

# Hawthorne Historical Society



*Crumbling walls and a discolored stone entryway mark the location of the Ahavath Joseph cemetery on Brockhuizen Lane. The graveyard is still maintained by local Jewish congregations.*

## Old Jewish cemetery still stands strong

The century-old Ahavath Joseph cemetery maintains its heritage

**BY VERONICA MACDONALD DITKO**

*Special to the Hawthorne Historical Society newsletter*

Hawthorne has many treasures, and a group of Society members took a hike up Brockhuizen Lane on April 26 to check out a few. Two cemeteries, the Ahavath Joseph Cemetery and the Holland Cemetery, are located off this street.

The Ahavath Joseph cemetery was originally purchased by a group of people from Slutsk, Lithuania (now Belarus), who moved to Paterson in the 1890s and formed a Jewish congregation called Ahavath Joseph on Godwin Street.

“It was customary that once people set up a congregation, they would get land for a cemetery,” explains Ruth Brooks, Ahavath Joseph Cemetery Chairwoman. “Back then, young chil-

dren and adults passed away from diphtheria, pneumonia, measles, polio, etc. – things that we have inoculations for today.”

In fact, there were clusters of deaths, as evidenced by the gravestones, due to the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the diphtheria epidemic of the 1920s. Many stillborn and very young babies were buried at that time without gravestones. However, the parents knew where they were interred. “But sadly, there are no records now,” Brooks says.

The land where the cemeteries were purchased used to be Dutch farmland. The members of Ahavath Joseph were entitled to a plot in the cemetery, says Brooks, and they would purchase one when the need arose. Inscriptions on the tombstones were often in Yiddish, which took up less space than Hebrew. Originally the cemetery was arranged in rows of men and women. But later,

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## The Society President's Update

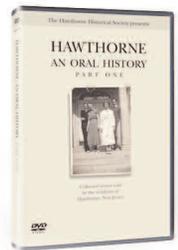
**BY BRENNA ROONEY**

Greetings and welcome to the first issue of the Hawthorne Historical Society's newsletter. I hope you find it interesting as well as informative.

As the Society's current president, I have the privilege to report on our organization's current activities. While we are a relatively new organization, we have managed to keep very busy lately, and I hope that by reading about our activities, you will be inspired to join us in our goal of preserving and sharing Hawthorne's history.

First, in keeping with our main goal of educating the public about our wonderful town, we have produced the documentary, *Hawthorne: An Oral History, Part 1*. This DVD release contains nearly 40 minutes of endearing, honest, and often humorous recollections from long-time residents. It was filmed in the summer of 2007 and successfully premiered during our 2007 Holiday Open House. (We will be filming a second installment at the library on August 23.)

Additionally, we have seen the successful launch of our stained glass window note card project.



*The Society's documentary DVD release is available for \$15 at the Louis Bay 2nd Memorial Library or by contacting us through our Web site.*

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## TRIVIA CONTEST

### Are you 'Street Smart'?

What is the original name of Lincoln Avenue?

For whom is Emeline Drive named?

Where does Utter Avenue get its name from?

E-mail correct answers to all three questions to [info@hawthornehistory.org](mailto:info@hawthornehistory.org) before November 1, 2008. If you're right, you win a free one-year Society membership. Answers will appear in our next newsletter.

## President's Update

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This project not only captures the beauty of Hawthorne's stained glass windows, but also helps preserve these works of art for everyone to enjoy. Although many residents kindly offered their windows to be featured, only 10 have been published so far. Like the DVD, the notecard sets can be purchased by contacting us through our Web site.

We have been very privileged to acquire five large containers of the late Mayor Bay's belongings from his daughter, Barbara Donahue. Among the books, photos and newspaper clippings, and other "hidden gems" that allow us a glimpse into a time gone by. A sampling of this collection can be seen [in](#) the library as part of our rotating display.

In May, we participated in the town-wide Garage Sale. Many Society members made donations of both merchandise and time. Despite the uncooperative weather, we were able to raise over \$250, and get our name out.

These certainly are not the only things our organization has done, and I look forward to updating you in the future about our other exciting endeavors. Until then, I hope you take an interest in our projects and, if you're not already a member, join up now.



*The Holland (or Vermulen) Cemetery, also on Brockhuizen Lane, was used by local Dutch reformed churches in the 1800s. The remaining gravestones provide a sobering reminder of what life was like two centuries ago. Here, the marker for a child who died at 21 months.*

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families were buried together.

Marty Rittenberg of Wayne says his grandparents were not buried together in this cemetery. It was considered a hex to buy a cemetery plot prematurely, he adds. His grandfather, Abraham Max Rittenberg, was the second president of the Ahavath Joseph synagogue.

Abraham left Lithuania in 1883 and came to New York City where he met his future wife, Fannie Simmons from Russia. "They were looking for a better way of life in coming to America, as well as to escape from religious persecution," Marty explains.

Together, Marty's grandparents opened a wholesale candy factory in Paterson. They had eight children; however, four did not live to adulthood and are buried in the cemetery without gravestones. Abraham died in 1914 and was also buried in the Ahavath Joseph cemetery.

