

# **NEIGHBORHOODS SOUTHEAST SEATTLE COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECT**

Jewish Heritage in Southeast Seattle

Narrative Report & Annotated Bibliography

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# **The Jews of Southeast Seattle: An Interweaving of Change and Tradition**

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## Introduction

The Jewish community of Southeast Seattle is a diverse one; a rich tapestry of histories, memories, and traditions that has its roots in three distinct migrations from the “Old Country” - a term so broad in its range that it includes German-speaking Ashkenazi Jews from Central Europe (in the 1850’s), Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe (1880-1924), and Ladino-speaking (Judeo-Spanish) Sephardic Jews from Turkey and Rhodes (starting in 1902). A fourth migration occurred just before and after World War II of those fleeing Hitler’s Germany and those surviving the Nazi death camps. There were additional migrations after these that were smaller in number, including the refugees from Egypt following the Sinai and Six Day Wars, as well as the Russian Jews who came in the 1980’s; the latter included a group from Uzbekistan. As with any influx of immigrants to a new home, the Jews brought with them new social groupings, religious traditions, eating rituals, music, and art. Along with the effort to maintain their cultures of origin, they have become part of the fabric of Seattle life, making valuable contributions along the way. During the process of researching and conducting interviews for this narrative, it became clear that many of the experiences described were common to most or all of the people we spoke to: arrival from the “Old Country,” working and raising families, close ties – physical, spiritual, political – to the State of Israel, and celebrating a religious and cultural tradition thousands of years old. Because of these commonalities and because of the wealth of respondents, we chose to focus on one particular family that seemed to epitomize the struggles and transitions of the Jews of Southeast Seattle – the Varon family, of Varon’s Kosher Meats. We have also included anecdotes from other members of the Jewish community to add additional “color” to our descriptive palette. It is important to mention for future readers that the political and religious affiliations of the Jews of Washington State in general are broader than the three Seward Park congregations that are featured here.

## Before WWII

Prior to WWII there were very few Jews in Southeast Seattle; the Southeast is defined as that area south of I-90 and east of I-5, including the neighborhoods which comprise Mt. Baker, Beacon Hill, the Rainier Valley, Seward Park and Rainier Beach. The main exception was the Kline Galland Home in Seward Park. This establishment was donated by Caroline Kline Galland in 1905 and constructed in 1914 to provide an old age home for Jews in the Seattle area. A second adjunct establishment, called The Summit at First Hill, is an assisted living facility that opened in 2001 near Broadway on Capitol Hill. Prior to WWII, most of the Jews lived in the Central District, or CD - that area between Broadway and Lake Washington, and between

Jackson and Madison. The years 1910 to the 1920's saw a proliferation of the numbers of Jewish inhabitants. There were originally four Orthodox synagogues, one of which, Herzl-Ner Tamid, eventually changed to conservative. The Orthodox rabbi and several members then formed the Machzikay Hadath and relocated within the Central Area. Eventually that congregation merged with Bikur Cholim (Ashkenazic). Herzl moved to Mercer Island and later merged with Ner Tamid Conservative Congregation. In the meantime, a small number of Jews had moved further south into the Mount Baker area.

### After WWII

After WWII the situation changed dramatically. Between 500-1000 Jewish men and women from the Seattle area served in the American armed forces during WWII. After the war, Congress passed the GI Bill, and all returning servicemen and women were eligible to attend college. Many took advantage of this because college provided entry to much better jobs than those held by their parents. As part of their military training and service most had traveled throughout the US and abroad; this fact combined with the prospect of better jobs following additional education, created the possibility of settling beyond the Central Area neighborhood of their parents (and its relatively inexpensive housing). They had returned from the war, had gone to college and now wanted to explore other neighborhoods in which to live.

### The Migration South

The new decade of the 50's witnessed the migration south of a small number of young Jewish families, to the Mount Baker area and to Seward Park. Each year, the number increased. Within a decade or two many of those who moved to Mount Baker would move again further south to Seward Park. This included both members of the Ashkenazic (Eastern European) community and the Sephardic (Spanish) community. The latter included both the Jews from the Island of Rhodes in Greece and from Turkey. Economic and social impact of these communities can be measured not only by the population demographics of the various affiliations - i.e. Southeast Seattle was home to the greatest concentration of Orthodox Jews in Seattle – but also by the growth of the kosher food business. According to the North American Jewish Data Bank in 1956, there were approximately 11,250 Jewish persons living in Greater Seattle. The May, 2000-February, 2001 population estimates from the same data bank estimates this figure at approximately 37,200 (in 22,500 core Jewish households). Out of this total, 10,400 or 28% were living in the areas from the Seattle Ship Canal to the South and of these, 33% or about 3500 people lived in SE Seattle (most of the others south of the Canal were living in Capitol Hill, downtown and Queen Anne). During the 10 year period of 1990-2000, the Jewish community of Seattle grew by over 27% compared to 1990 estimates of 27,200 Jewish persons; at the same time, the population of the Greater Seattle area has grown only 15% with the Jewish population in the North End and Northern suburbs increasing by an amazing 58%. Interestingly, though only about 8% of all Jews that live in Seattle live in the Southeast neighborhoods, their impact on greater Jewish Seattle -

with regards to food, religion, involvement in Jewish organizations (e.g. WSJHS and The Jewish Federation) , and affinity (or active ties) with the State of Israel - is significant.

