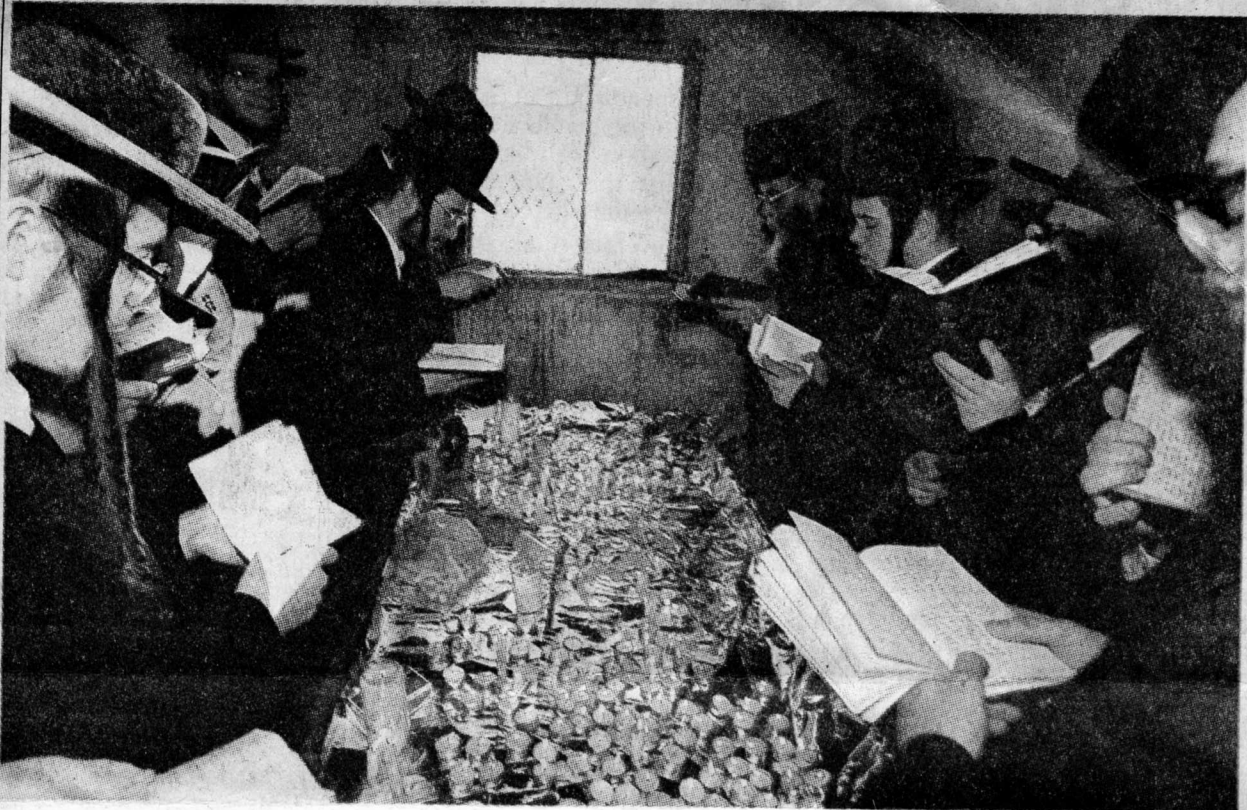


Several senior lieutenants and a captain filed a grievance because Maras- not make seniority the only cri-

"He was a very pious man who devoted his life to God. He was very righteous. He spent his days in study of the Torah and because of it reached a very high level of holiness."

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, speaking at the grave of Rabbi Joseph Rabinowitz.



JAMES P. McCOY/Bufalo News

Hasidic rabbis chant Psalms in Hebrew after lighting candles at the Cheektowaga grave of Rabbi Joseph Rabinowitz, the first Hassidic rabbi to come to the United States.

