

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

ABRAVANEL LODGE NO. 1116, F. & A. M.

by

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In the year 1930 a number of Sephardic Masons of New York conceived the idea of forming a Masonic Lodge whose membership would be predominantly Sephardic. The first meeting launching this movement was on Saturday Evening, November 22, 1930, at the Manger Hotel in Manhattan. This gathering was convened through notice over the signature of Brothers Solomon Emanuel, Jacques M. Habib and Louis J. Opal. It was the beginning of the only Masonic Lodge in the world composed mostly of Sephardic members.

The petition for Letters of Dispensation for the Lodge was signed by the following members: Eli M. Alcabes, Joseph Amelar, Claude Cabutto, Fernando de la Garza, Dr. Solomon De Sola, Solomon Emanuel, Milton H. Ezra, Jacques M. Habib, David Joseph, Theodore LaBe, Louis J. Opal and Gabriel Yohai.

It then became necessary to find the appropriate name for the lodge. Several names of celebrated philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages were suggested. It was finally concluded to name the Lodge after Don Isaac Abravanel, who was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1437, and who died while in exile in the town of Padua, Italy. It is noteworthy to point out to our readers the place which Don Isaac Abravanel still holds in world history. He was a statesman, financier to kings, philosopher, theologian and Biblical commentator. He is, indeed, considered a truly great and glorious figure of the Golden Age of Jewish history.

Since there is no distinction among masons, men of other sects and religions could also join. But strangely enough, Abravanel Lodge was from the very beginning composed mainly of members of Sephardic extraction. In it there were and there still are many of those Sephardim who came to America after the turn of the century and many of whose male children have since joined the roster of the Lodge. Of course, the Lodge welcomes also many Askenazi members as well as members of the Christian Faith.

Money was needed to carry on the work of the Lodge. It was assisted in its finances at the beginning by contributions from James Abisror, Isaac S. Alevy, Joseph Amelar, Joshua Attias, Joseph Cohen, Milton Ezra, Joseph Gorman, Jacques M. Habib, Victor Hazan, Max Honan, David Joseph, Bocko Mayo, the firm of Mevorah and Cohen, Joseph Mevorah, Saba Mevorah, Louis J. Molinas, Joseph Pesserilo, Morris Russo, Henry Sadacca, James Wahnou, Gabriel Yohai and Herman Zacharia.

A structure is as strong as its foundation. The founders of Abravanel Lodge as well as those generous contributors certainly laid the foundation for a strong and permanent Lodge. Today Abravanel Lodge can count on and enjoys the support of its entire membership, which totals approximately four hundred strong.

It is impossible to list all those who have made Abravanel Lodge the great institution that it is today. Suffice it to say that many of the more distinguished leaders of our community who are always in the forefront of Sephardic organizational life, belong to Abravanel Lodge. Many of the following men who served as Masters of Abravanel Lodge deserve a place in the Roll of Honor: Louis J. Opal (1933); Jacques M. Habib (1934); Joseph Amelar (1935); David Joseph (1936); Claude Cabutto (1937); Milton H. Ezra (1938); Mathias Naphtali (1939); David N. Barocas (1940); Samuel Nahoum (1941); Rev. David Jessurun Cardozo (1942); Thomas Santana (1943); Eli Abrevaya (1944); Albert J. Hasson (1945); Ralph Gabay (1946); S. Jay Coffineau (1947); George Moss (1948); Isidore Mevorah (1949); Irving Benedict (1950); Hyman Pesserilo (1951); Jacob M. Nahoum (1952 and 1953); Edward Tiano (1954); Samuel J. Hasson (1955); Leon Farhi (1956 and 1957); Robert E. Levy (1958); David E. Rouso (1959); Arnold L. Winters (1960); Albert Goynias (1961); Max Varon (1962); Victor Benjamin (1963); Bernard Fintz (1964-the sitting Master).