### The Synagogues

Congregation Ezra Bessaroth (EB) has its roots in the Greek Island of Rhodes. Its earliest members arrived in 1904 with holiday services initially held in rented halls. In 1915 two houses and lots were purchased on the corner of Fifteenth and East Fir Street and in 1918, a newly constructed EB (the first building in Seattle to be built under Sephardic communal auspices) was dedicated. By the late 1950s, there were enough Jews from the Rhodes community to warrant building a new synagogue and land was purchased in the Seward Park area on Wilson Avenue. As soon as the new synagogue was constructed in 1957 - in a modern style of architecture - it began to function as a center for gatherings; other Jews in the neighborhood were welcome to use it, i.e. both the Ashkenazic and Turkish Sephardic. The Turkish Sephardim (or Sephardim) participated directly in EB services, while the Ashkenazi Jews were given a small room in which they could hold their own religious services since Ashkenazic services are significantly different from the Sephardic. In 1969 Ezra Bessaroth significantly upgraded its building, constructing a beautiful and unique sanctuary and converting the original structure into a social hall. It was designed by award-winning Seattle architect Bob Durham of the Durham, Anderson and Freed architectural firm.

In the early 1960's, the Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation (SBH) decided to sell its synagogue in the Central Area at 20<sup>th</sup> and E. Fir Street, buying land in the Seward Park area at S. Morgan St. and 52<sup>nd</sup> Ave. S. from the DiMarco family. To serve the SBH members who had already been living in the Seward Park area, as well as newcomers, the synagogue initially used a small house on the property belonging to Mrs. Dimarco as a "branch" of the synagogue. Before construction was to begin on the main synagogue and the house had to be torn down, SBH purchased a house on Morgan Street, across from the site of the new synagogue. This house, then, served as the SBH "Branch" in Seward Park until the new building was ready for use. This new synagogue, designed by the renowned Seattle Jewish architect (originally from Scotland), M. Benjamin Priteca and his associate Bernard Stertzler has a unique red-brick style. It was completed in 1965, with Rabbi Solomon Gaon, Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, attending the formal dedication. A separate building that combined both social hall and offices was added in the late 1970s. Mr. Stertzler went on to design private residences in the Southeast for several individuals active in the SBH building committee (see Documentation section).

Members of Bikur Cholim, the Ashkenazic synagogue on 17<sup>th</sup> and Yesler Way (now the Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center) in the Central Area, had been living in Seward Park since the early 1950s and had been using a room in the original Ezra Bessaroth building on Wilson Avenue. The congregation then decided to purchase land as well - on Morgan Street one-half block west of the SBH building. A small wooden building was built there in 1961 that served as the Yavneh synagogue; the latter merged with Ashkenazic Bikur Cholim in 1964. Within five

years, the congregation had purchased adjoining property and was ready to build a full-scale synagogue. The synagogue board approved the move and work was begun on the new structure. It changed its name in 1971 to Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath, or BCMH when it merged with Congregation Machzikay Hadath.

The original Central Area synagogue had been designed in 1914 by the then young Priteca as well - in the classical style. More than 50 years later Priteca was again asked to design the new building, but because the property was not on the corner, he refused, believing that synagogues and movie theaters should be located on the corner of intersecting streets. As a result, a congregation member, I.M. (Sonny) Gorasht, an accomplished architect in his own right, was recruited to do the design work. The new synagogue began operating in 1972. One of its unique aspects was that Gorasht creatively recycled several religious components from the old synagogue on Yesler Way, incorporating them into the new Seward Park building. These included a spectacular chandelier, the large mosaic-covered structure – the Aron Hakodesh - that housed the torah scrolls, as well as the large platform known as the Bimah from which the torah scroll is traditionally read.

With the establishment of these three Orthodox synagogues, scores of their respective members moved into the Seward Park area. These congregations became the anchors of the Jewish community in SE Seattle.

### Businesses in Southeast Seattle

#### ***The “Village”***

From the early 1900’s until the late 1960’s, early 1970’s, there were many Jewish-owned businesses in Seattle’s Central District, all relatively close to each other. In fact, the neighborhood between Cherry and Jackson Streets and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Empire Way (now Martin Luther King Way), was known as “The Village”, because of the close ties between immigrant Ashkenazic and Sephardic families who had come to America from the same communities in the “old country.” There were meat markets such as Varon’s Kosher Meats at 2811 E. Cherry, Romey’s American Kosher Meat Market at 2405 Yesler Way, White Kosher Meat Market at E. Cherry and Empire Way, Scharhon’s Poultry and Grocery at 2117 Jackson, and Northwest Poultry at 17<sup>th</sup> and Yesler as well as on 12<sup>th</sup> between Terrace and Alder. There were grocery stores such as the 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue Market at 2401 Yesler Way, Al’s Grocery at 2001 Yesler Way, Jack’s Grocery on the NW corner of 20<sup>th</sup> and Yesler Way, Richlen’s Market at 23<sup>rd</sup> and E. Union, Glazer’s Grocery at 25<sup>th</sup> and Cherry, Bluma’s Delicatessen at 25<sup>th</sup> and Cherry, Palace Grocery at 14<sup>th</sup> and Spruce, Handlen’s Grocery and Market at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Cherry, and Steinberg’s Grocery Store at 1814 Yesler Way. There were also bakeries such as Brenner’s, Sam’s, and the Bohemian - and mercantile or variety stores such as Fuxon’s, Greenspan’s, Thrifty Department Store and Mount Baker Variety – as well as many others.

