

Minutes of the Bellville Congregation 1919 – 1948

We are delighted to have found a copy (in the Kaplan Centre Archives) of the minute books of the Bellville Congregation from the very beginning in 1919 to 1948. The full handwritten minutes can be seen on the 'Activities' page. In this article I highlight some of the key milestones and the decisions that were made along the way. Further articles may follow.

The First Meetings

A meeting was called by Mr. H Sacks on May the 25th 1919 at his residence of all Jewish residents to consider the advisability of forming a Hebrew Congregation and appointing a Schochet and Hebrew teacher.

Most of the Bellville residents and several from Parow attended, and after much discussion, it was decided to form a congregation under the name of: -

Bellville Hebrew Congregation

and appoint a Schochet.

The question of Parow combining with Bellville was considered but no definite arrangements were arrived at.

At a meeting on the 29th June, the following committee was elected: Mr. B. Sacks President, Mr. H. Berkowitz vice President, Mr. H. Sacks Treasurer, Mr. H. Jaffe Secretary, Messrs. G Antesorsky, S Cohen and B. Kruskal as committee members. Mr. G. Antesorsky to act as collector.

It was decided to advertise in the press for a suitable man to fill the position of Schochet and Hebrew teacher.

The Appointment of Rev. Moshe Rabinowitz

Pages 7 and 8 of the minutes

A General Meeting was held at Mr. J. Wainstein's residence on March 15th (1921). The purpose being to discuss Rev. M. Rabinowitz's application as Schochet and Hebrew teacher, Mr. Rabinowitz having arrived that day from Ceres. The attendance was quite satisfactory and he was introduced to each member by Mr. G. Antesorsky. After the Chairman had asked him a few questions, Rev. Rabinowitz was requested to leave the room, so that the members could decide about him. The Chairman then remarked that we should not make any agreement with Rev Rabinowitz but see about him after a few months' time. Mr. Antesorsky responded that since he has been from ten to twelve years at Ceres as Reverend, he should be good enough for us. To which the Chairman replied

that we should see if he could teach children and test him. Rev. Rabinowitz was then called in. Mr. Cohen then asked him that since he had previously had a shop in Ceres, if he had kept open his shop on Saturdays. To which Rev. Rabinowitz replied “certainly not”. Upon the members asking him to test the children’s knowledge of Hebrew at 5pm the following day, he agreed to do it. It was decided that Mr. Sacks, Mr. Kruskal, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Abel were to be present.

At a meeting held on March 20th at the residence of Mr. B. Kruskal, Rev. Rabinowitz was accepted at a salary of 30 pounds a month.

These were the terms of agreement of his appointment:

- a) Rev. Rabinowitz is to commence his duties as “Shochet”, Hebrew teacher and “Bal Tfilah” of the Bellville Hebrew Congregation from the 1st of April 1921 for a period of 12 months, terminating on the 31st March 1922. (He retired in 1947 and continued to teach the tanach).
- b) Included in the Bellville Hebrew Congregation is KuilsRiver and either Parow or Durbanville.
- c) The salary is thirty pounds per month for the whole period.
- d) Three months’ notice is to be given by either party.
- e) Should Durbanville amalgamate with us, then the conditions will be considered at a General Meeting.
- f) Rev. Rabinowitz is also to see that Bellville is provided with Kosher Meat.
- g) Any expenses incurred by Rev. Rabinowitz in travelling to Parow to do his duties will be refunded by the congregation.
- h) Rev. Rabinowitz is to confine himself only to the duties of the Bellville Hebrew Congregation. He cannot undertake any other duties.

Rules for the Congregation

Pages 10 and 12 of the minutes

A General Meeting was held at Mr. B. Sacks residence on March 21st, 1921 and it was proposed to draw up the rules for the congregation.

- a) Every married member is to subscribe one guinea per month and every unmarried member half-a-guinea per month as a contribution. All outsiders coming to Bellville for the Schochet are to pay half-a-guinea per month, but the members of that place where the Schochet goes to do his duties are to pay one guinea per month as a contribution.
- b) All members should sign the agreement.

