

The Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle

An introduction to burial data collected from headstones belonging to members of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle interred at Block 2, Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey

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*Honoring the 80th Anniversary of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle
(1934 – 2014)*



This database contains information on in-ground interments made under the auspices of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle (MGFC), in Block 2, Beth Israel Memorial Park, U.S. Highway One and Gill Lane, Woodbridge, New Jersey 07095 (GPS Coordinates: Latitude: 40.55164, Longitude: 74.31139). As of December, 2012, there were 96 members of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle buried at the Beth Israel Memorial Park site.

Arrangement and Condition of MGFC Burials

Block 2 of the Beth Israel Memorial Park is situated behind the cemetery's old Administration building. The site is bounded by narrow paved streets with the names Montefiore Avenue, Sinai Place and Saul Place. A path referred to as Central Walk bisects Block 2. The overall topography of Block 2 is that of a gently sloping field, devoid of trees and broken up only by clusters of graves. Each cluster is the domain of a particular Jewish burial or mutual aid society (landsmanshaften). None are protected by fences or hedges. The section that comprises the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle sits near the corner of Montefiore Avenue and Saul Place.

The graves belonging to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground are arranged in two sections separated by a central path. Each section contains two to five graves (Heb. *kever*) in twelve evenly spaced rows. The path runs down the entire length of the site, from front to the rear. The entrance, or portal, is marked by two stone pillars, joined at their bases by a stone threshold that bears the inscription: "Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle". The two

pillars are inscribed both in English and in Hebrew with the names of many of the first and second generation members of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle.

All but one headstone (Heb. *Matzeivah*) are made of a light gray granite and face forward towards the entrance of the site. The sole exception is a single white marble headstone that belongs to “Baby Kanter” who died on August 25, 1939. It sits low to the ground at the back of the section and is turned at a right angle to the other headstones.

All of the granite headstones appear to be in excellent condition. Those with high relief have retained their original definition and show no signs of severe weathering. At the time each of the headstones was photographed by the Fishbeins in February, 2012, no vandalism was evident. All of the stones stand perpendicular to the ground and appear to be in their original positions. The graves are well kept, with many of the plots outlined by a low-lying frame. Many are planted with low-growing shrubbery. In keeping with Jewish custom, small stones have been placed on many of the markers, signifying that family or friends have paid their respects at the graves of the deceased.

According to the IAJGS International Jewish Cemetery Project, the Beth Israel Memorial Park is a cemetery with approximately 60,000 burials and room for 40,000 more. Beth Israel opened in 1922 and covers 68 acres.

The Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle

The Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle (MGFC) was founded on January 14, 1934, and was registered formally with the State of New York as a domestic not-for-profit corporation under the name of the *Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle Fun Zwanetz Podolsk Inc.*, on June 25, 1934.ⁱ The original purpose of the organization was to serve as a family mutual-aid society, or landsmanshaften, to provide loans, maintain burial property and extend other forms of assistance to its members as was necessary and feasible. In 2014, the MGFC remains an ongoing concern, though its activities have been greatly diminished by changing times and the dispersal of family members to points outside of the New York metropolitan area.

Mordechai Gerstein

The origins of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle lie with its patriarch and namesake, Mordechai Gerstein (1820-1904). Mordechai, the son of Shlomo and Baylah Gerstein, was born and raised in the village of Zhvanets,ⁱⁱ a small settlement sitting astride the Zbruch River in the former Russian province of Podolia. It was here that Mordechai and his four sisters, Tsvia, Cheva, Frimma, and Inda lived out their lives. In 1900, Zhvanets boasted a Jewish population of 3,353.ⁱⁱⁱ

Podolia means “black earth,” and for centuries this land has attracted the attention of a multitude of conquering armies, from Scythians and Mongols to Kievan Rus, Poles and Ottoman Turks, each intent upon exploiting its rich agricultural potential, extracting tribute and seizing captives from the local population.

The Russian persecution of its Jewish population was particularly harsh. Among the most dreaded calamities was the impressment of Jewish boys, many as young as ten, into the army for terms of upwards of 25 years. Faced with this possibility, Mordechai's parents followed the pattern of Jews across the Pale of Settlement and sought sanctuary for their son outside the reach of the local authorities. Thankfully, the nearby Zbruch River marked the border between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. One day, Mordechai was secreted across the frontier, finding safety in the village of Uscie Biskupie (aka, Ust'ye), in the province of Galicia, 19 miles Northwest of Zhvanets. He returned home only when he was old enough to escape reprisal.

According to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Chronicle (1934-1997), Mordechai's father was a baker in Zhvanets. Rather than follow in his father's footsteps, Mordechai became "a furrier specializing in the Persian lamb fur hats which were popular with Russian men in winter. Apart from his home and business, he also owned land on which he built stores and subsequently leased to others." ^{iv}

Mordechai was married twice, first to Mirele (Miriam) Zimmerman (b.1839-d.1885) whom he first met in Uscie Biskupie, and then to Sussa Gover (b.1858-d.1920). Mordechai and Mirele had seven children: Tema Riva, Frimma, Freida, Kayleh, Leah, Yankel and Momtza. With Sussa he had five children: Baila-Ruchel, Morris, Lilly, Hyman and Fanny. A number of Mordechai's children married spouses from Khotin, a large fortress town five miles south of Zhvanets on the Dniester River.