### *Spotlight on the Varon and Hirsch families:*

Isaac Varon came to Seattle with his brother in 1905 from Gallipoli, Turkey by way of Constantinople. Later, he sent back home for his mother, his brothers, and his (arranged) bride; they had three children. As a young man, he first sold cigarettes in the public market, and then went into fruit. He became known as the “Banana King.” He was known as an honest man; a handshake was enough for him. One of his children was Harry, who founded Varon’s Kosher Meats in 1947 - on Yesler Way in the Central Area, between 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Avenues. About five years later, the shop moved a few blocks away to 2811 E. Cherry Street. At this time Harry’s brother, Leon Varon, joined up as a partner and Jerry Adatto as an assistant; Jack Maimon later became an employee after the 1970 closing of his own butcher shop - White Kosher Meat Market – on E. Cherry and Empire Way. During the fifties and the sixties, Varon’s became the main kosher butcher in Seattle catering to the Kashruth needs of many Orthodox Jews. The term “kosher” refers to the special way that meat is slaughtered and prepared to ensure that it contains no blood and comes from animals that are deemed “clean.” Jewish dietary law stipulates that only meat from animals with cloven hoofs that chew their cud (hence veal, beef and lamb, but not pork) may be consumed – as well as chickens, turkeys, geese and certain ducks.

A period of civic unrest in the Central Area followed the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968. The smashing of all his shop windows prompted Harry Varon to begin thinking about moving his business. Urban renewal was an issue as well; the building was slated for demolition in 1972. A suitable location was found at 3931 Martin Luther King Way S. (at that time known as Empire Way) where the store remained from 1972 until December, 1996 as the only operating butcher offering fresh kosher meat to customers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska. Varon’s also catered to some halal customers - Ethiopians and other Muslims – whose diets were restricted to certain meats.

In 1983, Roger Hirsch, Harry’s son-in-law, a kosher butcher trained in London, took over while retaining the name Varon’s Kosher Meats. Hirsch’s family had escaped before Hitler to settle in London, but he and his brother were later sent to Canada at the time when England found it expeditious to expel Jews who were German. A set of fortuitous circumstances led to Hirsch making the acquaintance of his future wife - Varon’s daughter Renee - on an Israeli kibbutz. As luck would have it, the English-born Hirsch was also a trained kosher butcher. He agreed to take over the business in 1983, and ran it until its closure in 1996 - after nearly 50 years of service to the Jewish community, twenty-four of them spent in SE Seattle. The competition from the large grocery stores, especially the QFC in Rainier Beach - only a few miles away - was simply too fierce for an independent butcher such as Varon’s to overcome. The site on Martin Luther King Way is now an Asian market. In 1992, Hirsch also opened the Park Deli near the PCC on Wilson Ave. in Seward Park, which he ran concurrently with Varon’s Kosher Butcher. The deli closed in 1998. When interviewed, Hirsch described a litany of mouth-watering foods offered by the Park Deli: corned beef, pastrami, chopped liver, kishke, cheeses, gefilte fish, and hot dogs.

Over the years the Varons and the Hirsches have nurtured deep roots within the community. Like many other extended families among the Jews of Southeast Seattle, they have brought their respective heritages with them to this city under sometimes difficult circumstances, making significant contributions. Roger Hirsch's stepmother Lore (DuBonsky) Hirsch came to Seattle in 1946 after three years in a concentration camp. Before marrying Mr. Hirsch senior, she and her first husband Lou DuBonsky owned the Mount Baker Grocery at 36<sup>th</sup> and Horton. She has been a member of BCMH for fifty years. After operating Varon's Kosher Meats, Roger Hirsch went to work at Albertson's on Mercer Island in 1997 where he still runs the kosher meat department. As we approach 2010, the only other establishment in Seattle to offer an onsite kosher butcher is the QFC in University Village; Roger trained the butcher there as well – Amir Ben Meir. Renee Hirsch has been part-owner for eleven years of Renee and Sherry's Preschool, an orthodox preschool in the Seward park neighborhood. As a side note, this family represents, through marriage, the melding of two cultures: Ashkenazic and Sephardic.

### *The Late Sixties*

From an historical perspective, it is worth mentioning the events that transpired in Seattle in the sixties - as an extension of the overall political climate in the United States. Many stores in the Central District had to relocate in the late sixties, either because of civic unrest or urban renewal. The assassination of Martin Luther King in April, 1968 was the trigger for three days of rioting, looting and arson. In July of the same year, a police raid on Black Panther Party headquarters resulted in rallies by the SDS and the firebombing of Central District businesses and some further to the south. Jewish businesses directly affected include Varon's Kosher Butcher which had its windows smashed, the 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue Market, Brenner's Bakery and the Mount Baker Grocery; all were firebombed. In all there were three outbursts of urban racial violence in that year. This provided a huge impetus for Jewish families to migrate out of the neighborhood, although it was not the only reason. Besides the issue of urban renewal, there was also the fact that the three Orthodox synagogues were located in Southeast Seattle, and that individual families were growing and required more room.

