

A Brief History of the Temple Israel Memorial Park And Early Minneapolis Jewish Community

The Montefiore Cemetery, now Temple Israel Memorial Park, is located at 4153 3rd Ave. S. in the Bryant neighborhood of Minneapolis. The cemetery is approximately 4.5 acres, extending from 3rd to 4th Aves. S. and between 41st and 42nd Streets. Although far out in the country when established in 1876, the cemetery is now surrounded by an urban neighborhood a block east of I-35 W. Nearby housing consists of one- and one and one-half-story frame houses and bungalows dating from 1900-1925.

The Montefiore Chapel is a one-story Richardsonian Romanesque building. Richardsonian Romanesque, with its massive masonry style, remained popular in the Twin Cities through the 1890s. With its emphasis on heavy stone or brick walls, round arched window openings, and ornament based on Romanesque and Byzantine models, the style was distinctive in residential, commercial and religious uses. One scholar proposed that 1889 was the peak of the Richardsonian era in the Twin Cities, particularly in Minneapolis, with the completion of the National Bank of Commerce, the Globe Building, the public library, and the Samuel Gale mansion, all important examples of the style. Among prominent remaining Richardsonian buildings is the Minneapolis City Hall – its 1888 design competition specified a Richardsonian design.

Typologically, the chapel is reminiscent of the gate lodges designed by H.H. Richardson in the 1880s. The Ames Gate Lodge, at North Easton, Massachusetts, designed for manufacturer and financier Oakes Ames is a notable example.

The Romanesque style with a Byzantine dome was also "associationally branded" with synagogue architecture in the 1880s. Shaarai Tov's (Temple Israel) wood frame building at Fifth Street between Marquette and Second Aves. S. (1880-1903), designed by LeRoy Buffington, was based on the famous Plum Street synagogue in Cincinnati, using narrow twin towers with small bulbous domes and a larger central dome in the Byzantine style. Many of the same people who established Shaarai Tov had earlier begun Montefiore Cemetery Association; the chapel was built a decade after the synagogue.

The one-story Montefiore Chapel consists of a rectangular footprint with equal halves devoted to the enclosed chapel and to the relatively commanding porte cochere entry. The building is finished in red brick, resting on a rusticated brownstone water table and piers. Brownstone voussoirs frame the porte cochere arch and brownstone accents the tower piers, the tower, and the gable roof line of the porte cochere. Stepped buttresses with rusticated quoins support the chapel corners. A separate doorway between the stone piers of the large arch and the tower provides access apart from the porte cochere vehicular

entry. Ornate wrought iron gates enclose both entrances. Two stained glass windows framed by a circle of brick voussoirs illuminate the east and west chapel elevations. Slender, blind recessions with rusticated keystones accent the porte cochere and the brick tower. A slightly bulbous, copper-clad, octagonal cupola provides a central roofline focus. The asphalt-shingled hip roof with cross gable over the porte cochers was originally slate. A gable-end chimney is located on the south end.

Two one-story, flat-roofed additions extend south of the building to the cemetery fence. Designed by Liebenberg and Kaplan in 1927, the first addition was planned as a tool room and constructed of red brick that matched the original chapel. The second addition, of unknown date, is of smooth red brick. A simple brick parapet with openings every several feet is the primary ornament on the addition. Two double-hung windows accented with black shutters illuminate the addition's west side.

The Montefiore Cemetery Chapel is significant under Heritage Preservation Guideline Gp-1 as an example of the religious and cultural development of Minneapolis. The growth of religious institutions paralleled the growth of the city, both in increased population and a physical expansion outward as the city grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Montefiore Cemetery Chapel is also significant under Heritage Preservation Guideline Gp-2 for its reflection of the early German Jewish community. These early pioneers established not only the cemetery association but were also founders of the other early Jewish institutions in the city, including Shaarai T'ov (Temple Israel), the B'nai B'rith lodge, and the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society, thus providing leadership within the Jewish community and the city at large. The chapel is the oldest extant building associated with early Jewish settlement in Minneapolis, and one of the few remaining buildings still associated with its original use.