Following Mordechai Gerstein's death in 1904, his children and their families gradually immigrated to the United States, settling first in New York City before succeeding generations moved out to cities and towns across the country. Sussa was not so fortunate. In 1920 she was "fatally wounded by a Russian border guard" while trying unsuccessfully to flee across the Dniester River on the first stage of her journey to America.^v Sussa was sixty-one at the time of her death.

Data Collection and Indexing

The information in this database was collected by Aliza M. Fishbein, Rand H. Fishbein and Julie W. Fishbein on February 14, 2012, and subsequently was indexed and translated from the Hebrew by Aliza M. Fishbein. It contains only data extracted from the headstones themselves. The indexing procedure used for this database follows the standard JOWBR protocol and, whenever possible, contains the following fields: Plot Location, Surname, Given Name(s), Place of Birth, Date of Birth, Place of Death, Date of Death (English), Date of Death (Hebrew), Age at Death, Date of Burial, Hebrew Name, Spouse's Name, Father's Name, Mother's Name, Other Surnames, All Towns, Photo Filename, Comments/Notes. A description of any engravings found on a headstone is contained in the Comments/Notes section of the database.

Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the visionary efforts of those who founded the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle in 1934 and the many men and women who have lovingly guided the organization over the last eighty years. Special recognition is due to Leonard and Yvette Seskin, who collected and published two monographs in 1997 and 1984 chronicling the history of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle, preserving forever the stories and life history of the family patriarch and his descendants. Additionally, a heartfelt thank you is due to Julie Fishbein, whose support in reviewing and editing this work, providing advice and technical assistance, and sharing in the highs and lows of our family's genealogical journey, has helped to make this project a reality. Lastly, our enduring gratitude is reserved for Nolan Altman, JOWBR's long-time Coordinator, whose steady hand and hard work built JOWBR into the extraordinary tool for the study of Jewish family history that it is today. His example has been an inspiration for this project.

Contact Information

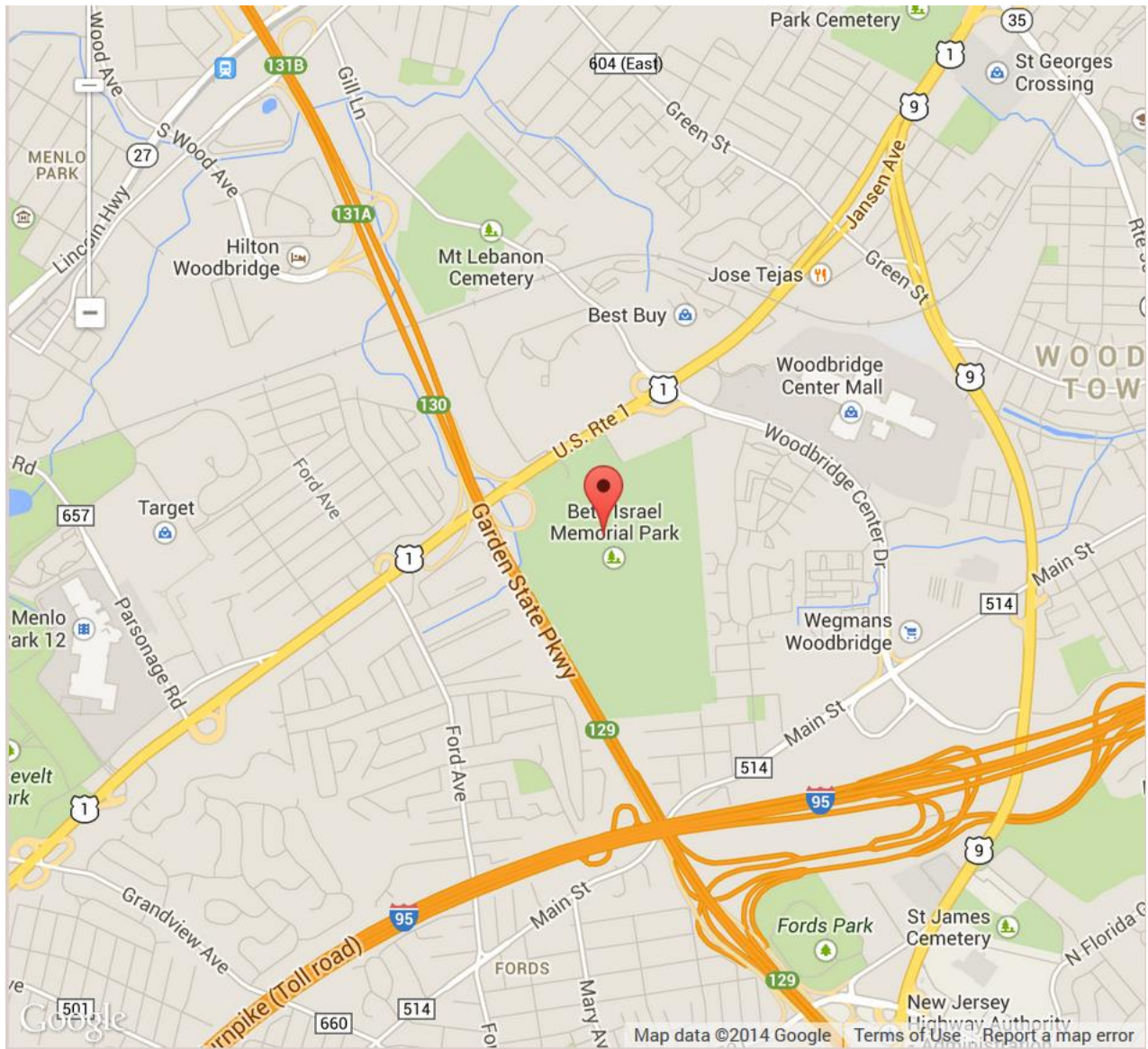
Rand H. Fishbein, Ph.D. and Aliza M. Fishbein, caretakers of this web page, ask that any additions and/or corrections to this database be directed to them at: fishnet@pipeline.com, Tel: (301) 469-0099, Fax: (301) 767-1692. Similarly, we invite anyone with a connection to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle or an interest in perpetuating this venerable organization, to contact us. We are eager to maintain the family legacy begun by Mordechai Gerstein and carried forward by his descendants. As such, we are continually in search of any documents, photographs, or other memorabilia that will enable us to add detail and color to the ever expanding story of our family.

