

April 2008

Harry Boonin

Author and Founding President of JGSGP

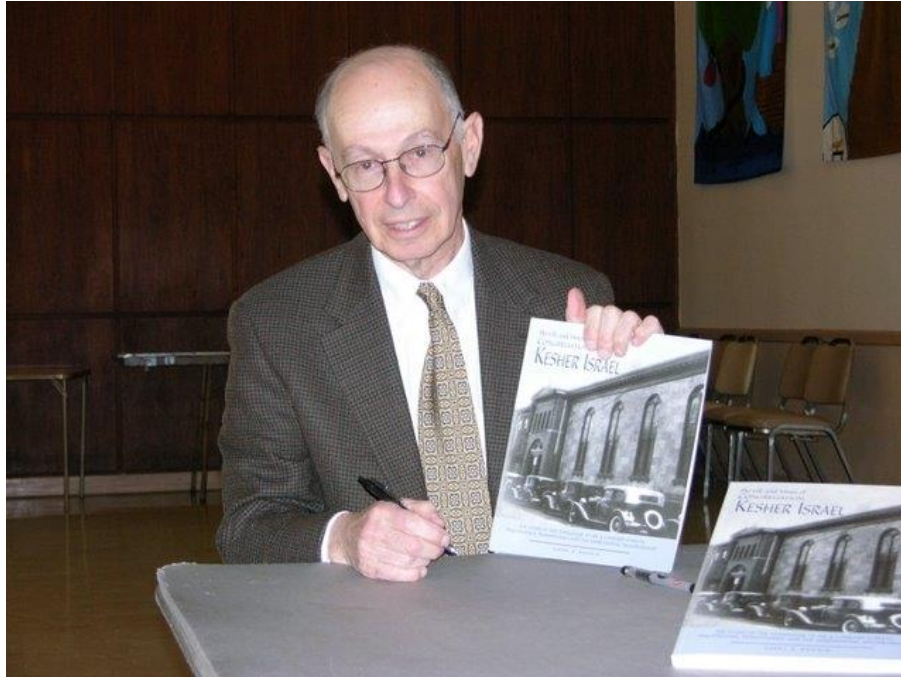


Photo Courtesy of Jack L. Weinstein

The Life and Times of Congregation Keshet Israel

When Harry was researching his first book, *The Jewish Quarter of Philadelphia*, he kept stumbling over stories about Keshet Israel, the *Shul* at Fourth and Lombard. Harry had majored in Russian language and history in college and is interested in the Russian Jews who settled in the South Street area. Harry was interested in the role of Russian immigrants in Jewish history, American history, and family genealogy.

Keshet Israel was the center of Zionism in Philadelphia. The Zionist group in Philadelphia was an outgrowth of meetings at Keshet Israel. In 1896, Charles Hoffman, the co-Editor of the *Jewish Exponent* from 1887 to 1897 founded a Hebrew speaking society in Philadelphia.

Zionism was not well supported in the US or Philadelphia. The Jewish Colonial Trust was founded to start a homeland in Eretz Israel at the turn of the 20th century. Bearer Bonds were sold for one pound sterling to acquire land. Over 300,000 shares were subscribed, but only 458 shares were subscribed in Philadelphia, mostly by Russian immigrants.

One of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Philadelphia was Dr. Benjamin Gordon of Jefferson Medical College. He led the Philadelphia Zionist movement for 25 years. In 1909, he took a trip to Palestine, prepared a presentation, and tried to gather interest in

Philadelphia for a Jewish homeland. Much more about Zionism in Philadelphia is in Harry's book.

The building that houses Keshet Israel was built as a Church in 1796. By 1887, this Church building was vacant. Keshet Israel was formed in 1894 through the merger of two Synagogues. In January 1897, Keshet Israel moved into this building. From 1897 through 1905, Keshet Israel was the place for Zionist meetings. KI was the venue for demonstrations against Pogroms and for a memorial to Theodore Herzl upon his death in 1904. By 1905, KI was a neighborhood *Shul*.

Harry's book covers the neighborhood, including the Dock Street market, the pushcart markets, Yiddish theater, sports, places for celebrations and much more. The book covers the era of mass immigration of Russian Jews, World War I, the Roaring Twenties and prohibition, the Great Depression, and the Holocaust.

Keshet Israel went into decline with the Depression, but remained a place of Jewish worship from 1897 continually to today. In 1998, the building was restored and is now a very active "traditional" Jewish house of worship.

Congregation Keshet Israel, 412 Lombard Street, Philadelphia 19147, 215-922-1776. Rabbi Ira S. Grussgott.

The Life and Times of Congregation Keshet Israel by Harry Boonin sells for \$29.95 plus applicable sales tax (\$1.80 in PA, \$2.10 in Philadelphia) plus shipping and handling of \$4.00. To purchase, make checks payable to JWT of Phila., Inc. and mail to Harry Boonin, 505 Plymouth Court, Warrington, PA 18976.