

From Our History

By Mark I. Wolfson

Abraham Sulzberger

This week we remember the Hashcabah of Abraham Sulzberger, the great-great grandfather of our dear friend and member since birth Berthold Levy, who passed away a couple of years ago at the age of 97. Abraham Sulzberger was the first of Bert's ancestors to come to Philadelphia and begin a long legacy of outstanding and influential members of Mikveh Israel, the wider Jewish community in Philadelphia, and the broader secular society in Philadelphia in general.

Abraham Sulzberger was born in Heidelberg in Baden, Germany on May 20, 1810. His father Solomon (Meshullam) Sulzberger had been a Rabbi there, and Abraham followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a scholar in Jewish texts as well as serving as Hazan, reader, and teacher in his local congregation. He married Sophia Einstein and had six children, including the famous Mayer Sulzberger who was born on June 22, 1843, and was destined to be the most prominent and influential Philadelphia Jew of his generation, and in 1894 was the first Jew to sit as a judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

During the uprising of 1848 in Germany there were reprisals against the Jews, and Abraham decided to relocate his family to Philadelphia. They arrived in 1849 and established themselves in the city and joined Mikveh Israel. The following year, Sulzberger was one of 8 charter members who founded the Har Sinai Lodge of District No. 3 of the B'nai B'rith. Sulzberger served as its president for the next 25 years.

During the Civil War, Rev. Isaac Leeser, the Minister of Mikveh Israel, was very concerned about the wounded Jewish soldiers in the army hospitals. He obtained a hospital pass from his friend General Charles Collis, who was married to Septima Levy, formerly of Charleston. Sulzberger would accompany Leeser on hospital visits to the Jewish wounded. During the annual meeting of the Grand Lodge No. 3 of the B'nai B'rith on August 14, 1864, Sulzberger, in calling attention to the fact that three Jews within the previous six months had died in various area Christian hospitals, offered resolutions asking for the appointment of a committee to consider the subject of organizing a Jewish Hospital.

That committee was established and included Sulzberger, Rev. Isaac Leeser, Samuel Weil and others. Within a few days a circular was sent to every

B'nai B'rith Lodge and all of the congregations and Jewish societies in the area requesting appointments for committees. On December 4, the first meeting of this joint convention was held during which a plan was prepared, and a constitution and by-laws were framed and presented. On Sunday February 19th, 1865, these were ratified by a large meeting of the area Jews at a meeting held at the National Guard's Hall on Race Street below Sixth. Officers and managers were appointed, including President Alfred T. Jones, Vice President Isadore Binswanger, Treasurer Samuel Weil, and Secretary Mayer Sulzberger. Sulzberger's home at 977 North Marshall Street became the temporary headquarters of the provisional committee for the hospital.

The Association was incorporated on September 23, 1865 and a lot was soon purchased at 56th Street and Haverford Road in West Philadelphia for \$19,625. The hospital opened on August 6, 1866 along with a home for the aged. It started with 22 beds and linens donated by philanthropist Moses Rosenbach. During the first year 71 patients were treated and 5 people were admitted to the old-age home. In 1873, the hospital moved to greatly expanded facilities at Old York Road and Olney Avenue. In 1952, after merging with Northern Liberties Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital to form a single medical center, it evolved into the Albert Einstein Medical Center. It was very appropriate that Einstein granted permission to use his name for the non-profit organization, as Sulzberger's wife Sophia descended from the same Einstein family.