would be able to pay $130.00 per month which, the fact-finding committee had determined, would be the cost of room and board per person in the contemplated residence club, and

whether they would be ready to enter such a residence club, if it were to materialize, by, say, 1956.

At it happened, the Chevra was unable to obtain the funds needed for the realization of the project. In time, too, the members of the Chevra came to understand that the larger Jewish community of Baltimore was in a much better position to provide residential care for the aged than a small organization such as the Chevra. The Levindale Home was soon to have the advantage of excellent hospital facilities close by, for in the late 1950s the Sinai Hospital moved from its former location in East Baltimore into a new Jewish Medical Center built across the highway from Levindale. For those elderly persons who, though they found it too strenuous to have households of their own, were still in relatively good health and were reluctant to enter an institution for the aged, the Associated Jewish Charities was planning a residence project, which was to be opened in 1969 and named the Concord House.

Given these facts, the Chevra decided that the most welcome and effective services it could perform for its elderly members would be to visit them in their homes on their special birthdays and other occasions, to pay regular visits to shut-ins or members who would become residents of Levindale, and to continue the social functions which it had begun to sponsor for its "Golden Agers" as early as 1952.

Among the Chevra members who in 1956 took it upon themselves to make visits to Levindale on a regular basis were Fred Baer, Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht (who by that time had succeeded Alice Hirschler as president of the ladies' auxiliary), Mrs. Richard Hellman (who in her turn would succeed Ida Hecht as president of the auxiliary), and Mrs. Eva Kleeman.

The Chevra's "Golden Age" functions were occasions to which the elderly had come to look forward with considerable pleasure. The first of these gatherings had been an afternoon tea, held on November 16, 1952, in the vestry hall of the

Shaarei Tfiloh Congregation on Auchentoroly Terrace and Holmes Avenue. Invitations to the tea had been sent out to all Chevra members above the age of 65 and their spouses; those who had no transportation were called for by car. Admission was free; the hall and the refreshments – cookies, candies, chocolate, fruit, and tea – had been paid for by the Chevra's executive board and the committee that managed the *Notstandskasse,* the Chevra's emergency fund which had been set up in 1945. A program of German-language entertainment was presented by two husband-and-wife teams: Arnold and Inge David (the daughter and son-in-law of Mrs. Julius Lauer) and Fred and Greta Schlossberg (the son and daughter-in-law of another long-time ladies' auxiliary member and officer, Mrs. Emanuel Schlossberg). A similar party took place the following fall.

Throughout the middle and late 1950s the Chevra ladies' auxiliary gave monthly *Kaffeeklatsch* afternoons for its elderly ladies. These parties were held at the homes of Chevra members in various parts of the city, with ten or twelve ladies from the immediate neighborhood invited. Among the moving spirits behind these afternoon functions were Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht, Mrs. Sigi Kleeman (another future president of the ladies' auxiliary), Mrs. Richard Hellman and Mrs. Julius Lauer.

In the late spring of 1957, a garden party was held for the Chevra's "Golden Agers" on the lawn of the home of Mrs. Isaac M. Potts, who, as Mrs. Myer Strauss,[23] had helped and

[23]The daughter of Dr. Harry Friedenwald, a noted Baltimore ophthalmologist and American Zionist leader, Julia (Strauss) Potts was a fourth-generation Baltimorean, active in many fields of Zionist and Jewish communal endeavor also on the national scene. She formed close personal friendships with "refugees" not only through her work with the Refugee Adjustment Committee but also through her affiliation with two synagogues where many of the "refugees" worshipped. Through her father, and later her second husband, Isaac M. Potts, she was associated with the Chizuk Amuno Congregation. Together with her first husband, Myer Strauss, she worshipped at Rabbi Schwab's Shearith Israel Congregation.

befriended hundreds of "refugees" during the late 1930s and early 1940s and had herself become a member of the Chevra.