*Israel + Morry Rabi Dow
Derach'acht night to this temple
maybe
Rabi*

Forgotten grave, holy site

By DAVE CONDREN
News Religion Reporter

It could have been a scene from "Yentl."

Dozens of bearded rabbis, each wearing the traditional black hat, surrounded a small, red-brick building. They took turns filing in and out. They lit candles. And they chanted Psalms in Hebrew, bowing repeatedly as they prayed.

But it wasn't celluloid make-believe set in Eastern Europe. It was reality unfolding in Cheektowaga.

About 150 Hassidic Jews gathered in Ahavath Sholem Cemetery along Pine Ridge Road Wednesday to pray at the grave of Rabbi Joseph Rabinowitz, the first Hassidic rabbi to come to the United States and a greatly revered leader of that movement.

"He was a very pious man who devoted his life to God. He was

very righteous. He spent his days in study of the Torah and because of it reached a very high level of holiness," explained Rabbi Sholem Fishbane of Saranac Synagogue in North Buffalo.

An Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Fishbane is not a member of the Hassidic movement, whose members aspire to a mystical level of Judaism. But a few people in his congregation are members and his synagogue later was host to a religious service and dinner for the visitors.

Rabbi Rabinowitz, who is said to have had healing powers because of his holiness, came to Buffalo about the turn of the century to serve as rabbi of the former Congregation Ahavath Sholem on Jefferson Avenue. He died in 1910.

Born in Russia, he lived for a short time in Manhattan before moving here.

His grave, which is barely off the highway, is sheltered by a small, faded, red-brick building that could be mistaken for a cemetery pump house. The structure, identified only by an inscription in Hebrew, is known as an "ohel," a word meaning tent or dwelling place.

"It was a European tradition to put a cover on the grave of someone of great importance," said Rabbi Jacob Blugrond of Baltimore, who visited the cemetery with Rabbi Fishbane.

The delegation of Hassidic visitors, most from the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, came on three buses to pray at the long-forgotten grave.

"He was one of the biggest rabbis in America. He was spiritually very big," said Joshua Schwartz, one of the visitors.

BN March 18, 1999

See Rabbi Page C4

Rabbi: Visitor reports feeling 'great inspiration' at gravesite

Continued from Page C1

"This is considered a place where the ground is holy," added Wolf Tenenbaum, one of a handful of Buffalo Jews who know about the grave.

Is Rabbi Rabinowitz in the same league with Father Baker, the Catholic priest from Lackawanna who is a candidate for sainthood?

"There is no sainthood in Judaism. He would be considered a holy, spiritual person," said Rabbi Blugrund. "We believe the soul exists around the grave of a righteous man. We don't pray to the man. We pray to God. His soul is a catalyst to bring our prayers to the Almighty."

Rabbi Abraham Goldstein, a Hassidic Jew who is a member of Saranac Synagogue, said that since the grave has been rediscovered "there have been stories that some people got help immediately after visiting the gravesite."

He personally felt "a great inspiration" the first time he visited the grave, he said.

The grave of Rabbi Rabinowitz has become a popular pilgrimage destination for Hassidic Jews since it was rediscovered last year by Rabbi Yoneh Landow of Brooklyn, who arranged Wednesday's tour.

"It is going to get bigger and bigger. We started with one van. Today we have three buses. This is the largest group so far," Rabbi Landow said.

The temple that Rabbi Rabinowitz served was disbanded in 1962. The building at 407 Jefferson Ave. eventually became the home of Greater New Hope Church of God in Christ.

The Hassidic visitors made their pilgrimage on Wednesday because it is the last day of the Jewish month and is observed by Orthodox Jews as Yom Kippur Katan, a small Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement.

Kenneth A. Sull, another member of Saranac Synagogue, said it is not surprising that few members of the Buffalo Jewish community are aware that such a prominent rabbi is buried in Cheektowaga.

"I've been in Buffalo for 44 years," he said. "I come to this cemetery to visit my ancestors' graves. I always wondered what was in that little building."