

Glimpses Into American Jewish History (Part --)

Brooklyn Yeshivas Circa 1937 Part II

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Unless otherwise indicated all quotes are from **History of Brooklyn Jewry** by Samuel P. Abelow, Scheba Publishing Company, Brooklyn, NY, 1937. This book is available from <http://books.google.com/>

This month's column continues the discussion that began last month of the status of yeshiva education in Brooklyn circa 1937.

The Yeshivah of Flatbush¹

The Yeshivah of Flatbush was founded in 1927 by Mr. Joel Braverman. The Flatbush of 1927 was drastically different from the Flatbush of today. Then there were no kosher restaurants, no stores that were closed on Shabbat, no men or boys wearing yarmulkas in the street, and only a few Orthodox shuls.

Braverman "was born was born in 1896 in Balta in the Ukraine to a well-respected, educated family who made sure that his education consisted of both limudei kodesh and general studies. By the time he was a teenager he had become an ardent Zionist, and at 16 immigrated to Palestine where he resumed his studies in the Mizrahi in Jerusalem." In 1916 he immigrated to America.

Shortly thereafter he enrolled in NYU and pursued "degrees in both education and business administration, while simultaneously teaching Hebrew school in the afternoons in Stamford, Ct. At the young age of 25 he became an assistant principal in a small Hebrew School on Long Island and a year later, in 1922, he became the principal the Talmud Torah of the Avenue N Jewish Center in Flatbush."

In 1927 a group of Flatbush *baalei batim* asked Braverman to become the educational director of what was to become the Yeshiva of Flatbush. It was not easy to convince some parents to enroll their children in this new Jewish Day School. Indeed, in the early days when Braverman and other community leaders would try to make their case for the school, "there were people who yelled at them in Yiddish, saying "What do you want, to make for us a ghetto? We had a ghetto in der heim we don't want a ghetto in America!"

Despite such opposition in 1928 the Yeshiva of Flatbush opened with 22 children and four teachers for two classes - a kindergarten and a first grade. Joel Braverman was the moving force behind the development of the school. He modeled its curriculum after the

coeducational Tarbut schools in Poland, Romania, and Lithuania. All *Limudei Kodesh* subjects were taught in *Ivrit B'Ivrit*. A number of the teachers who taught these subjects were recruited from Eretz Yisroel over the years. The secular education was designed to rival the best available in public schools, and experienced teachers were recruited from the public school system.

Braverman did his best to imbue his students with a love for Israel and strong Zionist ideals. He also encouraged regular synagogue attendance on Shabbos at the Junior Congregation minyan that met in the basement of the yeshiva building.

Braverman worked tirelessly to improve the school with much success.

Samuel P. Abelow writes, "The Yeshivah of Flatbush is a co-educational institution, located in the Young Israel building, Avenue I and Coney Island Avenue. It was organized in 1922 with twenty-two children and, in 1936, its register reached the total of three hundred and seventy pupils. The school is in session from 9 A. M. until 3.45 P.M. The classes range from the kindergarten through the highest grade of the elementary schools. The English department is chartered by the Board of Regents so the regular school subjects are taught. Since the attendance in a class is limited to twenty-two, it is possible for the teachers to give the pupils individual and intensive work. Those children who do not live in the neighborhood of the school as well as those who desire it are served with lunches by the school at a nominal cost.

"The popularity of the Yeshivah forced the authorities to seek larger quarters. For that reason, they decided to erect a modest building to cost about \$60,000 on Coney Island Avenue, between Avenues L and M. In addition to the regular classroom facilities, the building will have a large outdoor playground, an attractive roof garden and a completely equipped gymnasium. The corner-stone of the new building was laid on June 9, 1936, and it is expected that the building will be completed by October 15, 1936.

"The officers of the Yeshivah of Flatbush in 1936 were: President, Samuel K. Charnoff; vice-presidents, Jacob Kestenbaum, David Carmel, Mrs. Maurice L. Katz; treasurer, Abraham Usherson; recording secretary, Joseph Greenberg; financial secretary, David Kamerman; executive secretary, Joel Braverman; Rabbi Wolf Levy, chairman of the Hebrew department; Rabbi J. A. Dolgenas, chairman of the English department; Max Kupfeld, principal of the English department, and Mr. Braverman, principal of the Hebrew department."

By 1948 the enrollment was over 620 students. A high school was opened in 1950, and its first class graduated in 1954. The present high school building located on Avenue J opened in the fall of 1964.

Joel Braverman did not get to spend much time in this magnificent high school building that he built, because a year later in 1965 he suffered a stroke. He passed away on February 5, 1969. Unfortunately, he and his wife never had children.

Other Brooklyn Yeshivas and Talmud Torahs

Abelow wrote about other Brooklyn Jewish schools.

“Brooklyn has other Yeshivot. There is one in the Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst, which was under the supervision of the principal, Dr. Zuckerbrau, until September, 1933, when Rabbi Moshe Berman became the principal. The school is open for boys only. It was established in 1928. Hebrew is taught from 9-12 A.M. and English, from 1-4 P.M. The chairman of the Board of Education is Rabbi Nachman Ebin. Abraham Mazer is the president, and A. B. Kramer is the vice-president of the institution. The school is graded according to the elementary school curriculum of the City of New York. In 1935, through the efforts of State Senator Philip M. Kleinfeld, the school, called Ohel Moshe, obtained a charter from the Board of Regents of New York State.

“A new school was built on Ocean Parkway near Neptune Avenue, called the Talmud Torah Ahavath Israel. The Jewish Centre of Kings Highway on Avenue P and Twelfth Street has a fine Talmud Torah building. Almost every synagogue conducts a school. Talmud Torahs in the neighborhood of the Sons of Israel School are located at 83rd Street and 23rd Avenue; 75th Street, between 18th and 19th Avenues, and 63rd Street and 20th Avenue.

“According to Rabbi Ebin, Brooklyn Jews do more for Jewish education than the Jews of Manhattan. While one may travel for miles in Manhattan without seeing a Hebrew school, he said that it was unusual to go far in Brooklyn without seeing at least one Hebrew school.”

Conclusion

It is clear from last month’s article and the above that yeshiva education in Brooklyn circa 1937 was in its infancy compared to what it is today. This is not surprising given the size and demographics of the Jewish community of Brooklyn in 1937 compared to today. Today Orthodoxy is a vibrant force in Brooklyn, and this was most certainly not the case in 1937. Nonetheless, one must give credit to those who laid the foundations for the vibrant and varied Jewish educational institutions that we have today.

¹ The material about Joel Braverman and the founding of the Yeshiva of Flatbush is based on **Remembering Joel Braverman, AH**, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/81318490/Remembering-Joel-Braverman-A-H>