During the spring and early summer months of the 1960s, "Golden Age" members were taken on bus trips to Washington, D.C., Great Falls, Va., Longwood Gardens, Annapolis, and the Tulip Festival in Hershey, Pa. Refreshments – sandwiches prepared by the Chevra ladies – were free of charge.

At some of the "Golden Age" functions, the entertainment was provided by the children of Chevra members. Another time, in 1957, a skit was presented with a cast consisting of Arnold and Inge David, Greta Schlossberg, and the "two Bettys" – Mrs. Richard Hellman and Mrs. Sigi Kleeman. The author of the skit was Mrs. Max Zippert, a gifted pianist who, despite her somewhat austere appearance, had much originality and a fine sense of humor.

During the 1960s most of the funds to pay the expenses of "Golden Age" parties were raised through rummage sales which took place several times a year. Sometimes, such a sale brought in as much as $300.00 or $400.00. However, the neighborhoods in which the sales were held eventually became unsafe and the sales had to be discontinued. Today, the funds for "Golden Age" social affairs come from cookouts held by the Chevra every June.

The popularity of the "Golden Age" programs arranged by the Chevra may be seen from the fact that at least one such function – the "Golden Age" luncheon held in 1967 at the Bais Yaakov School for Girls in the beautiful Mount Washington area – drew an attendance of over 100.

The *Opas* and *Omas* of the Chevra not only enjoyed these gatherings as opportunities for relaxation and companionship but also came to treasure them as proof that they still had many friends and that their Chevra truly "cared." The men and women who arranged the functions, for their part, took pleasure in the fact that, in this way, they could demonstrate

their affection and concern for their elders. Truly, the "Golden Age" program, like so many of the Chevra's other activities, was designed to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."[24]

[24]Malachi 3:24.

CHAPTER IV

"WUERSTCHEN UND KARTOFFELSALAT"

During the early 1940s, its fledgling years, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed did not run any social functions. It always seemed to the Chevra's leadership that there were "more important things" for the organization and its membership to do.

It was not until the end of the war that the Chevra first gave thought to the possibility of holding social affairs beyond the "*Kaffee und Kuchen*" hours that followed the annual *Generalversammlungen.*

The Chevra's early social events could best be characterized as "family gatherings," intended primarily to give a good time to the children of its members. The time when boys and girls would be able to help themselves to an endless variety of shows and entertainments by the mere twist of a television dial was still a few years distant. Most of the Chevra's children were still at that unsophisticated stage which permitted them to look forward eagerly to rare trips to the movies or to kiddie shows such as the one sponsored annually by Baltimore's Board of Jewish Education at Hanukkah time, when thousands of children from every Hebrew school in the city would crowd into the Lyric Theater to see a Hanukkah program arranged by their teachers, interspersed with Walt Disney cartoons and other wholesome movie fare.

The one feature which the Chevra's early social events had in common with these mammoth entertainments was that, like the latter, they, too, were Hanukkah celebrations especially planned for the enjoyment of the children.

The Chevra's first *Chanukkafeier* (the invitations were still in German) took place on the afternoon of Sunday, December 2, 1945, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Nathan Lind, at Schanze's Hall, where the Chevra had been founded back in 1942. Now, the hall was crowded with 400 children and adults. The adults had paid an admission fee of $.50 each; the children were admitted free of charge. The proceeds of the afternoon went to the *Notstandskasse,* which had been set up earlier that year to aid individual members in financial emergencies. The entertainment, presented by the children themselves, was followed by a lively game of "Tombola" (German cousin to the American "Bingo"), free refreshments and, as an added Hanukkah treat for each child, some little toys which the arrangements committee had been able to obtain for a few pennies each from an East Baltimore wholesale firm. Since the arrangements committee was not very experienced in organizing children's entertainments, the noise and confusion were considerable, but, as at least one child reported, "a good time was had by all," and even his exhausted elders agreed that the *Chanukkafeier* should become an annual institution.

