

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 Kuils River 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. Antosorsky'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 Efroikin would go to the Bellville Brickfield and see whether they could get bricks for the Synagogue.

Members were chosen to go to Durbanville, Parow, Kuils River 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.