As an important example of a cemetery chapel, Montefiore Chapel fits within the Religion and Social Organization context, and "Jewish Settlement in Minneapolis, 1860s-1972" of the *Minneapolis Preservation Plan*.

The Montefiore Burial Association was formed in 1876, the first Jewish organization in Minneapolis. Along with the Baszion Benevolent Society, also formed in 1876, the Minneapolis Jewish community established an institutional presence in the city two years before Shaarai T'ov, the first synagogue, was formed in 1878. St. Paul's Jewish community had established Mount Zion in 1856 and early on created a cemetery that was open to all Jews for burial. A winter burial in which the mourners were lost in a snowstorm and arrived too late to conduct a burial that day encouraged Minneapolis Jews to establish their own cemetery. In November 1876, a group of men purchased two acres of ground on 42nd Street and 3rd Ave. S. for \$300. The men, including Ralph Rees, Jacob Cohen, Lewis Brin, K. Brin, Jacob Skoll, Jacob Deutch, A. Krutzkoff and Elijah Bloom, each paid \$25 and took out a mortgage for the remainder. The burial association was not affiliated with any congregation, and all

Jews in the community were permitted to use the cemetery. Most of the early Jews in Minneapolis were of German heritage, and the burial association officers and trustees tended to be members of Shaarai Tov.

Ralph Rees served as president of the burial association from 1876 to 1906, when he was succeeded by his brother, Gustave. Ralph Rees was born in Germany and came to America as a child. He came to Minneapolis with three brothers and a sister, and was later cited as the “patriarch among the Jewish pioneers who remained in Minneapolis.” He arrived in 1889 and with B. H. Plechner and his brother established a clothing and furnishing goods store on Washington Ave. S., “occupying the first brick store in the city.” Both Ralph and Gustave Rees were charter members of Shaarai Tov and B'nai B'rith, as well as the burial association.

The Rees family began another early association, the Baszion Benevolent Society. Ralph Rees' mother, Mrs. Saszion Rees, called 15 women together in 1876 to establish the society, which took her baptismal name for its first name. The society raised money, and its first event netted \$60, which was used to purchase fencing for the “newly bought burial ground.” In 1880 the benevolent society was incorporated and changed the name to the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society.

Many of the early German Jewish settlers in the city had experience in other American cities, and came to Minneapolis with enough capital to set up a business. These characteristics were common among the Montefiore Burial Association. Among the other early trustees or officers of the burial association were Jacob Cohen, a Russian-born dry goods merchant; Max Segelbaum, a German-born dry goods businessman; Max Wolff, Prussian-born and a Civil War veteran who was in business with Gimbel and Sons; and Samuel Jacobs, born in Prussia and owner of a jewelry store. All were charter members of Shaarai Tov and B'nai B'rith, and Segelbaum, Wolff and Jacobs had all lived in eastern cities for some time before coming west to Minneapolis.

The society was, in all likelihood, named in honor of Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885). He was a British philanthropist and community worker who was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1837 and known for his contribution of funds for economic development and schools in Palestine. Montefiore was well-known, as a world-wide celebration of his 100th birthday was held in 1884, and Duluth Jews created both a Hebrew school and an Orthodox congregation named in his honor in the 1890s.

The Montefiore Cemetery Chapel was an early design of Septimus J. Bowler, ca. 1890. Apparently self-taught, Bowler first advertised himself as an architect in 1888. His later Minneapolis work, for which he was better known, included the First Church of Christ Scientist (1897; NRHP, 1986) and Mikro Kodesh Synagogue (1926).