For the following year's Hanukkah party, on December 15, 1946, Tilly Lind and her committee chose the Cadoa Hall, on West Franklin Street, on the outer edge of downtown Baltimore. The admission fee for adults had been raised to $.75 per person; the children still came free. Door prizes and refreshments were distributed by a corps of teen-age ushers and hostesses – the older sons and daughters of Chevra members – led by Gertrude Hirschler (daughter of Alice Hirschler) and Herbert Birnbaum (a son of Frieda Birnbaum), who was then still years away from his rabbinical degree and doctorate. These were earnest and busy young people; most of them were already working at various jobs to share their parents' household expenses, or to pay their college tuition fees, or both. Perhaps less conscious of a generation gap

between themselves and their elders than the young people of a quarter-century later, they felt sufficiently a part of the Chevra "family" to devote a Sunday afternoon to help entertain the little ones.

In the years that followed, the *Chanukkafeier* became a little more elaborate. The 1947 party featured a performance in which the cast included three adult members of the Chevra. During 1949 there were two Hanukkah affairs; the first of the two, on January 2, was a post-holiday event actually intended for 1948. At that January party, held at the Agudath Achim Hall in the 4200 block of Park Heights Avenue, the children put on a playlet – in German – composed by Mrs. Eric Drysdale. There was also a program of songs, led by Greta Schlossberg and her guitar. Probably mindful of the havoc which an outbreak of winter coughs or sniffles could work with a cast of youthful actors, the arrangements committee put on its invitations the postscript: "*Aenderungen vorbehalten,*" or "program subject to change."

Meanwhile, the Chevra had begun to try its hand at entertainments for the grown-ups. In the fall of 1947 it had arranged a tea to welcome post-war immigrants. Other, similar affairs that followed not only provided an occasion for "socializing" but also gave an opportunity to three professional musicians, men of mature years, not long in this country, to perform for a local audience. Thus, Alex Sanders, a violinist from Heidelberg, made his Baltimore debut at a tea held by the ladies' auxiliary on the evening of October 30, 1948 at the Shaarei Tfilih auditorium. A tea the following year (October 29, 1949) featured a chamber music trio consisting of Mr. Sanders, Prof. F. R. Mendelssohn (cello) and Prof. Herman Schwarz (piano).

Profs. Mendelssohn and Schwarz had already performed for the Chevra several months before, at a Purim celebration on March 26, 1949. The Chevra was to sponsor similar Purim festivities in the years that followed. At one of these (March

25, 1951), there was a concert of cantorial music by Rev. Hillel Lipsicas, of the Petach Tikvah Congregation. By this time, the refreshments served at the Chevra's early gatherings – coffee, cake and soft drinks – had been replaced by more substantial fare. As the Chevra proudly announced in its invitation, the menu at the 1951 Purim party would be, once again, "*unsere altbewaehrten Wuerstchen mit Kartoffelsalad* (sic) *und Bier.*"[25]

During the late 1950s, the Chevra sponsored summer outings for its general membership, usually to a camp near Baltimore which had been rented for the day. The proceeds from the admission fees and refreshments went to the Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem. Later, the outings were replaced by annual cookouts held in June, usually on the lawn of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hellman. A substantial part of the proceeds from the cookouts is set aside for the Chevra's "Golden Age" functions; among other beneficiaries, in addition to the Shaare Zedek Hospital, has been the Israel Emergency Fund.

As the years passed, the members of the Chevra arranged special events to pay tribute to the founders and early officers of the organization. As birthdays and family anniversaries multiplied, there were many opportunities for such celebrations.

On the afternoon of June 11, 1950, 500 people gathered in the Cadoa Hall to honor Alfred Loebenberg on his seventieth birthday. The chairman of this function was Alfred Loebenberg's close friend and co-worker, Fred Baer. There was a musical program by Herbert Herz and the singer Lilly (Mrs. Herman) Schwarz. Following the reading of a German ode composed for the occasion by Hans

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[25] "Our ever-popular frankfurters, potato salad and beer." The spelling – "*Kartoffelsalad*" instead of the correct "*Kartoffelsalat*" – shows that the German of at least the composers of the invitations was already becoming "Americanized."