With an overwhelming Black majority, the Central District at the time was a neighborhood just waiting to explode; though it contained only "5 percent of the city's population, it also contained three thousand African American families living in substandard housing" (Quintard, 190-196). At the beginning of the sixties, the buzzword for blacks was "integration;" by the end, "a significant number... sought instead to build a community within the Central District free of the economic and psychological control of white Seattle" (Quintard, 190-196). The direct action campaign that formed the basis of "the movement" in Seattle focused on ending job bias, housing discrimination and segregation in the schools.

One has only to talk to those Jewish families who were there at this time to understand how as long-term targets of hatred and unbelievable violence (only twenty-three years had passed since the Holocaust), they reacted to the mood of the times with a desire to move to a quieter and safer

environment. The Jewish community of Southeast Seattle remains sensitive to anti-Semitism stereotyping - and hyper-vigilant to the possibility of physical attacks against its members and its property. For at least the last five years, on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, both SBH and BCMH have employed armed security at the entrances to the synagogues. Security issues remain a high priority, especially in the wake of recent events such as the shootings in the downtown offices of the Jewish Federation in 2006 resulting in the death of one worker, and the 2009 defacing of two synagogues in Seward Park just before the start of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. These two events are seen to have been the results of both the increasing anti-Israel sentiment concurrent with the growth of the Islamic fundamentalist movement in the former, and the anti-Semitic beliefs of groups such as the Aryan Nation in the latter. In the case of the event at the Jewish Federation, the shooter Naveed Haq, an American of Pakistani descent, shouted "I'm a Muslim American; I'm angry at Israel" before he began his rampage. On December 15, 2009, Haq was convicted of five counts of attempted first-degree murder, one count of unlawful imprisonment and one count of malicious harassment. Understandably, there is a kind of wagons-in-a-circle mindset among some community members, many of whom are Holocaust survivors, that adheres to the statement "never again." This was most certainly a contributing factor to the offense felt by many to the stereotyped depiction of Jewish women going to Ezra Bessaroth on SE Morgan Street as "furs on parade," from a 1994 article in the Seattle Times about the Seward Park neighborhood. A letter to the editor from the President and Vice-President of the Jewish Federation states that the comments in the article perpetuate "the idea that all Jews are wealthy isolates the community [causing] it great harm" (Treiger and Novick, 1994).

### ***Businesses in Southeast Seattle***

Businesses in the southeast Seattle area that relate to its Jewish population fell into two main categories: those that were or are owned by Jews, and those that catered to Jewish customers. Often the two overlapped; both Jewish and non-Jewish businesses have been designed to attract Jewish clientele based on the products they provide. This is especially true of the food industry - groceries as well as restaurants. In addition, kosher butchers such as Varon's sold products that fulfilled the dietary requirements for halal customers hailing from Ethiopia and other Muslim countries. Currently, kosher restaurants owned by non-Jews are not to be found in SE Seattle, but rather nearby: for example: Pabla Indian Cuisine in Renton or The Teapot Vegetarian House on Capitol Hill. The latter maintains a second location in Renton that will be certified kosher by the beginning of 2010. A bit further away is the Bamboo Garden in the Queen Anne neighborhood. Jewish-owned kosher restaurants include Island Crust Pizza on Mercer Island, and Noah's bagels in the University Village QFC. There is also Nosh Away, a catering company in Renton owned by Phillip Klitzner.

During the 1960s, there was a small bakery and deli called Angel's on Wilson Avenue owned by Ray and Rachel Angel which operated for a few years. In 1969 Isaac and Rachel Maimon, a Turkish Sephardic couple, opened up a small grocery store called Maimon's Kosher Foods on 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and South Alaska Street that catered to a Jewish clientele. Isaac had been the

co-owner with his brother Sam Maimon of the 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue Market in the Central Area, which had operated on 24<sup>th</sup> and Yesler Way for more than thirty-five years. The new store drew Jewish trade from all over the city for its kosher inventory and its Sephardic emphasis, especially around the times of the major Jewish holidays; it stayed open for about 10 years. Upon Isaac's retirement in 1978, the Maimons sold Maimon's Kosher Foods to a nephew, Isaac Azose, who kept the name of the store. Azose ran it until January, 1983 and then sold it to a Korean family; the name was subsequently changed to Noah's Grocery. Although the name has remained Noah's Grocery, the store carries a limited stock of Jewish items. Sometime later, the PCC (currently PCC Natural Markets), a coop-style grocery featuring many natural and organic products was established in 1985 across the street from Angels. This PCC in Seward Park has been somewhat of a boon to the Jewish community of the Southeast neighborhoods as it carries a number of kosher products - although still not as many as the Rainier Avenue QFC or the Rainier Beach Safeway.