We cannot possibly forget that some of the leaders of Abravanel Lodge went beyond the post of Master. At a great sacrifice of personal effort and much more they reached posts of much higher honor and distinction thus bringing added glory to the Lodge. Louis J. Opal became Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Peru. Sam Nahoum was appointed District Deputy Grand Master in the years 1944-45. Sam Nahoum was also President of the Masonic Club during the years 1959-61. Jess M. Colchamiro was also elevated to the high post of Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Peru.

In 1943 the Abravanel Square Club was founded by Jacob Hassid, Michael Moise, David N. Barocas and Thomas Santana. Jacob Hassid and Michael Moise are now deceased. The Club has done much to foster friendly relations among the families of the members of Abravanel Lodge. Many who are members of other Lodges have chosen to join our Club. The following men have served as President of the Abravanel Square Club: Jacob Hassid, Isidore Mevorah, Jacob Nahoum, Jess M. Colchamiro, Edward Tiano, Irving Benedict, Max Varon, David E. Rouso and Joseph Ocera. David N. Barocas served as its Secretary for thirteen years and Hyman Pesserilo who succeeded him is the present Financial Secretary and has held that office for many years. The idea of the popular week-end

outing now celebrated by many organizations was originally introduced into Abravanel Square Club by Jess M. Colchamiro. Over the years this yearly venture was joined by the Broome and Allen Boys Association, and has become a main source of revenue to both of these organizations.

Another milestone in the history of Abravanel Lodge was the formation of the Abravanel Foundation. It was organized for the exclusive purpose of handling all appeals for charity made to the Lodge. The establishment of the Foundation was also the work of Jess M. Colchamiro. It was he who conceived the idea originally and through whose efforts it became a reality. The Foundation is not a part of Abravanel Lodge but every Lodge member is individually a member of the Abravanel Foundation. The members of the Foundation have good reason to be proud in the part which each of them plays through the Foundation in the field of philanthropy. The yearly contributions of the Foundation to the various charitable organizations are sufficiently substantial. It must be remembered that the Foundation was organized to assist distressed members of the Lodge. Next in line to deserve praise in the creation and administration of the Foundation is Mathias Naphtali. It was he who prepared the articles of incorporation together with a group of lawyers from the Lodge. He was the President and Treasurer for many years and to this he remains the Treasurer of the Foundation, a post which carries with it the bulk of the administrative work.

Abravanel Lodge celebrated its Twenty-fifth Anniversary on Saturday night, November 2, 1957, at the Biltmore Hotel, in Manhattan. This Gala event and its Journal provided ample funds and the beneficiary was the Abravanel Foundation.

The Lodge today is the crowning glory of thirty-two years of loyal and devoted service by its Masters and members. The present officers are as follows: Bernard Fintz (Master); Leon Halfon (Senior Warden); Victor Penso (Junior Warden); Thomas Santana (Secretary); Samuel Nahoum (Treasurer); Jess M. Colchamiro (Treasurer-Emeritus); Victor J. Benjamin and Max Varon (Chaplains); Ralph A. Matalon (Senior Deacon); Leonard W. Salomon (Junior Deacon); Sol Nahoum (Senior Master of Ceremonies); Thomas L. Redmond (Junior Master of Ceremonies); David A. Benjamin and Albert Franco (Stewards); Martin Zelenko (Marshal); George B. Arnold (Organist); Oscar A. Borges (Tiler); David E. Rousso (Trustee 3 yrs.); Albert J. Hasson (Trustee 2 yrs.); Philip A. Deutsch (Trustee 1 yr.); Herman Wessoly, Howard Benforado, John Coumeri and Ralph Setton (Standard Bearers).

Through the years Abravanel Lodge has grown and developed substantially and has become a strong constituent in the domain of New York Masonry. This is principally due to the ever present spirit of solidarity keeping the rank and file strong and steadfast as well as to the brilliant leadership of a long array of luminaries within Abravanel Lodge guiding its destiny. Long may we continue to walk in their path.