Juergensen-Steinhardt, and addresses by Rabbi Schwab and Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht, Mr. Loebenberg was presented with an electric fan from "Holiday Services, Inc." (those were the days before air-conditioned homes), a silver cup and a purse from the Chevra, and a book containing congratulatory messages from virtually all the Chevra members. Mr. Loebenberg was to be honored on two more "special birthdays."[26] His eightieth birthday was marked by an afternoon reception in June, 1960; his eighty-fifth, in 1965, by a dinner attended by over 200 guests.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Baer and Mr. and Mrs. Adolf Straus were feted on the occasion of their silver wedding anniversaries at a Purim chamber music concert at the Shaarei Tfiloh auditorium on March 18, 1950 (with Prof. Mendelssohn, Mr. Sanders and Prof. Herman Schwarz performing). Adolf Straus, the long-time treasurer of the Chevra, was tendered a testimonial dinner at Hanukkah, 1961.[27]

By the early 1950s, the Chevra's Hanukkah celebrations had ceased to be children's afternoon parties and had become increasingly adult-oriented. They had evolved into evening entertainments, presenting "outside talent" such as Hilde Marx, a former "refugee" poetess from New York whose works frequently appeared in the *Aufbau*; the late Manfred George, and Richard Van Dyck, the *Aufbau's* editor and assistant editor, respectively; and John Kolischer, the Austrian-born humorist who was then popular with audiences of former German and Austrian immigrants in New York for his repertory of typically Viennese jokes. Refreshments consisted of *Wuerstchen und Kartoffelsalat*, or cold cut

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[26] In between, on March 4, 1956, there was a testimonial dinner honoring Alfred Loebenberg and Alice Hirschler on their retirement from the presidency of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary, respectively.

[27] Adolf Straus was to pass away only a few months later.

platters, eaten from paper plates on paper tablecloths of matching color and served by a committee of hostesses.

In more recent years, the Hanukkah affairs of the Chevra have become banquets, very much like those of Baltimore's other well-established Jewish communal organizations. They are held in banquet halls in suburban Baltimore, with smorgasbord and dinner served by a well-known kosher catering firm. The entertainers may be cantors, opera singers, better-type comedians from the "Borsht Belt" circuit, or theater troupes, who play to guests clad in the latest evening fashions.

But one feature of the Hanukkah program still remains as it was at the children's *Chanukkafeiern* of two decades ago: the *menorah* is lit, and the blessings are chanted not by a virtuoso of the cantorial platform or a rabbinical personage, but by a young man from the audience – preferably below the age of nine.

CHAPTER V

"FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WELFARE OF THE MUNICIPALITY"

Late in 1955, Alfred Loebenberg, who had been president of the Chevra Ahavas Chesed ever since its inception, and Alice Hirschler, who had headed the ladies' auxiliary since 1945, informed the nominating committee of the Chevra that they intended to retire from office. Alfred Loebenberg has passed his seventy-fifth birthday; some years before, he had suffered a severe heart attack from which it had taken him many months to recover. Alice Hirschler found herself devoting most of her time to her family; her aged parents, who had survived the war in Hungary and had arrived in Baltimore in 1949, were increasingly in need of her care, and her husband was in poor health. While they were determined to maintain an active interest in the Chevra, both Mr. Loebenberg and Mrs. Hirschler felt that the time had come for the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary – which by then had a total membership of over 1,100 – to choose new presidents.

On the evening of March 4, 1956, the Chevra tendered a testimonial dinner to Alfred Loebenberg and Alice Hirschler at the Shaarei Torah (Feldman's) Hall on Liberty Heights Avenue. After appropriate presentations had been made to the two retiring officers, it was announced that Alfred Loebenberg had been named Honorary President of the Chevra, and Alice Hirschler, an honorary life member of the ladies' auxiliary's executive board.

