

From The Parnas

By Mark I. Wolfson

Dr. Abraham A. Neuman

This week we remember the Hashcabah for Rev. Dr. Abraham Aaron. Neuman, former minister of Mikveh Israel from 1927 to 1943. Dr. Neuman succeeded the Rev. Leon H. Elmaleh as minister and was just the eighth minister of the congregation since the first in 1780. Dr. Neuman was born in Brezau, Austria in September 1890 to an old Rabbinic family. At the age of eight, he emigrated to the United States and went on to study at R. Isaac Elhanan Yeshiva, Columbia University, and the Jewish Theological Seminary under Solomon Schechter. By the age of 22, in 1912, he had received a B.S. from Columbia and was ordained as a Rabbi.

Following his graduation from Columbia and ordination as a Rabbi, Dr. Neuman joined the faculty of Dropsie College in Philadelphia, where he taught history for the next 27 years. He became an associate professor in 1923 and full professor in 1934. From 1919-1927, Dr. Neuman was the Rabbi of B'nei Jeshurun in Strawberry Mansion and then became the minister of Mikveh Israel until 1943. He was installed as Minister on Sunday September 25, 1927 during an elaborate Installation Ceremony at the synagogue. The Installation Sermon was delivered by Dr. David de Sola Pool, Rabbi of our sister congregation Shearith Israel in New York. At the time, Rabbi Newman was President of the Philadelphia Board of Jewish Ministers. The Vice-President, Rabbi Mortimer Cohen of Beth Shalom Congregation delivered the Installation Prayer. Addresses were delivered by D. Hays Solis-Cohen, Parnas of Mikveh Israel, United States Congressman Benjamin M. Golder and Dr. Cyrus Adler, Adjunto of Mikveh Israel and President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and President of Dropsie College.

Dr. Cyrus Adler had served as the president of Dropsie College from its founding in 1907 until his death in 1940. The school began its existence as the Dropsie College of Hebrew and Cognate Learning and grew to become Dropsie University before eventually merging into the University of Pennsylvania and becoming the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies.

After the passing of Dr. Adler, Dr. Neuman assumed the presidency of Dropsie College, a post he held until retiring in 1966 for reasons of health. The board then elected Dr. Neuman to the office of Honorary President and to life membership on the board. During his presidency, the college expanded its curriculum and added departments. In the early 1940's departments were added in Jewish Philosophy, Hebrew Literature, History of Semitic Civilization, Assyriology and Egyptology and Comparative Religion. In 1948, he established the Institute for Israel and the Middle East, which was the first complete unit for Middle Eastern studies in any American University and included studies in the history, anthropology, economics, religion, and social and political institutions of the countries in the Middle East including extensive courses relating to Israel. Under Dr. Neuman's administration, there was a large increase in the enrollment of Jews, Christians, and Moslems.

Dr. Neuman produced many scholarly books and articles. His most famous work was "The Jews of Spain", published in 2 volumes in 1942, which detailed the social life of the Jews of Spain. He also wrote a biography of Cyrus Adler, also published in 1942. He wrote countless articles which were published in scholarly periodicals. Dr. Neuman was very active

in the development of the Zionist movement in the United States. He was renowned as an orator and was often sought after as a public speaker.

Among his many affiliations, he was the Editor of the Jewish Quarterly Review, Trustee of Gratz College and Chairman of its College Committee, member of the Publication Committee of the Jewish Publication Society of America and Vice-President of the American Jewish Historical Society. He was also the Revising Editor of the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia. In 1940, Dr. Neuman served as a Democratic Presidential Elector for the State of Pennsylvania.

Rev. Dr. Abraham A. Neuman died on November 20 (21 Heshvan), 1970.