- c) The fee for tuition in Hebrew is 1 pound per boy and 10 shillings per girl. If any members has two boys, he is to pay for two but if a member has three boys then he is only to pay for two. If he has four boys, then he is only to pay for three.
- d) If any member fails to pay his monthly contribution after two months' time, then after a month's notice the committee have the right to exclude him from the Congregation. The excluded member will also not be supplied with "Kosher" meat.
- e) Any member who has a backward balance and who is unable to pay it in one time, should at least pay half-a-guinea on his backward debt together with his monthly contribution every month.
- f) Any member who has not paid for two months, then a registered letter should be sent to him giving him fourteen days to pay.
- g) The Congregation should have at least one meeting per month.
- h) The Rev. is to see about the Kosher meat.

After a vote of thanks had been given to Mrs. Sacks for kindly supplying grapes etc. at the meeting, it was resolved that a General Meeting should be held at Mr. G. Antesorsky's residence on Friday the 25th inst. at 10 a.m. sharp and that the secretary should write postcards to all members.

The Synagogue

Pages 15 to 36 of the minutes

A General Meeting was held at Mr. Goronovsky's residence on May 27th 1924 concerning the building of a synagogue. Every member of the Congregation was present. It was agreed unanimously that each member should pay 10 guineas as a donation towards the erection of the synagogue. Later on members could donate whatever sums they wished. Members who could not pay the total amount at once, could have a period of three months in which to complete payment of the 10 guineas. A banking account would be opened at the Standard Bank for the Bellville Synagogue.

At a General Meeting held at Mr. B. Sacks residence on Sunday at 8 p.m. on June 15th 1924, Messrs. Sacks and Efrogin would go to the Bellville Brickfield and see whether they could get bricks for the Synagogue.

Members were chosen to go to Durbanville, Parow, KuilsRiver and far afield as Somerset West and Strand for purposes of getting donations.

A letter should be written to Mr. F. J. van H. Duminy expressing warmest thanks for the generous gift of two plots of ground for the Synagogue. The copy of the letter was included after the minutes. It is mentioned that the plots of ground were in "Duminy Township" (Rhos Street). (Page 16 of the minutes).

An approximate cost of the Synagogue was worked out to be 1015 pounds. (Page 19 of the minutes).

Many meetings were held discussing the finances involved.

The official opening of the Synagogue was decided to be on the 11th September 1927.

Protest to the Government

Page 53 of the minutes

1929:

The meeting was held in the Synagogue Hall to protest against the proposed Immigration Bill as presented before the House of Parliament.

Mr. Sacks was in the chair and explained that it was essential that this meeting be called. Dr. L Sive moved the following resolution seconded by Rev Rabinowitz which was unanimously passed.

“This mass meeting of Jewish Citizens of Bellville emphatically protests against the proposed Immigration Quota Bill on the grounds that is based on unjust and illiberal principles because of its discrimination against particular races and creeds. This meeting is of the opinion that the admission of immigrants should be based upon their individual qualifications, character and conduct and not upon their country of origin.’

The Secretary was instructed to telegraph the above resolution to Gen Hertzog, Dr. D.F. Malan and Mr. Faure, our member.

Helping a Congregant in Financial Difficulties

Page 59 of the minutes

A special meeting was called (+- 1932) in connection with the unfortunate circumstances of Mr. Kaufman of Bellville.

A discussion took place, the question being how the Congregation could assist Mr. and Mrs. Kaufman who were in need of 50 pounds to start them in business. The chairman, Mr. Becker, proposed that a list be drawn and all members contribute. This was seconded. It was agreed that the sum of 50 pounds be raised that way and handed to Mr. Kaufman who would repay the same when able.

The Retirement of Chairman and Chazzan Mr. Samuel Becker

Page 79 of the minutes

A reception and farewell presentation was made to Mr. Samuel Becker on the 24th February 1937 at the synagogue in the presence of the entire members of the congregation and their wives and children,

As it was erev purim, Maariv was first davened and the Megilla was read.