The man and woman who succeeded Mr. Loebenberg and Mrs. Hirschler were also veterans in the Chevra's service. Fred Baer, a vice-president of the Chevra since its founding, had served on nearly all the Chevra's major working committees.

Mrs. Ludwig J. Hecht, who had begun her activities in the Chevra in the late 1940s as chairman of its committee for work with newcomers, had been first a board member, and then vice-president, of the ladies' auxiliary.

The three years during which Fred Baer and Ida Hecht were presidents of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary, respectively, saw the Chevra not only continue its usual religious and social service activities but also take an ever-growing interest in the welfare of the larger Jewish community of Baltimore, and of Jewish communities the world over. During the years immediately following the war, the Chevra had first begun to make modest contributions to local and national Jewish philanthropic organizations for specific purposes. Beginning with 1950 it had made donations at various times to the Associated Jewish Charities and Jewish Welfare Fund of Baltimore, the Cancer Fund, the Hadassah Medical Organization, the Red Magen David (Israel's equivalent of the Red Cross), and to religious schools such as the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore and Yeshiva Kol Torah in Jerusalem. As the Chevra and its members prospered, these donations were continued and increased.

The arrival of a large number of Jewish families from Hungary following the Hungarian revolution in November, 1956 found the Chevra ready once again, as it had been during the early post-war years, to help the newcomers find their places in the Baltimore community. Again, the Chevra also raised funds for the rehabilitation of Jewish refugees. The Baltimore *Jewish Times* of March 3, 1957 carried a picture of Fred Baer, Ida Hecht, and Adolf Straus (then the Chevra's treasurer) presenting Harry Greenstein, the executive director of the Associated Jewish Charities and Jewish Welfare Fund, with a check in the amount of $1,059.86. This money had come from a special fund-raising drive conducted by the Chevra among its members in response to the "Associated's" Emergency Worldwide Rescue Fund Campaign to purchase

freedom, and to provide transportation, food, shelter and medical care for Jews fleeing oppression in Hungary and Northern Africa.

Early in 1959 Fred Baer and Ida Hecht, in their turn, retired from office. Ida Hecht was by then preoccupied with the care of her husband, who had been in failing health for some time. Despite his serious illness, however, Dr. Ludwig J. Hecht had remained active not only in his profession but also in the service of his synagogue (the Chizuk Amuno Congregation) and of the Chevra, of which he had been a founding member and early vice-president. He died in December, 1959, only 57 years old.

Justin J. Kahn and Mrs. Richard Hellman, who succeeded Fred Baer and Ida Hecht as presidents of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary, were particularly eager to see the Chevra assume an active and prominent role in the larger Jewish community. It was during their term of office that the Chevra donated $4,000.00 to the Sinai Hospital to furnish and equip the office of the assistant pathologist in the newly-completed Jewish Medical Center.[28]

By this time the Chevra's membership had become largely "Americanized." Except in the case of "Golden Age" functions, invitations and other communications from the Chevra were written in English and by 1961 German had yielded place to English also in the minutes of the Chevra and its ladies' auxiliary; the men and women who had come to Baltimore as children, adolescents and young adults and who now comprised a growing proportion of the Chevra's membership spoke English more fluently than German, if, indeed, they spoke German at all. Many of them had American-born husbands and wives, who had also joined the Chevra.

[28]The Chevra took an interest also in the convalescent and nursing homes into which some of its older members had moved. In 1969, during the terms of Arnold Zeller and Betty Hellman (her second term), it pledged a gift of $1,000.00, to be paid out over a period of two years, to the Jewish Convalescent Home on Pall Mall Road.

The functions for which the Chevra had originally been founded were still important to its members. The *Krankenhilfe* committee, now know as the "Visiting Committee" and composed of some 20 women, still brought good cheer to the old and the home-bound. Entertainments were held for the "Golden Agers," and social functions were arranged to enable the members, now scattered all over the uptown and suburban areas, to maintain the ties of friendship that had bound them together for so many years. And of course there were the religious activities of the Chevra Kadisha the tasks connected with burials [29] and the maintenance of the cemetery.