Regarding Jewish bakeries, there had been one on Wilson Avenue South, Mishpacha Rye, across the way from PCC, but this lasted only a year or two before closing down. Several Jewish-owned restaurants also operated for relatively short periods of time. The most successful was the above-mentioned Park Deli which was on Dawson Street, near Wilson Avenue. The Park Deli was located very close to where many Orthodox Jews lived and had a menu focused mainly on meat products such as hot dogs and hamburgers; this of course attracted teenagers and the younger children. It is important to note that Jewish restaurants do not mix meat and milk products; they serve one or the other.

In the late 1990s, the Quality Food Center (QFC) in Rainier Beach made a concerted effort to cater to the Orthodox Jewish community by providing the following: a kosher butcher shop, a kosher deli with kosher sandwiches and salads, and a large selection of packaged kosher products - some from non-Jewish companies, e.g. Tim's Cascade Style Chips. This was spurred on by the founding in 1991 of the Va'ad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle, the organization that supervises the production of kosher foods sold in the area: i.e. foods composed of ingredients and prepared in ways conforming to Orthodox Jewish standards. The Va'ad reorganized during the middle 1990s, and a few years later they were approached by both the Albertson's on Mercer Island and the QFCs in Rainier Beach and University Village about incorporating kosher butcher shops within those grocery stores. The Va'ad worked with the above two organizations to make integration of the kosher sections successful, both for the Jewish consumer and for the grocery store. The advent of the certified kosher butcher shop signaled an expansion in the availability of kosher food for the Jewish community of greater Seattle. The Va'ad provides other services as well; for example, it functions as a Bet Din, or religious court, facilitating and issuing conversions (through the Rabbinical Council of America) and religious divorces as well as hearing legal and quasi-legal disputes.

In 2005 QFC closed a number of their stores in the Seattle area, including the QFC in Rainier Beach. The main kosher food store in SE Seattle existed no longer. Saar's, the store that replaced

QFC, was not interested in continuing the kosher food section. At the present time, the consumers of kosher food in SE Seattle can go to two grocers in the area; although these two grocers do carry a fair quantity of kosher products, the selection is not nearly as complete as what was previously offered by the Rainier Beach QFC. These are: the Rainier Avenue QFC (2707 Rainier Ave. S.) and the Rainier Beach Safeway at 9262 Rainier Avenue. Moreover, neither of these groceries has a kosher butcher section. For this, the Jewish consumer has to go outside of the SE Seattle area, either to the Albertson's on Mercer Island or the QFC in University Village. These are the only two stores in the entire state of Washington with in-store kosher butchers.

### Education:

Through the years, the three Orthodox synagogues of Southeast Seattle have cooperated very closely and successfully on schools, camps and youth groups. The main Orthodox Jewish day school in Seattle is the Seattle Hebrew Day School, founded in 1947; it underwent a name change in 1969 to the Seattle Hebrew Academy (SHA). The original building had been built in the Central Area - on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Columbia and Cherry Streets - in the 1930s, with M. Benjamin Priteca as the architect. At first, it was the home of the Seattle Talmud Torah, providing after-school religious programs to students attending local grade schools, middle schools and Garfield High School. The idea for the Hebrew Day School came from such community leaders such as Rabbi Solomon Maimon, Joseph Russak and Ben Genauer; they recognized the need for an all-day school in the Jewish community. The after-school programs of the Talmud Torah declined as the Hebrew Day School grew in enrollment and eventually the two merged.

By the late 1960's a more suitable site for the Hebrew Day School was sought, as most of the families with school age children had moved out of the Central Area; the building on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue was sold. Today it is the site of the Islamic School of Seattle. The Seattle Hebrew Academy moved to a site at 5237-5261 Rainier Avenue in Southeast Seattle where it remained for five years. When the buildings at this site were deemed too small, the school's Board of Directors began a second search for a more suitable site. The Forest Ridge Convent at 1617 Interlaken Drive East on Capitol Hill (originally designed by Frank H. Perkins) became available and was purchased by the Seattle Hebrew Academy in 1975.

There have been times when all or parts of the Capitol Hill campus could not be occupied; during those times the synagogues in the Seward Park area provided temporary space to students and teachers. For example, during the late 1980's asbestos concerns caused part of the SHA building to shut down temporarily. Classes were relocated to the Yavneh building on the property of the BCMH synagogue.

A more significant event occurred in February 2001 when the Nisqually earthquake damaged the main SHA building rendering it unfit for occupation. Immediate assistance was given by the

Herzl-Ner Tamid Synagogue on Mercer Island. Its classrooms served as temporary quarters until the end of the school year in June, 2001. During this time engineering and architectural plans were developed for the complete repair of all earthquake damage to the main building.

During the repair period which coincided with the 2001/02 school year, BCMH allowed SHA to move trailers into its parking lot; these served as temporary classrooms for the upper grades. In addition, SBH allowed the use of one of its rooms as a temporary classroom for the same school year. The renovation was completed and the building re-opened in 2004; at that time the temporary quarters provided by the Seward Park synagogues were no longer needed.

