

Writing History Among the Tombstones: Notes from Har Hasetim

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Abstract: This paper examines the collaborative project to preserve and interpret Har Hasetim, the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery. In fall 2015, Villanova University professor Craig Bailey approached the Friends of the Cemetery, an organization affiliated with the local Beth David Reform Congregation, about jointly restoring Har Hasetim. The ensuing project, in which the authors participated as M.A. students, began by expanding the database of known interments in the cemetery, relying on local archives, Philadelphia death records, and census data. This initial work evolved into a range of public history projects such as scout and school lesson plans, informational booklets, academic research papers, and preservation plans. This paper reflects upon the lessons learned from the partnership between our public history class and the Friends. The authors of this paper detail their personal research projects as well as their classmates' findings about the cemetery, the people buried there, and the neighborhood of Philadelphia—the historic Jewish Quarter—where the deceased once resided. The Har Hasetim project treated history as a civic initiative, helping a community organization to document its history, preserving a physical site, producing materials for site-specific education, and sharing historical discoveries with the public.

In the introduction to his 2017 volume *Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Avi Decter stresses the importance of collaboration in bringing U.S. Jewish history to the general public. Decter explains that, despite the richness of American Jewish history, a limited number of museums and historical organizations are devoted to this subject. He recommends partnerships between secular museums and “Jewish counterpart[s] that can bring resources (collections, contacts, and context) and expertise to the project.”¹ Furthermore, Decter argues that such a partnership could bring economic benefits, since “many donors and funders recognize the advantages of funding multiple agencies through a single gift or grant.”² Decter’s book provides multiple case studies depicting his model of

¹ Avi Y. Decter, *Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Interpreting History Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 19.

² *Ibid.*

institutional cooperation (e.g., between secular and Jewish groups) in the development of interpretative projects about U.S. Jewish history. Such efforts require public historians to serve their communities and suggest the possibility of academic institutions becoming sponsors for community-based Jewish histories.³ In our case, Villanova University professor Craig Bailey became a liaison between the university and the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community.⁴



Figure 1. *Har Hasetim, Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, 2016.*

In spring 2016, we and our M.A. classmates in Villanova University’s Public History Practicum helped to interpret the history of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, formerly known as Har

³ Cf. Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, “Introduction: People and Their Pasts and Public History,” in *People and their Pasts — Public History Today*, edited by Kean and Ashton (London: Palgrave Macmillan U.K., 2008), 1–20, esp. 2; Marianne Babal, “Sticky History: Connecting Historians with the Public,” *The Public Historian* 32, No. 4 (Fall 2010): 80.

⁴ Although Villanova University is a Roman Catholic university, Catholicism did not figure into the Har Hasetim restoration project, so Villanova essentially served as one of the secular historical partners for a Jewish community organization, per the secular-Jewish partnerships Decter describes.

Hasetim (Mount of Olives).⁵ Under the guidance of Prof. Bailey, the Har Hasetim Project became a collaborative effort between our class and the Friends of the Cemetery to learn about the site's story and share it with the public. This partnership produced both collective and individual research projects that drew from public history, historic preservation, and genealogy.

While researching the Philadelphia Main Line suburbs, Bailey had previously stumbled upon the story of Har Hasetim, one of the relatively few Jewish cemeteries located in the historically Protestant-dominated Main Line. Fascinated, Bailey contacted the Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, who are now in charge of safekeeping the Mount of Olives, to learn more about the site.⁶ Residents of Philadelphia's Jewish Quarter founded Har Hasetim sometime between 1880 and 1893.⁷ Most of the burials occurred in the 1890s and 1910s, but the last burial was not until 1945. As time passed and new cemeteries opened in the Philadelphia suburbs, serving the needs of the next Jewish generations, Har Hasetim changed hands repeatedly.⁸

⁵ The Villanova students, aside from Soto Segura and Gorman, were: Helen Gassmann, Riley Hubbard, Sarah Johnson, Paul Kopacz, Blake McGready, Elizabeth Motich, Bill Petersen, Brianna Quade, Amanda Rockwood, Ann Shipley, and Emily Vasas.

