

The original documents are located in Box C48, folder “Presidential Handwriting, 9/7/1976 (2)” of the Presidential Handwriting File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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ME 3-1/07

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sept. 7, 1976

To *Congregation Mitzvah Israel: In the
year of our Bicentennial the dedication of your
new synagogue carries special meaning.
It marks the continuity of life and tradition
of your congregation. It also reflects the
vision of George Washington and our
other founding fathers that in a free
land, each should be free to worship
as he chooses.

With best wishes.

Gerald R. Ford

SEPT. 7, 1976

MR. PRESIDENT

STATIONERY IS ATTACHED IF YOU CARE TO
COMPLY WITH THE REQUEST FOR A HAND-
WRITTEN MESSAGE AS OUTLINED.

TERRY

Pls send
to Larry

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

STRIPPING _

The original of the attached
message was given to David Lissy.

Copy of entire file sent to Eliska
Hasek.

Trudy Fry
9/8/76

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Eliska Hasek -

This did not go in thru us -- just
came out thru us.

I felt that you should have a copy of
the entire file.

Trudy Fry
~~8/8/76~~ 9/8/76

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 6, 1976

~~THE PRESIDENT~~

MEMORANDUM FOR:

~~FOSTER CHANOCK~~

FROM:

DAVID LISSY 

As we discussed, I will be going to Philadelphia next Sunday (Sept. 12) to represent the President at the dedication of the new building of Congregation Mikveh Israel-the second oldest synagogue in the country. The new building is in the Independence Mall area near the site of the original synagogue building. The rabbi of this synagogue was one of the six who visited the President in July.

Mikveh Israel has in its archives one of the two handwritten letters from George Washington to the Jewish congregations of the colonial period. In addition to the formal message from the President which has already been prepared, I think it would be appropriate -- and also of historical note -- for the President to send a short handwritten note to the Congregation.

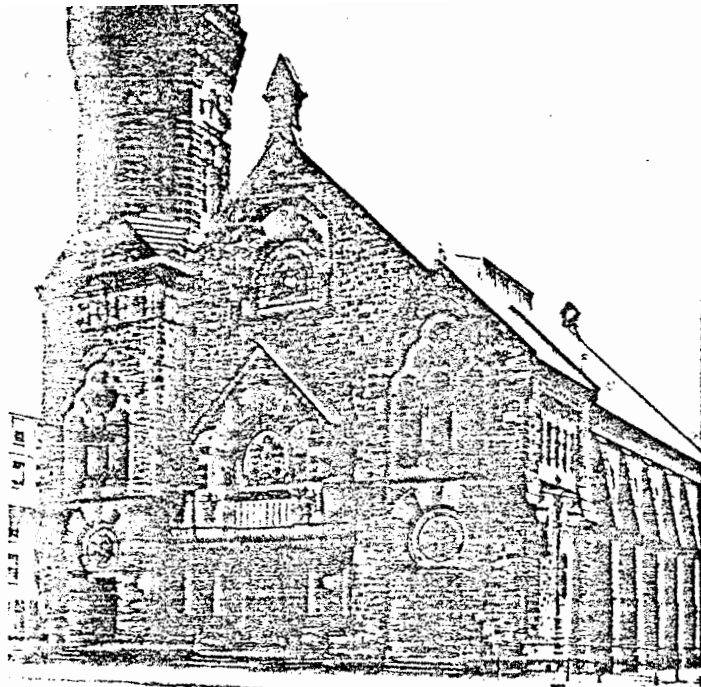
The coincidence of the Bicentennial, the dedication of the new synagogue in the Independence Mall area, the fact that one of the original George Washington letters is in the archives and my presence at the ceremonies combine to make this a lovely and not a forced gesture.

I would suggest something very brief, as follows:

"To Congregation Mikveh Israel-

In the year of our Bicentennial the dedication of your new synagogue carries special meaning. It marks the continuity of life and tradition of your congregation. It also reflects the vision of George Washington and our other founding fathers that in a free land, each should be free to worship as he chooses.

With best wishes, Gerald R. Ford."



Rodeph Shalom, circa. 1869

Article from the
JEWISH EXPONENT,
circa. 1899

WOMANKIND
EDITED BY GIUDITTA.

**PHILADELPHIA JEWESSES IN
ORGANIZED SOCIETIES EIGH-
TY YEARS AGO.**

**The Pleasurs of Charitable and
Educational Work Were
Women.**

This new event in the lives of American Jewesses, this breaking through the boundaries of our own country and crossing the ocean to "further the interests of Judaism," is apt to lead to a comparison of the task with the present. The result will be all in favor of modern methods. Considering the limitations of the American Jewesses who lived eighty years ago, and the advantages of those who live to-day, it would seem as though they deserve as much praise for the little work that they accomplished as we do for the large projects which we attempt. Their plans did not extend beyond the limits of their own cities, and they benefited a limited number of persons only, in consequence. A glance at the beginnings of three Philadelphia organizations, still in existence, will serve to illustrate what Philadelphia Jewesses did generations ago.

**The Female Hebrew Benevolent So-
ciety.**

One stormy day in autumn, when our great-grandmothers were still young, Mrs. Azra Levi and Miss Hannah Levy, moved by an instance of suffering more pitiful than usual, resolved to ask their sisters in faith to assist them in relieving distress. At that time, it was before the German immigration commenced, there were not many Jews in the city, and no charity society existed. One month later, November, 1819, the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society was formed. In 1820 it was regularly instituted, and in 1827 it received its articles of incorporation.

General Washington's reply is still a cherished possession of the Mikveh Israel Congregation:

To the Hebrew Congregations in the Cities of Philadelphia, New York, Charleston and Richmond

Gentlemen,

The liberal sentiment towards each other which marks every political and religious denomination of men in this country stands unrivalled in the history of nations—The affections of such a people is a treasure beyond the reach of calculation; and the repeated proofs which my fellow citizens have given of their attachment to me, and approbation of my doings form the purest source of my temporal felicity—The affectionate expressions of your address again excite my gratitude, and receive my warmest acknowledgements.

The power and goodness of the Almighty were strongly manifested in the events of our late glorious revolution.—and his kind interposition in our behalf has been no less visible in the establishment of our present equal government—In war he directed the sword—and in peace he has ruled in our councils—my agency in both has been guided by the best intentions, and a sense of the duty which I owe my country; and as my exertions hitherto have been amply rewarded by the approbation of my fellow-citizens, I shall endeavor to deserve a continuance of it by my future conduct.

May the same temporal and eternal blessings which you implore for me, rest upon your congregations.

G. Washington.

The Creation of Rodeph Shalom Congregation

During the Colonial and early National periods the Jewish community and Mikveh Israel Congregation were coextensive. If a person intended to remain a Jew, membership in the congregation was mandatory. This membership in turn implied the acceptance of *halacha* and submission to the authority of the constitutional leaders of the congregation. Defiance of the congregation, disobedience to Jewish law or avoidance of the responsibilities of membership could lead to the withholding of the privileges of marriage, burial, or conversion and the honors of the ritual all of which were within the control of the congregation's leaders. So long as Mikveh Israel was the single, all-inclusive Jewish institution in town, every Jew was required to accept its authority. But about 1795 some newer immigrants who perhaps felt uncomfortable in the unfamiliar Sephardic atmosphere of the synagogue instituted their own independent Ashkenazic worship, probably in the form of a *hevra* at first—the German Hebrew Society. (This may not have been the first effort in this direction, howev-