

Introduction

It is not incumbent on you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it.

If you have learned much Torah you will be greatly rewarded, and your employer is trustworthy to pay you the reward of your labors. And know, that the reward of the righteous is the World to Come.

Rabbi Tarfon

Jamaican Jewish History

Over the past three decades Jamaica's Jewish settlement and history from 1655 to the present has been fairly well documented, starting with the picture book of the second half of the 20th century compiled by the late Ernest de Souza. This was followed by the documentary "La Nacion", compiled for the Beth Hafusoth by Ambassador Mordechai Arbell. The next publication was "The Portuguese Jews in Jamaica" authored by Arbell who later wrote a number of histories of the Caribbean Jews. These works augmented a number of earlier publications.

A major conference on Caribbean Jews was held in Kingston, Jamaica in 2010. The presentations made at the conference have been published in the book “Jews in the Caribbean” in 2015. Other publications on this historic congregation are in the making.

To supplement these, much has been done to record the genealogy of Jamaican Jewish families and to find, clean and catalogue most of the 13 remaining Jewish Cemeteries. The Second Beth Chaim of Spanish Town is one such project.

WHITE CHURCH STREET CEMETERY

{The Old Salt Pond Road cemetery}

The Second of three Beth Chaim's
in Spanish Town,
St. Catherine.

From the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries.

How we found it



Piles of rubble, stones and garbage cover the second Beth Chaim of Spanish Town





SACRED TO THE
MEMORY OF THE
HONORABLE
EMANUEL
GEORGE LEVY

BORN 2ND SEP.
1884, DIED 19TH
SEP. 1886

Hon. Emanuel Levy - a
former Acting Custos & the
first Member of the
Legislative Council for St.
Catherine

The white headstone which was erected 130 years ago for Emanuel Levy still stands on the small open lot in Spanish Town, yet it is in remarkably good condition.

Others were either destroyed by vandals, craftsmen searching for material to carve bookends and figurines, or lie buried beneath piles of junk - feet high in places - of broken glass and bricks, rusted metal, plastic bags and rubble.

Today, a shallow gutter cuts through to the sidewalk carrying a slow trickle of green water. Children hurry past to school, unconcerned or perhaps unaware of the history that lies just feet from them.



Surrounding the plot of land are rusting zinc fences, the small community of Dallas, Jonathan Grant High School, Spanish Town Primary School and the busy Burke Road that carries traffic to the heart of Spanish Town.

But scratch away the dirt next to the sidewalk and some of the old tombs appear just inches beneath the ground, their inscriptions still legible.

This is the last of the old Beth Chaim or Jewish cemeteries still to be excavated. It will not remain hidden for much longer.



School children walk by each day, largely unaware that it even existed prior to the work.



Site supervisors assess the extent of the work to be done in order to excavate, clean and restore the graves.



The cemetery lies opposite the Spanish Town Primary School and adjacent to the Jonathan Grant High School on White Church Street.



Weeds and vines carpet the ground and creep across the few visible graves.



“IN LOVING
MEMORY OF
LUNA JULIA
ANDRADE, RELICT
OF DAVID
DaCOSTA
ANDRADE.

BORN 31st. OCT.
1849, DIED 20th Sep.
1930”



“HERE LIES THE
REMAINS OF LEAH
ADOLPHUS,
INFANT
DAUGHTER OF
SIMON AND
SARAH
ADOLPHUS, WHO
DEPARTED THIS
LIFE 20th
DECEMBER, 1796”



Some of the ancient slabs with their Hebrew or English inscriptions are visible on the surface, while others need to be cleared of rubble and weeds in order to be seen.



A tombstone that had been moved from the grave it once covered.

The inscription remains clearly visible after many centuries.





DIED ON THE 4 NOVEMBER 1979
DEBORAH R. RAMS
AGED 79 YEARS

THE COMMUNITY

WHITE CHURCH STREET
CEMETERY

WELCOME TO DALLAS



Residents willingly showed the survey pegs in their backyards marking the cemetery's boundary lines, and the graves which now "just happen" to be on their side of the zinc fences.

They have little idea of what the developments will eventually mean for them and their neighbors, yet they are highly supportive.





Phase **11** of the project will bring significant improvements to the site, including landscaping and proper fencing.



Workmen from the adjoining Dallas community clear the old Jewish cemetery at the southern end of West Church Street in Spanish Town.



One by one,
graves are
exposed after
lying hidden for
decades.



This worker felt that the hard work was a small price to pay for an end result that would make a big difference to his community.





Working in two-week rotations, the Dallas men dig around the graves and then remove truckloads of dirt from the site.





Finally

“Gam zu l’tova. This too is for the good.”

Nachum ish Gamzu, Talmud, Taanit, 21a

This White Church Street cemetery, founded in the 18th century and formerly known as the Salt Pond Road cemetery, was one of two on opposite sides of the road. The earlier one no longer exists.

The present restoration was initiated by the Jewish Jamaican leader Ainsley Henriques. The initial results of the restoration have been more awesome than expected. Yet there is still much to be undertaken and it is anticipated that a significant sum will be needed to carry this important restoration to completion.

The initiative has been partly due to the program of cataloguing all Jewish graves in the remaining 13 Jewish cemeteries in the Island. Under the direction of Rachel Frankel and Ainsley Henriques, it is now in its 9th year.

The first restoration of a Jewish cemetery was the Hunt's Bay cemetery which has graves with inscriptions as early as the 1670's, predating the founding of Jamaica's present capital, Kingston.

The initial financing for this project has come from private donors.

After the first week of work it began to attract significant local and international interest.

First, it was blessed with a visit by the Chairman of the Board of the American Jewish Historical Society, Sidney Lapidus and his family.



Another early visitor was the President of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation Jerry Klinger (r), seen here with Ainsley Henriques.



A small number of graves and headstones have been cleared, but many more remain to be exposed and cleaned.





Just one
headstone stood
on this dry
patch of ground
before.

Today, others
are rising
proudly,
testament to
commitment,
faith and
ancestral pride.





The White Church Street Cemetery will become another site to add to the growing number of Heritage sites that beginning to excite Jamaicans and overseas visitors seeking to appreciate the rich history and culture of the Jamaican people.

“Death is the only certainty”. Yiddish saying.



The Cemetery restoration is expected to be completed in 2016.
Contributions to ensure its success would be welcomed .
These may be sent by check or wire transfer to:

United Congregation of Israelites
92 Duke Street, Kingston, Jamaica

Further details can be obtained by contacting:

Ainsley Henriques,
Project Director

ainsley@cwjamaica.com
Tele. # +1 876 - 329 - 9520

~It's a Mitvah~

Appendices

**JAMAICAN FAMILY SEARCH - GENOLOGY RESEARCH
JEWISH RECORDS - JEWISH CONGREGATIONS –
from the 1891-1892 Handbook**

A RECORD OF THE JEWS IN JAMAICA

By Jacob A. P. M. Andrade, Published in Jamaica, 1941

APPENDIX "L" - PARTIAL LIST OF INTERMENTS IN VARIOUS CEMETERIES

Partial list of those buried in the second Beth Chayim, Spanish Town,
situate at the extreme southern end of White Church Street (Numbered 2) (Western side).

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THE JEWS OF JAMAICA - TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS 1663 -1880

by R. D. Bennett & P. Wright