

from the Minute Books of the Curaçao Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society

By Ruth Gomes Casseres-Salas

The Society was founded in 1866 and numbered 46 members. In its Constitution its official name is stated as "Curaçaosche Israelitische Dames Weldadigheids Vereniging." Its purpose "to render financial aid to needy Jewish women and Jewish children."

The first recorded meeting took place in 1909 at the house of Judith Delvalle in Scharloo. The contribution was set at Fls. 0.50 per month, to be paid half-yearly in advance. In a meeting in 1910 the Board brought up the case of a Jewish lady who was living under "miserable conditions" in Otrobanda. In the same year the records make mention of presenting the recipient ladies with a gift on Rosh Hashana, a practice that has been retained to this day. Amy Capriles became secretary in that year and in 1918 was elected president, an office that she fulfilled until her death in 1971. Since she became president, almost all meetings were held at her residence at Scharloo 17.

At a General Meeting in 1931, a letter from a member residing in New York City was read. It contained a petition to help a friend from Curaçao who was in great need there. It was unanimously resolved to send her US\$ 40.00. In 1934 the Board got the pleasant surprise of receiving a bank savings book from New York in the name of the Society. The amount of \$ 584.67 (Fls. 938.67) was a welcome and unexpected bequest from a deceased member, Mrs. O. Mayer.

In 1940 there was again great rejoicing on receiving news that another bequest had been made in the will of Shon Joe Monsanto - a well known wealthy Jew of the time. However, in order to be able to collect it, the Society had to have itself legally registered as a Foundation first.

In the 1940s, '50s and '60s the Society supported the Red Cross and other organizations in the war effort, aided the Jewish internees in Bonaire, adopted a child in the newborn State of Israel, and gave a helping hand to Jewish refugees from Cuba that spent

some months on Curaçao in the care of the local Jewish community.

In 1971, at a General Meeting held at CSC, the agenda called for the formation of a new board, inasmuch as most of the Board members, having served for 25 years or more, wanted to see a "rejuvenation" of the Board. They included the then recently passed away Shon Amy Capriles, Lou L. Maduro, Sarah A. Correa, Edith Senior and Hilda Chumaceiro. As a result, Irene Moreno-Capriles, Ena Dankmeijer-Maduro, Elsita Luckman-Maduro, Diane Capriles-Henriquez and Ruth Gomes Casseres-Salas accepted to fill the vacant posts.

In 1972 the new Board raised the contribution from the original Fls. 6.00 per year to Fls. 10.00, then in 1979 to Fls. 18.00, in 1980 to Fls. 20.00 and in 1984 to the Fls. 25.00.

Other income received regularly at that time were annual donations from the Elias L. Maduro Weldadigheids Fonds, B'nai B'rith, the Sisterhood of Mikvé Israel-Emanuel and bequests of deceased members. Customarily, the Society also receives part of the Purim Shekel collections from MIE.

For many years, recipients had been receiving Fls. 200.00 per month, an amount that in view of the vastly increased cost of living, was considered quite insufficient.

Following the example of their predecessors, the members of the Society's Board called for rejuvenation after 25 years in function. At the Society's last General Meeting held in January 1997, the "Silver Anniversary" board stepped aside to make place for a new Board, composed of Yvette Schoonen-Moreno, Desiree Pinedo-Luckmann, Michèle Russel-Capriles, Monique Gomes Casseres-da Costa Gomez and Elena Krijt-Brandao. They are truly wished a very fruitful service and the traditional blessing of "muitos anos do cargo do mitzvot" helping the needy of our community.

Note from the new board: Today members pay an annual contribution of Fls. 50.-- and beneficiaries receive Fls. 350.-- monthly and in addition enjoy a small Rosh Hashana and Chanukah bonus.