

A BRIEF HISTORY

OF

UNITED HEBREW CHARITIES

Portland, Maine

(From 1900 to December 20, 1950)

Any history of the United Hebrew Charities must long pre-date this Organization's formal incorporation, under the Laws of the State of Maine, on June 23, 1915. Unfortunately, however, no 'Josephus' existed at the turn of the Century to put down, for posterity, a report of the beginnings of our Organization, and unfortunately, too, with very few exceptions, the founders and early workers have all passed on to their happy reward.

The only tangible evidence we have, to give us a list of the names of those early Members and Donors, is an Account Book, in which are recorded the contributions or payments of Dues made by them on, or about, 1905. This book was, of course, written in Jewish, and was in the possession of relatives of one, Nathan Druker. It recently was un-covered in Boston, Mass., and is valuable, inasmuch as it gives us the names of workers of that period.

Such names as - Baranowich, Yarchowsky, Margowsky, Pepper, Klein and Druker make no impression, whatsoever, on the present, younger generation, and in most cases, bring back only faint memories among the few 'old timers' who still are with us, today.

I am grateful to Messrs. Benjamin Fireman and Charles Rosenbloom for such sparse 'ancient' information as I have had furnished me.

I am informed that Nathan Drukem and Isaac Santosky probably were two of the organizers of the United Hebrew Charities in the 'Eighteen-nineties,' and that Nathan Druker

Page 2

probably was one of the organization's early Presidents.

Benjamin Fireman informs me that when he first arrived in Portland, in 1902, he found an active Charities group in Portland which, at that time, had about fifty Jewish families, and he recalls that in the year 1905 - the year in which he married - he already had become active in the organization.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Benjamin Fireman is the only living resident of Portland, Maine, who has, continuously, been active in the Charities - from before 1905, to date. I fervently pray that the Almighty will grant him many more years of health and happiness!

The only other early, written evidence we have of the Charities existence, is the Certificate of Organization, whereby the United Hebrew Charities was incorporated "To gratuitously aid and help the poor and the suffering with money, food, clothing and fuel, and to do anything and everything that relates to almsgiving and charity." I am turning over, to the archives of The Jewish Family Services, the original Certificate of Incorporation, which was signed on June 15, 1915, by the following persons:-

Joseph S. Bernstein, President; Myer Karlin, Treasurer; Lazarus Abrahamson, Max Robinson, Samuel Rosenberg, S. Isaac Santosky and Benjamin Press. The only living Charter member who signed, that day, is Mr. Benjamin Press, who now resides in Boston. We learn that Mr. Henry M. Taylor acted as Attorney for the incorporators, and he is listed as "Clerk."

Many of the early Jewish residents of Portland had difficulty in making a livelihood, and the relief committees, as they existed from time to time, were called on to render a considerable amount of assistance. Mr. Fireman recalls that, in 1917, through the kind efforts of Miss Lillian Josselson, who was employed by the Red Cross, he had, delivered to his Store at 97 Middle Street, two hundred bags of flour, for distribution to needy families. Only too well, he recalls how he, together with

Myer Karlin, Sprintze Bernstein, Fannie (Ginsburg) Kaplan, and several others, whose names escape him at this time, climbed three flights of stairs (because top-floor apartments were less expensive, and the poor could not afford better quarters), to deliver bags of flour, as well as other food stuffs. On many occasions these deliveries were made at late hours of the night, so that their presence would not be known by the recipients, whose pride would not permit them to make application for assistance. Nor were the children of our needy families put to shame by the destitution of their parents. On numerous occasions, such as before graduation or Jewish Holidays, Mrs. Bernstein and Mrs. William Goodman sent children down to see Mr. Louis E. Weiner, of Rines Bros., who would outfit them from 'head to toe' as nicely as any of the children of more affluent parents. Mr. James Stein, of the James Fruit Company, was always ready to furnish us with fruit and vegetables. Mr. Robert Clemont always managed to have a \$10.00 bill available from a "private" fund. These, and others, always came to our assistance without question, or hesitation.

For more than thirty-five years, both Sprintze Bernstein and Myer Karlin were the back-bone of the Organization. No heart-breaking problem was too personal to be unfolded to either. The needy of our Community had the utmost confidence in these two sterling souls, and this confidence never was betrayed. Nor was any problem too difficult to be undertaken by 'Sprintze' or 'Myer', as they fondly were called; the hour never was too late, nor was the weather/^{ever} too cold for either of them to go out on a personal visit, whenever assistance was needed. The honor and dignity of the United Hebrew Charities was the honor and dignity which was given to the Organization by their association with the Charities.

Since I became associated with the Charities, as President, in 1940, I have had invaluable assistance rendered me by my fellow Officers - Philip Reuben, Saul Sheriff, Myer Marcus and, particu-