In early 2006, some parents decided that they wanted a Jewish all day school that was more rigorous in its approach to teaching Jewish values and texts. The result was the creation of the Torah Day School (TDS) at 3613 South Juneau which opened its doors in September, 2006, accepting children from the ages of two to four. Its initial goal was to provide an exemplary Orthodox education with a comprehensive and individualized Judaic and general studies program. TDS began as the Seward Park Jewish Pre-School Cooperative but changed its name to Torah Day School extending enrollment to include children up to the eighth grade, and eliminating the pre-school cooperative section. It celebrated its first eighth grade graduation in 2008.

There had been an earlier attempt to establish a Jewish day school in the Seward Park area. This was the Yeshivat Rambam, a school that was started in September of 1999 and operated for one year using the classrooms at Ezra Bessaroth. The idea for the school had been championed by EB Rabbi Yamin Levy, based on the idea that the Seattle Hebrew Academy administration was not recognizing the need for the type of religious education necessary for Sephardic students. The Sepharadim - predominantly members of Congregations SBH and EB - were descended from immigrants who had come to Seattle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from various parts of the Ottoman Empire. They were different in many ways from the Ashkenazic Jews, whose ancestors hailed mainly from Germany and Eastern Europe. Differences had to do with Hebrew pronunciation, the conducting of the prayer service, the reading of the Torah scroll, etc. When Rabbi Levy left Seattle in the middle of the year 2000, Rambam as it had been called, merged with SHA. Some of the unique Sephardic educational features from Rambam were incorporated into the SHA curriculum.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the classrooms in Congregation Ezra Bessaroth were being used for the Seattle Sephardic Religious School. This school was created by members of both SBH and EB to provide a religious Jewish education to those children not enrolled in the Seattle Hebrew Day School. Classes were held at EB two days a week - one late afternoon during the week and Sunday morning. It continues operating today, using the facilities of the Stroum Jewish Community Center on Mercer Island.

### The Seattle Kollel:

A more recent addition to the educational organizations located within the Southeast Seattle Jewish community is the Seattle Kollel, at 5305 52nd Avenue S. in the Seward Park neighborhood. The Seattle Kollel was founded in 1991 by various members of the Orthodox Jewish community to house an outreach organization for the purpose of introducing Orthodox Judaism to elements of the Jewish community in the greater Seattle area, though its outreach extends as far as Oregon and Victoria, B.C. Historically, this type of organization provided financial support for the yeshivas, or schools, devoted to the study of traditional Jewish texts, including the Torah and the Talmud; it has roots as far back as the 1200's. While traditional kollels have generally been comprised of a group of men devoted to a few additional years of post-rabbinical study, the Seattle Kollel is focused on community education. It was originally staffed by a head rabbi, the Rosh Kollel, and three additional rabbis, young men in their 20s or 30s, all with wives and children.

Seattle Kollel has succeeded over the years in its mission; it has brought in many people with limited, even no prior Jewish background teaching them the meaning of Judaism as well as how it can be incorporated into their lives. At first, the Kollel was housed in several rooms within the three Orthodox synagogues, predominantly in BCMH. Due to a generous donation from outside of the state, along with funds collected within the community, the Seattle Kollel was able to build a new edifice. The building, designed by noted Seattle Jewish architect Jeremy Miller and named the Jack and Lilly Almo Kollel Building, was dedicated in 2005.

### Camping Programs:

For many years, the three Orthodox synagogues of Seward Park have been conducting camping programs for the children of their congregations. The first such program was the SBH Camp started by Rabbi Solomon Maimon in the mid-1950s. It was a sleep-away camp that ran initially for three days and then expanded to a week-long program. The first site used was Camp Burton on Vashon Island. Parents and high school aged members of the synagogue were the camp organizers. Over the years Sephardic Bikur Holim joined with members of Ezra Bessaroth to run a joint Sephardic sleep-away camp, with teens from both synagogues organizing and running the program.

During the 1990s this joint camping program was formalized into an independent organization, Sephardic Adventure Camp (SAC), with a Board of Directors composed of rabbis and members representing the two synagogues. For the last 20 years, SAC has used Camp Bishop near Shelton, Washington for its annual two-week program from late June until early July. This is the period just preceding the start of Camp Bishop's own secular summer camp - a traditional YMCA resident summer camp program.

Congregation Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath, as well, operates its own day camp program, Camp Kol Rina. This program includes children from the K-6 grades, for a period of four weeks during the summer.

Teenagers from the Southeast neighborhood's three Orthodox synagogues have one major organization: the Seattle chapter of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) - a branch of the Union of Orthodox Congregations. The Seattle chapter is called Ruach Hatzfon (Spirit of the North) and has been functioning for almost 40 years. It is governed by an adviser (an adult with previous experience in youth activities) and a board made up of teenagers elected by their peers. There are other NCSY chapters also located on the West Coast (several in the Los Angeles area) as well as Vancouver, BC and Calgary, Alberta. Some regional NCSY events bring Seattle teenagers to southern California or western Canada for religious gatherings called a Shabbaton. This is an event that focuses on the celebration of the Jewish Sabbath. There is usually one regional event per year that takes place in Seattle. Teenagers from the other chapters come to Seattle to participate in events with members of Seattle NCSY. Planned events take place primarily in the Seward Park area, but other sites of interest have also been included: for example, skating rinks and ski resorts.