Other people buried in the cemetery include members of the Spira family, founders of Spira's Department Store in Paterson, in 1898.

The gates of the cemetery were donated by Dina Solte Webster, one-time owner of the Junior Shop in Paterson.

The Ahavath Joseph congregation eventually merged with Congregation B'nai Israel in Paterson, adopting the B'nai Israel/Ahavath Joseph name. That congregation is still alive today in Paterson, however the aging congregation is getting smaller and a religious school occupies its building.

"Like many stories of other immigrant

city communities, the population moved," says Brooks. "The congregation, because of changes in demographics, is literally dying."

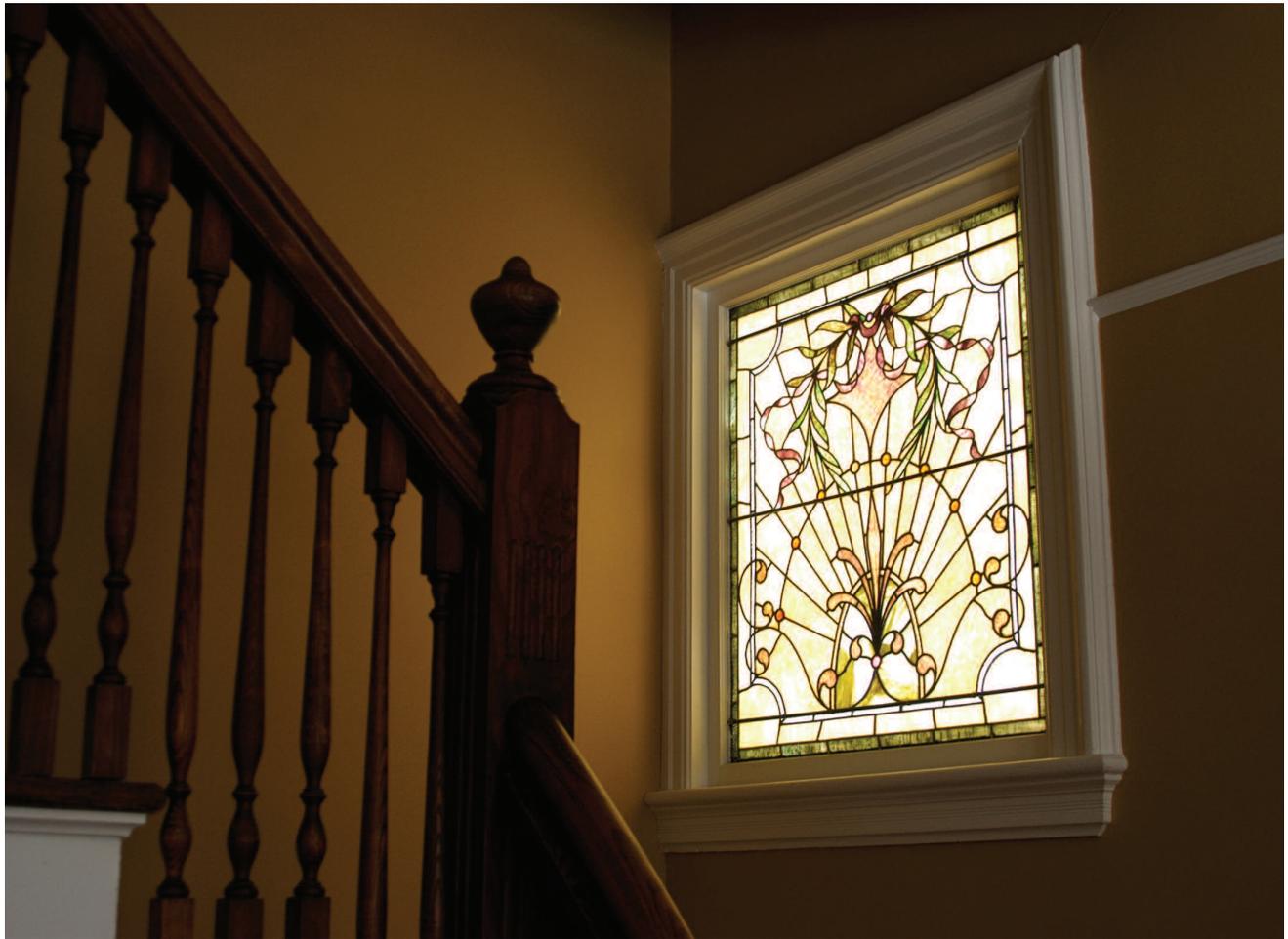
But the care of the cemetery goes on. Like many aging Jewish cemeteries, nearby congregations or the Jewish Federation maintain them.

The last person to be buried in the Ahavath Joseph Cemetery was in the 1990s, and a few plots remain. The cemetery still draws a distant relative of the people buried there. One neighbor, Hank Ringma, says he notices stones on top of the gravestones every once in a while.

"The stone tells whoever is buried there that someone has come to visit," says Brooks. "It is as if saying, 'we were here.'"