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[29]The Chevra Kadisha was most anxious to have a large attendance at funerals so that the families of the deceased should feel that the entire Chevra shared their sorrow. The officers were particularly distressed, therefore, there was no *minyan*–quorum of ten adult males–present at a funeral service, either at the funeral home or at the graveside. Unfortunately, this problem became increasingly acute due to the pressure of work on the younger members and the difficulty experienced by older, retired men in traveling to the cemetery from the outlying suburbs. In April, 1954, the Chevra Kadisha sent the following notice, in English and German, to the entire Chevra membership:

> . . . To provide a minyan for services at the funeral home and at the cemetery is the responsibility of the whole Chevra membership. Getting such a minyan together on weekdays is sometimes quite difficult. During recent months, two funerals took place at which the necessary ten men were not present. In view of our large membership, this should not happen. We therefore earnestly request that you pledge to attend *weekday* funeral services at the funeral home and at the cemetery once (ONLY once) each year, even though this might entail a few hours' loss of time from your job or business. Of course, you will not be called upon unless circumstances warrant it . . .

Enclosed with the notice was a return postcard, to be signed by the member, in which he promised

> to attend funeral services on weekdays at the funeral home and at the cemetery once each year, when requested. I shall not refuse such attendance, except in cases of extreme and unforeseen emergency.

Nevertheless, the Chevra leadership was constantly on the alert for new ways in which it could hold an even more meaningful place in the lives of all its members, no matter what their age, background or sphere of interest.

In 1962, during the terms of Fred Junker and Mrs. Sigi Kleeman, the Chevra inaugurated a blood bank which sent volunteer blood donors to any hospital where a Chevra member was in need of a blood transfusion. The first chairman of this project was Dr. Adolf Birnbaum.

In May, 1963, during Leo Haas' term as president, the Alfred Loebenberg Fund, which had been started in 1944 with an initial gift from "Holiday Services, Inc." toward the eventual purchase of clubhouse facilities was converted into a student aid fund to benefit children and grandchildren of Chevra members who were attending college. It was a revolving fund which permitted modest loans to deserving students for incidental expenses,[30] to be repaid after the student had graduated and found employment in his or her chosen field. A committee was formed to administer this fund and to pass on applications from students.[31] In 1966 the Alfred Loebenberg Fund extended aid indirectly also to hundreds of children whose families were not members of the Chevra: it granted a loan of $1,000.00 to Baltimore's Bais Yaakov School for Girls.

At its Hanukkah banquet in December, 1966, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. For this festive occasion over 500 guests assembled at the Emerald Gardens Hall in suburban Baltimore. The high point of the evening came when Werner L. Marx, president of the Chevra, and Mrs. Ernest Oppenheimer, president of the

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[30]Originally, up to $150.00 per year for college freshmen and sophomores, and up to $250.00 per year for juniors and seniors.

[31]In 1972 this committee consisted of Mrs. Herbert Birnbaum, and Messrs. Manfred Goldschmidt and Carl Weiler.

ladies' auxiliary, rose to accept from a City Hall official a citation signed by Mayor Theodore R. McKeldin, praising the Chevra for "outstanding contributions to the welfare of the municipality."

Like the men and women who comprised its membership, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed had become part of the family of people from varied backgrounds and many lands that made up the community of Baltimore.

EPILOGUE

As the Chevra Ahavas Chesed completes its third decade, its members have just cause to look with pride upon its record of individual and communal service. The men and women who founded the Chevra, and those who followed their call, began with helping one another; in so doing, they not only succeeded in rebuilding their own lives but also, in time, found the strength and vitality to reach out a hand of succor and friendship to others far beyond their own circle.

Today, the Chevra Ahavas Chesed is making its voice heard in every good endeavor on the local and world-wide Jewish scene. The ladies' auxiliary, headed by Mrs. Max Weil, is an articulate constituent of the Baltimore Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations, through which it has joined hands with philanthropic associations, synagogue sisterhoods and Zionist groups in activities of universal Jewish concern.