#### Music and Art:

Music plays a vital role in the Jewish community of Southeast Seattle - whether in sacred songs that beautify the liturgy (lead by a Sephardic hazzan or an Ashkenazi cantor) within the synagogue, or in "grommen" or humorous songs that incorporate the names of key participants at important family events. Grommen are performed by the Master of Ceremonies at weddings and bar mitzvahs. Music thus celebrates life's transitions, is spiritually transformative, and brings the community together. The visual arts have a place as well: from the murals and sculpture at Kline Galland Home to the windows at Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath. There is also a rich and multi-faceted arts programming at Kline Galland that includes painting, printmaking and ceramics, as well as music and drama.

Isaac Azose became Hazzan for the Ezra Bessaroth in March, 1966. This was a challenging position for a Sephardic Jew whose parents came from Turkey and who grew up listening to all the hazzanim at the Turkish synagogue, Sephardic Bikur Holim. Congregation Ezra Bessaroth, on the other hand was established by pioneers from the Island of Rhodes. This meant that Mr. Azose or "Ike," as he is called by friends and acquaintances had to learn quite a number of new liturgical pieces from the Rhodes tradition. Most of the liturgy that he had mastered as a young man had come from two hazzanim of Turkish origin: Nissim Azose (originally "Azouz") and Bension "Sam" Maimon, Ike's uncle. Reverend Samuel Benaroya came to SBH from Switzerland in 1950 to be the full-time Hazzan. There is a humorous anecdote about why his title contains the word "Reverend." US immigration policy in 1950 didn't recognize the designation "cantor," so his title was changed officially on paper to "Reverend" which according to

Immigration placed him on par with “Rabbi,” a designation they did recognize. Ike Azose himself learned quite a bit from Hazzan Benaroya before he went to Ezra Bessaroth as its official hazzan. This was his first professional appointment though he had gotten a lot of experience conducting services at the “Branch,” the site on S. Morgan Street that preceded the new Seward Park SBH. As Ike puts it, it is the job of the Hazzan to “lead the prayers in song.” Amazingly, the pronunciations of the Sephardic liturgy have remained essentially the same since Babylonian times, i.e. 900 BCE. The basic musical modes, or “makam” used in the Shabbat services of Seattle’s Turkish and Rhodes communities, can vary from week to week. These “makamim” are also used in the liturgies of other Middle Eastern Jewish communities around the world: e.g. Syrian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Egyptian and indigenous Israeli Sepharadim. Within the Ashkenazic service, the corresponding term for makam is “nusach,” or the musical framework upon which the prayer chant is built.

Each Jewish congregation in general has its own individual approach to the intersection between music and prayer, relying on influences as diverse as the Sephardic romanze or the songs of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. At Seattle’s BCMH, although there is no longer a cantor after the passing of Chazzan Gottlieb, different members (male only) of the congregation lead the services on a rotational basis; for the High Holidays, the beautiful voice of Michael Geller can be heard. Other ways to infuse synagogue events with live music are encouraged by Rabbi Kletenik: for example, Shlock Rock concerts and an upcoming performance by singer/ songwriter Julie Geller for the BCMH Sisterhood.

The windows at BCMH which depict the twelve tribes of Israel, were done in 1971 by renowned glass artist Lutz Haufschildt of Vancouver, BC who went on to do work for the Skydome in Toronto. Budgetary considerations lead to the window panels being hand painted on acrylic panels to give the illusion of stained glass. In each of the three Southeast synagogues, the architect devoted a great deal of artistic ingenuity to the Aron Hakodesh, or structure housing all of the sefer torahs. The Aron in BCMH was designed in a classic mosaic style by M. Benjamin Priteca, was installed in the old synagogue in 1914 and was then painstakingly brought over to Seward Park to be re-installed into the synagogue on Morgan Street. The Arons in SBH and EB are impressive in quite a different way; the architects for each were working in a modern style. At SBH, the Aron is fashioned from an unusual combination of white marble embedded with mahogany arches; the one at EB also uses marble, but incorporates a beautiful Ner Tamid (eternal lamp) within the design.

The Kline Galland Home contains several artworks of note. There is a metal sculpture in the dining area by Sam Calvo that depicts the twelve tribes, as well as a three-dimensional wall piece in an alcove where residents light the Shabbos candles. There is also a mural by artist and educator Rainier Waldman Adkins that illustrates the celebration of the Jewish holidays. Adkins is also well-known in the community for his ornately painted “ketubahs”, or Jewish marriage

documents. Kline Galland inspires its residents to create art; to this end, it is enrolled in “Seniors Making Art,” a program founded by Dale Chihuly that contracts with professional artists, skilled in building enthusiasm and confidence, to teach programs in museums, retirement communities, senior centers, libraries, hospitals, schools, nursing homes, and other locations. Residents at Kline Galland may display their work in art shows or sell it in the gift shop that is located within the facility. Additional cultural opportunities can be found at the Lakewood Seward Park Community Club where Ruth Fast offers an Israeli dance class on Monday nights at the “Clubhouse.”