In 1890, when the Richardsonian Romanesque chapel was constructed, the cemetery was approximately two acres in size and outside the urban area of Minneapolis. The cemetery and chapel were particularly important for the Jewish community in order to carry out traditional burial practices. Until the World War I era, most deaths occurred at home. Traditional Jewish practice called for the body to be prepared for burial by the chevra kaddish (burial society), and the funeral service took place in the home. The undertaker provided carriages to bring the procession to the cemetery for the burial service. The mourners then proceeded to the cemetery chapel where afternoon prayers were recited. A period of shiva (mourning for seven days) began after the burial, as the mourners remained at home for visitation. The first Jewish undertaking establishment in Minneapolis started in 1914. Prior to that time, non-Jewish undertakers provided minimal support, supplying a coffin and transportation to the cemetery. By the 1930s, more funerals were being held at synagogues, and undertakers began to handle the body in the funeral home rather than the home preparation that previously predominated.

The Montefiore Cemetery, first in the city, was followed by other Jewish cemeteries. Adath Yeshurun (not the Synagogue Adath Jeshurun) purchased a tract of land (between W. 55th and Minnehaha Creek) on the southwestern outskirts of the city in 1887. The fraternal Order B'rith Abraham, with seven lodges in North Minneapolis, purchased two acres of land beyond the southwest city limits in 1889 (later known as the Lithuanian Cemetery). One of the lodges purchased its own cemetery in 1904, and was known as the Russian Cemetery. B'nai Abram, the Romanian congregation, purchased land adjacent to the Adath Yeshurun Cemetery in 1917, and later purchased land adjacent to the Russian Cemetery. The Gemilas Chesed (Bestowal of Loving Kindness) Society purchased a tract in 1936. Two other cemeteries located in Crystal were the Chesed Shel Emes Society (True Loving Kindness), and another owned by the local branch of the International Workers' Order.

The cemetery itself was expanded with a two-acre tract north of the original cemetery and an additional acre of land on the 3rd Ave. side by 1935. Montefiore Cemetery Association continued as a separate organization until 1950, when its officers approached Temple Israel for support. After two years' study, the congregation voted to merge with the cemetery association, and the name was changed to Temple Israel Cemetery on May 7, 1952. The architectural firm of Liebenberg and Kaplan, which had built the 1927 addition to Temple Israel, drafted plans for a new, modern chapel on the 4th Street side of the cemetery in 1957, but they were not pursued.

Septimus James Bowler, a native of London, began his career as a carpenter at the age of 16. By 1888, at age 20, he listed himself as an architect in Minneapolis. His practice flourished in the 1890s,

beginning with the design of the Gate Lodge and Mortuary Chapel of Montefiore Cemetery at 4153 3rd Ave. S.

His work also included the Laurel Apartments, 1502-06 Laurel, 1519 N. 15th (1893); the Home Flats 1516 and 1520 Elliot Ave. S. (1892); a brick store and flat, 929 Centennial Place (1895); and the Minneapolis Brewing Co. Saloon, 1515 7th St. S. (1899). According to *The Improvement Bulletin*, Bowler completed plans for the Minneapolis Brewing Company stores at 961 Central Ave. and 1620 N. 5th St.; buildings for the Black Hills Brewing Co. at Deadwood, S.D., and numerous other small commercial buildings in Minneapolis.

Bowler's major commission of the 1890s, however, was the First Church of Christ Scientist at 614-20 East Fifteenth Street (NRHP 1986). Bowler's design was chosen over six other entrants. The First Church of Christ Scientist (1897) followed the Beauxarts classicism popularized by the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Bowler's design for Mikro Kodesh (1926) utilized traditional elements for synagogues, including an elaborate entrance facade with dramatic window groupings and flanking stair towers. Byzantine domes were first popularized in the 1860s and identified with synagogue architecture thereafter.

Other than Mikro Kodesh, Bowler's later works are not known. Bowler continued to work as an architect through the 1930s, apparently in private practice, changing offices frequently. He died in Rochester, Minnesota, at age 72.