

# Hiram Halle's Choice

## The Poway shooter's choice

By Jerry Klinger



April 26, 2019: President Trump declared Holocaust Remembrance Week. It would culminate with Yom HaShoah, May 1-2.

Ebie Wood is the President of the Pound Ridge Historical Society of Pound Ridge, New York. Many months earlier, she and the Society planned their annual meeting for April 28, 2019. They did not know their annual meeting would appropriately coincide with the President's proclamation.

April 28 more than 100 people came to the Pound Ridge Historical Society. Despite the unseasonal cold and rain, they stood outside for the dedication of a historical marker honoring Hiram Halle. Pound Ridge was one of the very, very few places North of New City, and across Connecticut, "Gentlemen's Agreement territory", who were willing to sell land to a Jew. Later, when the Great Depression hit, Halle, a Jew, used his great wealth to help save Pound Ridge from economic devastation. Quietly, unbeknownst to almost all, he saved even more.

As the dark clouds of death circled European Jews in the late 1930's Halle made a choice. He chose to save Jews. Most American Jews, fearful to stir the waters of American antisemitism, did not. The U.S. State Department deliberately dragged its feet denying Jewish refugees the

passports of life – visas. Through the cover of his association with the New School in New York, Halle guaranteed the salaries of Jewish refugee scholars, scientists, writers, educators. He obtained the needed visas.

The State Department continued denying Jews visas. Halle with his friend the head of the New School, Alvin Johnson, realized the State Department would grant visas to farmers. It was a loophole. Halle provided seed money. Johnson enlisted other Christians to thwart the State Department, bringing to America and life more Jewish scholars. They classified the academics as “farmers”.

Van Eeden was a small agricultural community Johnson created located near Burgaw, North Carolina. Jewish academics, many who could not identify the front end of a cow from its rear, were brought to Van Eeden as “farmers”.

It worked until the Nazis closed the last door of escape with War and their Final Solution for Jews – death.

Halle had managed to save hundreds of Jews. The State Department was not entirely successful. Halle proved, if the Jewish Federations, large and small charitable institutions, individual, had wanted to, there was a way to save Jews. Halle did what he could, and hardly anyone knew about his choice. He did what he could quietly.

April 16, 2016, JASHP, with the State of North Carolina, dedicated a historical roadside marker to the Van Eeden Holocaust Rescue effort

I traced back the origin of Van Eeden. I discovered Hiram Halle’s choice and contacted the Pound Ridge Historical Society. If they would be willing to place a historical marker reflecting Hiram Halle’s choices, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation was willing to pay for it. They could write the text. It would take three years.

Ebie Wood, on behalf of the Pound Ridge Historical Society, embraced the idea. The Society created a bronze story marker, to be dedicated in a garden Setting at their annual meeting, Sunday, April 28.

I bought my plane tickets.

April 27, Poway, California, a choice of death was by a rabid Trump hater. The Jerusalem Post wrote about the incomprehensible phenomena of rabid anti-Trump haters who were rabidly anti-Semitic. Six months earlier, to the day, October 27, Squirrel Hill, Pennsylvania, another rabid, anti-Trump, anti-Semitic hater, killed 11 Jews in synagogue prayer.

It was Sabbath, the last day of the festival of Freedom, as Jews gathered worshiping in the Poway, Chabad synagogue. John Earnest, “allegedly”, burst upon the service with his AR-15 intent on “sending Jews to Hell.” He killed one woman, wounded the Rabbi, a young girl and a man before his rifle jammed. An off duty armed Border Security Agent returned fire but

missed. Earnest escaped to his car and fled. He was captured later by police. Earnest's choice of death for Jews left the synagogue in Jewish blood.

The waiting area for my flight in Ft. Lauderdale to New York on the 28<sup>th</sup> had a large number of observant Jews waiting for the same flight. They wore Keepahs. Many had children with them. A few stood in a small group covered by their Prayer Shawls saying the morning Shacharit prayers. The Jews were returning home to New York, most likely having spent the closing days of Passover with elderly family in Florida.

I looked at them. They were all potential targets. I thought, how courageous they were. They wore their Jewishness outwardly. Others like me, wore it inwardly. We all were making our choices.

The attack on the Poway Sabbath service was a hate crime President Trump said.

Facing hate is a choice all must make. Freedom, life, good, evil, are choices. From his hospital bed Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein said, "We need to battle darkness with light."

That afternoon, a marker was dedicated to Hiram Halle, a man who made a choice that few knew about. The few lines of Halle's choice are forever inscribed in bronze in the Pound Ridge Historical Society's Garden.

The text of the marker reads.

"Hiram Halle (1867-1944)

Born in Cleveland, Ohio to German Jewish immigrants, Hiram Halle bought his first house in Pound Ridge on Trinity Pass Road, February 1929. From 1916-1944 he was head of the petrochemical giant, Universal Oil Products. From 1933 through the onset of the Holocaust, Halle worked to rescue persecuted Jews from Europe, most notably funding the University in Exile at the New School in New York City.

By the early 1940s Halle had acquired and remodeled over 30 historic buildings in Pound Ridge. His renovations coupled old with new, emphasizing the early-American roots of his houses while adding modern features to adapt them to the twentieth century living. Halle rented his houses to people he felt would have a positive impact on the community. His other vital contributions to Pound Ridge included helping construct the elementary school and the fire department.

By-preserving- and building upon – the town's past, Hiram Halle helped shape the future of Pound Ridge.

Erected April 28, 2019 to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hiram Halle's arrival in Pound Ridge by the Pound Ridge Historical Society and the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation."

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