Artist Hannah Voss is an enamellist; she creates wall pieces in enamel – a process that involves fusing glass to metal. She has an art studio in the SE Seattle neighborhood and is affiliated with Columbia City Gallery. She has taught art at Seattle Hebrew Academy, Cleveland High School and Seattle Girls School – and runs the enamel class at Kline Galland in which residents make gifts, jewelry and decorative switchplates.

Tales to tell: anecdotes from the neighborhood:

Al S. Maimon: "In times of joy and sorrow, community, family and friends come together, at times of sorrow, "taking over" preparation and serving of meals at the home of the mourner during Shiva; at times of joy, providing meals, and other family activities- taking the kids, providing meals, e.g., for births and/ or berith mila, for weddings offering sheva berachot, etc."

Larry Jassen: “Why walking to shul is memorable: We lived on Seward Park Avenue near Orcas but the Yavneh Branch of Bikur Cholim was at Holly-Morgan (between 51<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup>). So the walking routine on Shabbat was as follows: flat, then up Oakhurst, then flat, then up Upland, then flat, then up Morgan. Picture, if you will, three (sometimes four) teen-agers in a line, pushing their mother up the final hill. It was funny, fun and a great bonding experience!”

Ellen Russak Hellman of Jerusalem: “Growing up Orthodox and Ashkenazi in the Seward Park of the late 1950's and the 1960's meant getting creative about where to go to shul on Shabbos. So we started out at the old Kline Galland Home, then started our own congregation, Yavneh, in a rental house, then on to a classroom in the basement of the newly constructed Ezra Bessaroth social hall, and finally becoming a branch of Bikur Cholim Machzikay Hadath, and moving into a small building on their property at 52nd between Morgan and Holly. Yavneh was home and I feel close to the people with whom I grew up there to this day.”

Sara Simon, speaking about the place of the BCMH in her life: “It is always for us about [having] a place to pray.”

Lore (Dubanski) Hirsch: “People used to dress up to go shopping – hats and gloves...I used to walk to Sunday school and cheder classes twice a week with the children. The community has

changed. Distances are much greater and life more complicated. Everybody used to know each other; it was very nice. But now it is very large and the old people are dying out.”

Roger Hirsch: “In times of need, the community rallies...after a death, the needs of the family are taken care of for the week afterwards. There are prayer services for the ill – for recovery. You just have to ask and it’s taken care of. Also when orthodox Jews travel to Seattle, they can call the synagogue if they are stuck and need housing; our hospitality is known throughout the nation. During NCSY [National Conference of Synagogue Youth] retreats, up to 200 kids are put up by families in the South end.”

Ralph Maimon: “Maimon's Kosher Foods on 50th Avenue South and South Alaska Street...served Seward Park's entire Orthodox community with kosher food items but was also the "go to" place for the entire Jewish community before the major Jewish holidays, particularly Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Because of its proximity to Lake Washington, it was also a beacon for those attending the hydro races during Seafair. A block south of their grocery store was a large public playfield. Many of the young teens played baseball there and would go to Maimon's Kosher Foods afterwards for refreshments. They all knew Isaac and Rachel Maimon. So, it developed that whenever they wanted to play ball at that playfield, they dubbed it "Maimon's Field" because of its proximity and their habit of going to the store after playing. The name became familiar and used by virtually all the young Jewish baseball players who lived in the Seward Park area. The name of the playfield was never officially changed but is remembered fondly as "Maimon's Field" by the young men and women who played there in their youth.”

Ruth (Maslan) Sassoon: “I still live in the neighborhood in the house I've lived in since my son was 10 months old in 1967, four blocks from the big Maslan family house. Families tend to stay in Mt. Baker a long time. We moved into the "big house" at Cascadia Avenue South and South Ferris Place in 1951. My little brother thought it was a hotel. There was an elevator from the front hall to the second floor, a grillwork cage without a protective framework. Our parents were afraid the elevator would come down on top of a kid, so they sold it as quickly as they could; but first we had fun riding up and down all day long. We were six kids...we had a big dinner every Friday night... "Erev Shabbos" or Sabbath eve... and our grandparents, our mother's parents who lived three blocks away on Hunter Boulevard South, were always there. As we got older the group grew to include daughters and sons-in law and grandchildren and eventually there was a basic Friday night group of around 25, but there were usually a few friends and occasional drop-ins. My mother always welcomed whoever came and said she would just add more water to the soup.”

### Conclusion:

The Jewish community of Southeast Seattle is a diverse one, a rich tapestry of histories, memories, and traditions. As with any influx of immigrants to a new home, the Jews brought

with them new social groupings, languages, religious traditions, food, music, and art. Along with the effort to maintain their cultures of origin, they have become part of the larger fabric of Seattle life, making valuable contributions along the way. During the process of researching and conducting interviews for this narrative, it became clear that many of the experiences described are not only common to most or all of the people we spoke to - for example, escape from horrific persecution, immigration to America and a desire to experience the American Dream, working and raising families, and close community ties – but echo the experiences of other ethnic groups as well despite variations in specific histories.

It is this researcher's sincere wish that the memories and traditions of the Jewish community of Southeast Seattle not only remain strong in the hearts, minds and daily lives of its members, but that along with those of this project's other participants from the Asian, African-American and Latino communities, stand as beacons that can illuminate the universality of the human experience.

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