⁶ Bailey's research background: Emily Vasas, "Stories from Har Hasetim: Exhibits From One of Philadelphia's Oldest Jewish Cemeteries" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, spring 2016), 6, Microsoft Word file. For the beginning of the project, see: Richard Ilgenfritz, "Renewed Effort to Fix Up Lower Merion's Abandoned Jewish Cemetery," *Main Line Times*, Oct. 8, 2015, www.mainlinemedianews.com/mainlinetimes/news/renewed-effort-to-fix-up-lower-merion-s-abandoned-jewish-article_ae68b09b-8745-5c66-ad62-5c43aa190771.html.

⁷ According to Friend of the Cemetery Stephen F. Finkelman [email to Daniel Gorman Jr., April 28, 2019], William Silverstone and Raphael S. Green purchased the land for the cemetery from Charles Greaves in May of 1893. Shortly thereafter, Raphael S. Green transferred his rights to Meyer Wachtel. The Har Hasetim Association was incorporated in the year 1893

⁸ Andreína Soto Segura, with Riley Hubbard, Sarah Johnson, Blake McGready, Elizabeth Motich, and Ann Shipley, "Discovering the People of Har Hasetim: Introduction and Research Guide" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, spring 2016), PDF file; "History," B'nai Abraham Chabad [Philadelphia, PA], last modified 2017, <https://www.phillyshul.com/history-timeline/> (accessed Jan. 26, 2019), ; Stephen F. Finkelman, "Working Copy of Material for Har Hasetim and Related Entities to be Used to Create a History of the Cemetery" (unpublished manuscript, Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, last modified Oct. 30, 2015), Microsoft Word file; Stephen F. Finkelman, email to Daniel Gorman Jr., Feb. 10, 2018. Primary sources on ownership changes: "The Latest News in Real Estate... Montgomery County Transfers," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 144, No. 109, Apr. 19, 1901, 15, *ReadEx: America's Historical Newspapers*; Harry Schneiderman, ed., *The American Jewish Year Book 5680, September 25, 1919, to September 12, 1920*, Vol. 21 (Philadelphia: The Jewish

Horace P. Moore, a developer who briefly gained control of the property in 1913, dug up a number of bodies.⁹ Wolf Belostosky recovered Har Hasetim from Moore, and in 1914 Belostosky sold the cemetery to the Independent Chevra Kadisho (I.C.K.), a burial society from downtown Philadelphia. By the mid-twentieth-century the I.C.K. had failed to keep the cemetery from falling into disrepair, and Main Line residents forgot the cemetery and the people interred there.¹⁰ The Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, is Har Hasetim's current owner; many of the Friends are members of this synagogue.¹¹ Bailey's conversations with the Friends led to the idea that Villanova's upcoming public history course could focus on the cemetery—one of the “relatively few” Jewish-run American historical sites or “collections” that Decter describes.¹² Students could explore Har Hasetim's history, help the Friends revitalize the site, and invite Beth David's members to a town hall meeting at semester's end to share their findings.

While our work followed some of Decter's principles, it diverged in several ways. The practicum inverted Decter's model of a historical institution setting parameters for research projects and inviting Jewish groups' collaboration. Instead, the Friends, who were already experts on the cemetery's history, specified what help they needed, and we strove to meet their needs while still pursuing our own research interests. The Friends' primary requests were help with the site's physical restoration, identifying people buried at the site, and detailing the people who owned and managed Har Hasetim. In a final break from

Publication Society of America, for the American Jewish Committee, 1919), 555, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101044278917?urlappend=%3Bseq=569>.

⁹ “Contractor Rips Up Big Hebrew Cemetery,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 168, No. 26, Jan. 26, 1913, 7; Finkelman, email to Gorman

¹⁰ Soto Segura et al., “Discovering”; Stephen F. Finkelman, “Data on Independent Chevrah Kadisho of Philadelphia” (unpublished manuscript, Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery), Microsoft Word file; Finkelman, “Working Copy”; Minutes of the Independent Chevra Kadisho 1932–1980 (copy held by the Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery), PDF file.