The main office for Beth Israel Memorial Park can be reached by telephone at: Tel: (732) 634-2100 or by mail at: Administration, Beth Israel Memorial Park, U.S. Highway One, P.O. Box 706, Woodbridge, New Jersey 07095.



Prepared: May 30, 2014

**Beth Israel Memorial Park,
Woodbridge, New Jersey**



**Family Names Inscribed on the Entrance Gate to the Mordecai
Gerstein Family Circle Section, Block 2,
Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey**

Left Side of Entrance Portal: Memorial Stela	Right Side of Entrance Portal: Memorial Stela
Morris & Minnie GERSTEIN	Daniel & Fay HARRIS
Sam & Becky GOVER	Harry & Selina LUX
Morris & Lilly LICHTENTHAL	Dr. Dave & Ruth SENZER
Joe & Fanny KLEINBERG	Louis & Rosalyn FINKELSTEIN
Joe & Fanny KLEINBERG	Martin & Eleanor KLEINBERG
Joe & Fanny KLEINBERG	Sam & Goldie FRANK
Willie & Lena SESKIN	Anne BROWN
Harry & Esther STEIN	Jack & Jean DICKER
Morris & Minnie HOCHMAN	Hyman MADRISH
Sam & Miriam BLANK	Morris & Lizy GOVER
Carl & Bertha BLANK	Abraham & Mrs. BLANK
Dr. Herman J. & Nettie LUKEMAN	Louis & Beckie ZUFLACH
Martin & Marlene GERSTEIN	Jack & Mrs. ZUFLACH William & Chaika DICKER
	Eli & Minnie FARBERG
	Max & Shirley FARBERG
	Isidore & Ray FARBERG
	Harry & Muriel RISPLER
	Thelma FARBERG
	Rita FARBERG



Entrance portal to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground at Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Rand H. Fishbein Ph.D., February 14, 2012.



Close-up of pillars marking the entrance to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground at Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Rand H. Fishbein Ph.D., February 14, 2012.



Close-up of Hebrew inscription on the entrance pillars to the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground at Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Rand H. Fishbein Ph.D., February 14, 2012.



A side view of the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground at Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Rand H. Fishbein Ph.D., February 14, 2012.



Aliza Fishbein, Co-Coordinator for this project, responsible for indexing and translating all of the information contained on the headstones at the Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle burial ground, Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Rand H. Fishbein Ph.D., February 14, 2012.



Rand H. Fishbein, Ph.D., Co-Coordinator for this project, Block 2, Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle Burial Ground, Beth Israel Memorial Park, Woodbridge, New Jersey. Photograph courtesy of Aliza M. Fishbein, February 14, 2012.

ⁱ Department of State, State of New York, Certificate of Incorporation, Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle Fun Zwanetz Podolsk Inc., New York, 1934.

ⁱⁱ The village of Zhvanets is known by a number of alternate names: Zhvanets [Rus, Ukr], Zvantz [Yid], Żwaniec [Pol], Zvanitz, Zwanitse, Zvanec, Zhvaned, Svanyecz, Shwanez. See: "Zhvanets, Ukraine," Kahilialinks, JewishGen, <http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg-jgsys~community--1060900>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Zhvanets, Ukraine," Kahilialinks, JewishGen, <http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg-jgsys~community--1060900>

^{iv} Leonard and Yvette Seskin, *The Mordechai Gerstein Family Circle: A Chronicle – Vol. II, 1934-1997*, 1997.

^v *Ibid.*, 1997, p. 6.