During the Six-Day War of June, 1967, the Chevra made a substantial gift to the Israel Emergency Fund of the United Jewish Appeal and sent out letters to all Chevra members urging them to do likewise also as individuals. Over the years, the Chevra has not only invested in Israel Bonds, but has also acquired a visible share in the reclamation of the land itself in the form of a memorial grove, where the Chevra and its members have planted trees in memory of friends and loved ones.

Mindful of the suffering that persecution brought into the lives of its own members three decades ago, the Chevra has participated in city-wide meetings on behalf of Soviet Jewry. At the time of the infamous Leningrad trials, it sent telegrams

to the President of the United States and the Ambassador of the Soviet Union in Washington calling upon the Soviet government to cease its acts of anti-Jewish discrimination and to permit those Soviet Jews who wanted to leave the country to do so without trouble or fear.

Of course, the Chevra has continued its activities of social service. The *Notstandskasse* or Emergency Fund, for which donations are solicited from the membership through appeals sent through the mails twice each year, still makes loans or outright gifts to members who find themselves in financial difficulties due to illness or some other misfortune. Past President Fred Junker and the committee which helps him administer the fund do their work in such strict secrecy that actual cases where the *Notstandskasse* has rendered help are not known to anyone except those most intimately concerned.

Newcomers and other individuals known to be suffering from financial hardship receive free tickets to certain Chevra functions and free membership in the organization.[32]

The committee of "ladies from the Chevra" or *Krankenhilfe* started by Wally Heydemann and led for so many years by Martha Lauer has become a "visiting group" of over 30 women who pay regularly scheduled visits to the sick, the old, the home-bound, and the residents of nursing homes and institutions for the aged. The women also take note of

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[32]There are two types of membership in the Chevra Ahavas Chesed: individual and family. Family membership includes the husband, his wife, and all their children below the age of 16. When a child reaches the age of 16, he or she becomes a junior member and is charged a small membership fee. At the age of 21, he becomes an adult member and is charged full adult membership dues. In addition to the membership dues, each member makes to the Chevra a one-time larger payment which represents his or her share in the upkeep of the cemetery. In return for these payments each member is entitled to a grave in the Chevra cemetery and to the services of the Chevra Kadisha.

happy events in the lives of the members, such as special birthdays, wedding anniversaries and the birth of a child. New mothers receive a gift of flowers from the Chevra so that they may come to associate the Chevra not only with the sorrows and problems, but also with the joys, of daily living.

Young people of college age and young married couples are drawn into the life and work of the Chevra through the "Mini-Chevra," a group formed in 1970 through the initiative of two past Presidents of the ladies' auxiliary, Mrs. Richard Hellman and Mrs. Ernest Oppenheimer. Membership in the "Mini-Chevra" is open to single persons and married couples between the ages of 18 and 40. The "Mini-Chevra" members are for the most part sons and daughters of members of the parent Chevra; they are all native Americans, with American-born husbands and wives. They hold social events to maintain the bonds of friendship that have linked many of them since their early childhood. They are not active in the religious work of the Chevra Kadisha, but they pay membership dues to the parent Chevra, and offer help in general, such as baby-sitting services at the annual Chevra cookout. The "Mini-Chevra" is represented on the Blood Bank Committee [33] and on the executive board of the Chevra. The first officers of the "Mini-Chevra" were Stanley Junker, President; Allan Brown, Vice-President; Mrs. Robert Russel, Secretary; and Mark Bierig, Treasurer. As of 1972, Allan Brown and Stanley Hellman were president and vice-president, respectively.