¹¹ The Friends have asked us to acknowledge that members of other synagogues, as well as individuals who are not Jewish, are part of the Board and volunteer with the organization. Although the Beth David congregation currently owns the cemetery, the operations of the Friends see to the maintenance of the cemetery as a memorial park for the synagogue and Friends, see: Beth David Reform Congregation, 1130 Vaughan Lane, Gladwyne, PA 19035, United States, <https://bdavid.org/>; Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, <https://www.gladwynejewishcemetery.org/>. Our primary contacts with the Friends were the late Stephen J. Anderer, Jill Cooper, Stephen F. Finkelman, and Neil Sukonik.

¹² Decter, *Interpreting*, 3.

Decter, we did not pursue fundraising for our work, aside from asking the History Department to provide some refreshments for the town hall. We operated on a fairly ad hoc basis, and reciprocity was the core of this project. The students worked on an actual public history project instead of simply reading articles about public history; the Friends received a new team of volunteers; and group discussions between the students and Friends shaped the parameters of the project.

The Har Hasetim project grew beyond the cemetery itself. As we accumulated newspaper articles and census records, and as we planned our capstone projects, we gained a deeper understanding of daily life in Philadelphia's early-twentieth-century Jewish Quarter, which has received less historiographic attention than New York's celebrated Jewish Lower East Side. We learned how Jewish *landsmanshaftn* (benevolent societies) and *chevras* (variously, synagogues or burial societies) provided institutional assistance to their members in times of need.¹³ We considered how immigrant Jews engaged with the cemetery over time, how *chevras* eased concerns about the afterlife by providing burial services to the members of the Jewish communities of Philadelphia, and how the cemetery restoration could meld public history and archaeological preservation.

Our first order of business was checking the contents of the Friends' original burial database, which Bailey had edited. This database included roughly 600 names, along with demographic information such

¹³ On *landsmanshaftn* see: Decter, *Interpreting*, 70, 105; Hannah Kliger, "In a Common Cause, In This New Found Country": Fellowship and Farein in Philadelphia," in *Traditions in Transition: Jewish Culture in Philadelphia, 1840–1940: An Exhibition in the Museum of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, April 24–October 21, 1989*, edited by Gail F. Stern, Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia (Lanham, MD: AASLH Library (for the Balch Institute, Philadelphia, PA), 1989), 28; Rakhmiel Peltz, "125 Years of Building Jewish Immigrant Communities in Philadelphia," in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, edited by Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 35–36; Beth S. Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 97. On *chevras* see: Harry D. Boonin, *The Jewish Quarter of Philadelphia: A History and Guide, 1881–1930* (Warrington, PA: Jewish Walking Tours of Philadelphia, Inc., 1999), 42; Julius H. Greenstone, "Religious Activity: Philadelphia," in *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, with a description of rural settlements*, edited by Charles S. Bernheimer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1905), 162–63, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000335985>; Philip Rosen, "Orthodox Institution Builder: Rabbi Bernard Lewis Levinthal," in *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, edited by Murray Friedman, Sara F. Yoseloff Memorial Publications in Judaism and Jewish Affairs (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1993), 128.

as birth years, national origins, Philadelphia addresses, and occupations, and it was our job to confirm the information of the persons interred at the cemetery.¹⁴ Bailey gave the class a training exercise using digitized newspaper records and genealogical databases such as Ancestry and FamilySearch. He told us each to find as much as we could about Benjamin Schur, the last person buried in Har Hasetim (1945). Bailey had done his own research on Schurr, proving that contrary to local myth, Schurr served in World War One, not Two, and died of heart disease, not because of combat injuries.¹⁵ We compared our findings with Bailey's summary, and after this trial run, we applied the same research methods in order to check the rest of the interment database. Each of us reviewed the information of 50–60 interments from the burial database to ensure that these persons were properly recorded.



Figure 2. *Benjamin Schurr's headstone.*

The next phase was to produce a *reversed chronology*, tracing the cemetery from its current, dilapidated state back to its past glory as a Jewish gathering place. We developed a variety of capstone projects, but we all wanted to balance an understanding of the geographic Mount of Olives with the family and communal histories of the people interred there. The tombstones represented individuals, but the whole landscape represented families and communities connected by religion and ethnicity. It would take archival research to draw out these cultural and

¹⁴ Craig Bailey and the Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, original interment database (unpublished manuscript, last modified Jan. 2016), Microsoft Excel file.