After the service, Dr. L. Sive in an excellently delivered speech in Yiddish eulogized the good work of Mr. Becker as chairman for the past 5 years and as chazzan for the past 15 years. He wished Mr. and Mrs. Becker and family a very happy future. On behalf of the congregation, Dr. Sive then presented Mr. Becker with a handsome teak desk suitably engraved with a silver plaque.

Mr. Becker then suitably responded.

After this, light refreshments and minerals were served thanks to the efforts of Mesdames Sive and C. Rabinowitz.

Rev. Rabinowitz Retirement and Successor

Pages 129 to 138 of the minutes

At a special General Meeting held on the 1st May 1947, a letter of resignation from Rev. Rabinowitz was received and accepted. The chairman, Leslie Kaplan, informed the meeting that the committee held an interview with Rev. Marcus of Woodstock who was prepared to offer his service as Shochet, Teacher and Baal Musoph. This was accepted.

At a Committee Meeting on the 6th May 1947, the chairman pointed out that the general meeting was convened only in connection with the retirement of Rev. Rabinowitz and so it was unconstitutional to engage or select a new reverend. The secretary was therefore instructed to explain this to Rev. Marcus and to ask him to submit an application.

On the 12th May 1947, an application of Rev. Katz of Oudshoorn was read and an interview with Rev. Katz took place. He was prepared to accept the position of Teacher in modern Hebrew, Shochet and Baal Musoph with (some of) the conditions: A salary of 50 pounds per month for 6 months' trial. If the engagement was cancelled, another 50 pounds to be paid as a Baal Musoph fee. If this engagement is prolonged, this fee would fall away. Should his engagement become permanent, the salary must be increased to 60 pounds per month.

At a special General Meeting held on the 21st May 1947, the appointment of Rev. Katz was opposed. Mr. Minde proposed to engage Rev. Marcus on the same conditions. The chairman replied that the congregation favour a full time reverend who could also

supervise the meat distribution on a strictly kosher basis. Alec Sacks proposed a temporary teacher be engaged until a full time Reverend was available and to ask Rev. Rabinowitz to do the slaughtering at a fee of 10 pounds per month. This was agreed unanimously. A letter was to be written to Rev. Marcus advising of the meetings decision.

At a meeting on 22 December 1947 (page 135 of the minutes), a cable was received from Rabbi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Palestine re engaging of a Reverend Teacher and Shochet. As the vacancy was still open, it was decided to reply. (Apparently, Rabbi Herzog was referring to an acquaintance of his, Rev. Rudie of Muizenberg to be considered for the job). At a meeting on the 23rd February 1948, a reply to the letter of Rabbi Herzog was read by the chairman. As the applicant (Rev. Rudie) was at present a shopkeeper he was rejected as unsuitable. (Rabbi Herzog is the father of Chaim Herzog, the sixth President of Israel and grandfather of the current President, Isaac Herzog).

A number of other applicants were interviewed without being appointed.

At a meeting on 9th June 1948, the chairman read an application from Rev. Kwiatkowski of Upington. On the 26th July 1948, he was appointed on a three-year contract of 70 pounds a month and to start from January 1949 or sooner.

The Building of a Communal Hall, Chedar and House

Pages 105, 106, 108, 125 and 137 of the minutes

At a Special General Meeting held at the Shul in October 1943, the chairman, Mr. A. Rabinowitz, proposed that a collection to build a communal hall be started. It was carried.

At 26 Annual General Meeting held on 23rd April 1944, after a lengthy discussion, it was agreed that the building of the hall be rejected and monies repaid. Leslie Kaplan proposed and Alec Sacks seconded that plans be submitted for building a new chedar.

At 27 Annual General Meeting held on 13th May 1945, Messrs. Marcus and Sacks were appointed to interview an architect for new Shul Hall.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 15th April 1947, the building plan for a chedar was shown to members for approval. Alec Sacks proposed to rather build a house and an extra room in the house be for teaching the children. Both plans for a chedar and a house were approved. The plan for the chedar was approved with a vote of 10 for and 9 against.

At the Annual General Meeting on the 9th June 1948, Mr. Friedberg seconded by Mr. P. Smith proposed that the building of the house should commence immediately.

