

## **Waverly Jewish Cemetery up for listing in the National Historic Register**

“I’m Jewish, but I’m not religious.” How often have we heard this as a way in which we describe ourselves as modern Jews? We may not be that different from the pioneer Jews of this area who arrived in the 1800’s. I’m not saying they didn’t go elsewhere for religious observance, but these pioneer Jews did not immediately establish a Jewish congregation. They instead focused on local politics and industry, helping to establish educational institutions, museums, and libraries. Many joined the Masons, an organization in line with their Jewish values that fostered and supported their goals for the greater community, but they did not form a religious institution.

It wasn’t until Clara Senders, an infant daughter of one of the Jewish families died in December of 1877 that the Jews of Albany organized. The heart-breaking event catalyzed the rallying of the area’s Jews to establish a formalized Jewish community. In April of 1878, Bertha and Isaac Senders, four months after burying their daughter on their land, deeded that land to the newly formed First Hebrew Congregation of Albany Oregon, who would now oversee the newly established Albany Hebrew Cemetery.

Today, as I walk through the Waverly Jewish Cemetery (Albany Hebrew Cemetery), I remember not only the Jewish families who were pioneers here, but also more recent losses of beloved members (among them, “pillars”) of our Corvallis and Salem communities who are also buried here. I feel the importance of preserving this place, and I am far from the only one.

Our local Burial Society, which rededicated the cemetery in 1989, works to guide and support families who wish to follow Jewish practices for burial and remembrance of loved ones. The Burial Society in recent years has taken on a larger role of ensuring that the Waverly Jewish Cemetery is well cared for. Last year, because of a generous donation from an individual, we were able to hire landscapers who mowed, weeded, attended the trees and shrubs, and planted white rose bushes at the street-side edge of the grounds.

This year the cemetery, which is already listed in Oregon’s historic registry, has been approved by the Oregon advisory committee to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its acceptance is anticipated in the spring, thanks to Amy Crain who began working on this project nearly a decade ago, and with a huge amount of assistance from Daniel Froehlich, archivist for Waverly Jewish Cemetery.

The Burial Society is planning to raise \$1500 (\$750 in donations each, from the Corvallis and Salem communities) to pay for an assessment, leveling and cleaning of the tombstones, which will preserve and improve the aesthetics of this special place. In addition, we are applying for an Oregon Heritage Grant for the purpose of rebuilding many of the broken headstones. Other plans for this year include fixing the sprinkler system, installing paths, a few small benches, and an interpretive sign. We are also looking into security measures such as increased lighting (perhaps in conjunction with the city of Albany). Volunteers will be called to come and help with parts of this project in spring or summer.

Please consider taking a drive to Waverly Jewish Cemetery to visit and see our progress over the coming year. And please consider donating to this important Jewish project through Beit Am's Chevra Kaddisha Fund.

Submitted by Joni Plotkin for WVJC Burial Society

We are grateful for the historical information provided by Amy Crain's application for the Historic Register and by Daniel Froehlich.

*Waverly Jewish Cemetery headstone for Hirsch J. Joseph, photo by Steven Crain 2006*