The Chevra Kadisha still carries out its sacred tasks with quiet devotion. Some two dozen men and women are on

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[33] Today, the Chevra blood bank no longer needs to call on volunteer donors from case to case. The entire membership of the Chevra is enrolled in the Red Cross Blood Assurance Plan under which, in return for a quota of blood donations set by the Red Cross and filled by volunteers any time at their convenience, any Chevra member can apply for blood whenever it is required.

constant call to perform the final services of loving kindness for the dead. The women's Chevra Kadisha group, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Martin Bamberger, still maintains a roster of ladies – volunteers all – who sew shrouds. The Chevra Kadisha has preserved its own traditions that go back over centuries. Each year, on the seventh day of the month of Adar–[34] which according to tradition is the anniversary of the death of Moses – the Chevra Kadisha holds a dinner of its own to which the membership of the entire Chevra is invited, and which usually features addresses by noted local or out-of-town rabbis.

Regardless of their personal religious practices, the members of the Chevra are determined that Chevra funeral services must be conducted in strict accordance with Jewish law. For the information of rabbis from outside the Chevra circle who may be called upon to perform funeral services for congregants belonging to the Chevra Ahavas Chesed, the Chevra Kadisha drew up a circular some years ago, enumerating the religous practices which all rabbis, regardless of their interpretation of Judaism, are expected to observe when they conduct funeral services in the Chevra's cemetery.

The manner in which the cemetery is maintained reflects the concern and the sense of dignity that motivates the members of the Cemetery Committee.[35] All designs for monuments to be placed upon graves must be submitted to the Committee for approval. No monument may be more conspicuous or more costly than the others on the cemetery. Members are not permitted to "pick out" their own gravesite; the only exception is that a member, if he or she so desires, may reserve a lot for himself or herself beside the grave of a

[34] The week before Purim.

[35] The cemetery has a small chapel, which was dedicated in 1953. In 1968, 2-1/2 acres of ground were purchased from the adjoining cemetery of the Progressive Sick Benefit and Relief Association of Baltimore.

spouse already buried there. In 1969 the cemetery was given as a gift from the Bethlehem Steel Corporation (through Chevra member Arthur Baer) a plaque of stainless steel, protected by unbreakable glass, and a steel frame and roof, which bears the names of those buried in the cemetery, in alphabetical order with the grave location indicated next to each name. This plaque, which has room for about 500 names, supplements an older plaque listing the names by the cemetery sections in which they are buried. A perpetual care fund was set up in 1956 with an established banking concern to make sure that whatever the future may bring, the cemetery will not remain without the proper care.

Once each year, on a day between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the Chevra members go together to the cemetery. Led by their spiritual counselor, they pay tribute to the memory of loved ones buried there and also to those whose burial place is known only to God.

Each year, too, the Sunday closest to November 10 is marked by the Chevra as a day dedicated to the memory of the synagogues and the Jewish communities of Germany and Austria that were destroyed during *Kristallnacht* and the days of terror that followed. But today even the observance of this communal *Jahrzeit*, as it were, is oriented toward life. In 1972, the Chevra decided that, henceforth, the public commemoration of the *Zehnte November* should take the form of a memorial lecture by a scholar of renown, setting forth the lessons that the Holocaust of European Jewry holds for constructive Jewish living in the world today.[36]

The reaffirmation of life implicit in this innovation as well as in the time-honored traditional functions of the Chevra has always been the basic philosopy of Chevra Kadisha organizations throughout the centuries. It is an idea perhaps

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[36]The 1972 memorial lecture was delivered by Rabbi Leivy Smolar, President of the Baltimore Hebrew College.

best expressed in the custom followed by the ancient Jewish community of Pressburg to reserve expressly for a member of the Chevra Kadisha, which buried the dead, the annual public reading[37] of the thirty-seventh chapter of the Book of Ezekiel with its eternal promise of rebirth and new life:

Thus says the Lord God:
Behold, I will open your graves,
And cause you to come up out of your graves,
O My people;
And I will bring you into the land of Israel
And you shall know that I am the Lord,
When I have opened your graves
And caused you to come up out of your graves,
O My people.
And I will put My spirit in you, and you shall live,
And I will place you in your own land.
And you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken
And performed it, says the Lord.

[37] On the Intermediate Sabbath of Passover.

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