The cemetery alongside Ahavath Joseph used to be called Holland Cemetery or Vermulen Cemetery, and was used by local Dutch reformed churches in the 1800s. Today, there are just a few gravestones remaining. Most of the bodies and stones were exhumed and moved to Fair Lawn Memorial Cemetery on Maple Avenue. Those that remain provide a sobering reminder of what life was like two centuries ago. A child – only 1 year, 9 months old – has a tiny headstone. Others are inscribed entirely in Dutch, with names such as Van Adrianis and Veeneman. Allegedly there is also an old German cemetery nearby, according to some borough residents.

These cemeteries are a reminder of the struggles that immigrant families had to face, and the foundation of local traditions they left to us. [in](#)



GLENN GARVIE

*This turn-of-the-century stained glass window at 744 Goffle Road is said to have been a wedding gift to the home's original owners.*

## Behind the (Stained) Glass

Sometimes visible, sometimes not, many of Hawthorne's earliest homes still contain original – but hidden – works of glass art

**BY VERONICA MACDONALD DITKO**  
*Special to the Hawthorne Historical Society newsletter*

The Hawthorne Historical Society is interested in locating and researching stained glass windows in many of Hawthorne's older houses, but there's a catch – many homeowners might not know such windows exist.

"There may be as many as a thousand in town," says Society trustee Jeff Gardner. "These were proud treasures of turn-of-the-century homes, but I am certain many are hidden behind siding or walls. At least two people that I am aware of have exposed them recently."

The Society has photographed evident stained glass windows as part of its Stained Glass Window Project, and those images are available to the

public as post cards. They are also displayed on [www.hawthornehistory.org](http://www.hawthornehistory.org).

Ribbon-tied bundles of five postcards each are on sale for \$10. Proceeds go toward the Society's application for tax-exempt status, the purchase of archiving software, and a long-term goal of establishing a museum, says Gardner.

The Society has researched each window. "There is more than one maker of the stained glass, as can be seen by the different qualities and styles," says Gardner. "But some definitely share the same maker."

The first cataloging of windows for the ongoing Stained Glass Window Project has been from private homes.

The Society hopes to also chronicle the wealth of stained glass windows that are present in Hawthorne's many churches during the coming year. ■

THE GARVIE COLLECTION



*A view of Goffle Road looking north just above Diamond Bridge Avenue in 1907. This original photograph was used as a postcard, mailed by a Mrs. Mebray from "North Paterson." Some of the card's message, written in pencil, reads: "This is one of the drive ways here where my sister lives. We came to N.J. the 6 October, will return next week by way of my home. It is certainly a beautiful country here."*

*A news clipping of a poem, circa 1953, culled from the Society's Mayor Bay Collection. The author is unknown, credited only with the cryptic initials E.M.*

## Friendly Hawthorne

BY E.M.

I like to live in Hawthorne  
And sit among the trees and flowers.  
I love to be in my garden –  
I sit out by the hours  
And watch the birds so lovely,  
All happy and so free  
Come down to your feet  
Then fly up in the tree.

The cheery, friend greeting  
Of neighbors passing by.  
You look up to the heavens  
And see such a blue sky.

I like to do my shopping  
We have such real nice stores,  
Two big super-markets  
A 5 & 10, and more ...  
The best food you can eat;  
Bakery and butcher, and  
All things that you need.  
You know that you get the best  
For we are the type of people  
Who put things to a test.

Then we have our churches  
Of all denominations,  
All banded in one family  
To give help and consolation,  
Whatever be your nation.

Our high school is the finest  
Our public schools are, too.  
A Fire Dept. to be proud of –  
A band of fighters true.  
We've a wonderful ambulance,  
The best that they could buy,  
Free to all who call for help,  
And given with a smile.  
We are proud of our Police –  
Each one is "on his feet",  
A sincere Chief directs them,  
He's noble, kind, discreet.

Our Mayor and Commissioners,  
They see we have the best.  
And our "Daddy" – we all love him ...  
Now who would that be – guess  
It's Ray Rhodes with his greetings  
So very kind and true,  
Always ready to help you  
In all that you may do.  
Visit our park for recreation,  
You'll have fun if you are able

To feed the ducks, and then  
Have a picnic at the table.  
Go for a dip in our pool  
That's the way to keep real cool.  
Visit our Boys Club –  
They have good times;  
And our Little Leaguers –  
"Right on the line!"

We've a club for 50's and older,  
"Golden Harvesters" is the name.  
They sure do have a good time  
As they travel from here to Maine.

You all must know our Caballeros –  
Our band with honors grand,  
They're County, State, and National  
Champs –  
Color Guard and Band  
But don't forget our young Muchachos  
A pleasure, sure, to see.  
They drill and play so very well,  
They're [sic] trophies are "something  
to see!"

There are many more I could mention  
In our Hawthorne so fine.  
That's why the good folks here  
Have stayed a long, long time!

Hawthorne businesses are encouraged to help sponsor future editions of this newsletter.

For more information and rates, please send an e-mail to [info@hawthornehistory.com](mailto:info@hawthornehistory.com)