¹⁵ Ilgenfritz, "Renewed Effort." See also: Daniel Gorman Jr., "Timeline of Benjamin Schurr's Life" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, last modified Jan. 7, 2016), Microsoft Word file.

social dynamics, which meant learning about Jewish lives in the Philadelphia region between 1880 and 1920, the years of substantial Ashkenazi Jewish immigration to America.¹⁶ By doing so, we were able to document the way that Quarter's residents engaged with burial places and created strong communal bonds in the process. For example, period newspaper articles detail how, in the early 1900s, hundreds of urban Jews took the train to the Main Line and then walked or rode horses to Har Hasetim, where they performed annual rituals in memory of their deceased relatives.¹⁷ While we found records of such rituals for 1907 and 1908, it is unclear at what point in the twentieth century mourners stopped visiting Har Hasetim regularly.

An important element of our project was finding out who was interred at the Mount of Olives. Our colleague Paul Kopacz expanded the list of burials beyond the initial 600. After consulting Philadelphia death certificates and other sources, Kopacz identified 2,773 people—the majority of whom were children—buried in Har Hasetim between 1893 and 1915. Most of the adult Jews buried there were Russian immigrants, while most of the children were born in the U.S.¹⁸ This tally remains incomplete, since burials from 1894 and between 1915 to 1945 have yet to be identified. The class appreciated the solemnity of this genealogical work. A revised burial database could help Jewish citizens find deceased relatives, even if headstones did not survive for all names. The full list, in a sense, had always been there in the Philadelphia archives, but not in useful form until our class began probing.

We also wanted to give the Friends a range of public history materials, since they planned to invite genealogists, schoolchildren, and professional historians alike to Har Hasetim in the future. Our research,

¹⁶ On Ashkenazi immigration see: Murray Friedman, "Introduction: The Making of a National Jewish Community," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830–1940*, edited by Friedman (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues/ISHI Publications, 1983), 7–8; Melissa R. Klapper, *Small Strangers: The Experiences of Immigrant Children in America, 1880–1925* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), xi, 10; Evelyn Bodek Rosen, *The Philadelphia Fels, 1880–1920: A Social Portrait* (Madison/Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 58–60.

¹⁷ See: "Hebrews Flock to Gladwyn Cemetery," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 21, 1908, 3, *ReadEx: America's Historical Newspapers*; "Hebrews Observe Decoration Day," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 2, 1907, 3, *ReadEx: America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁸ The total number of interments and the year of the first interments remains inconclusive. Paul Kopacz's complete burial database for Har Hasetim records the earliest interments back to 1893 ("Complete Burial Database for Har Hasetim," unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, last modified Mar. 31, 2016), Microsoft Excel file.

as a class and as individual historians, combined fieldwork, statistical analysis, and visits to research libraries such as the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Montgomery County. The class essentially enacted Decter's emphasis on "appropriate formats," producing materials that could tell Har Hasetim's story to different audiences.¹⁹ Student capstone projects included: Ann Shipley's scout guide and essay about Philadelphia newspapers' coverage of Jewish residents; Blake McGready's study of Russian immigration to Philadelphia; Brianna Quade's paper on Jewish housing patterns in Philadelphia; Elizabeth Motich and Andreína Soto Segura's papers on burial and benevolent societies; Amanda Rockwood and Emily Vasas's study of disease and healthcare in early-twentieth-century Philadelphia; Helen Gassmann's survey of Philadelphia cemeteries; Bill Petersen's study of Har Hasetim's geography; Sarah Johnson and Riley Hubbard's refurbishment of a single Har Hasetim plot as a model for repairing tombstones throughout the property; and a co-authored booklet summarizing the cemetery's history. We hoped that, after we graduated, the Friends would partner with other historical organizations and that they would use our project materials as a stepping stone as they continued to revitalize the Mount of Olives.

Tracing the history of the individuals interred at the Mount of Olives and the communities connected to it was key to Gorman and Soto Segura's individual projects. Soto Segura wrote a paper studying how beneficial and burial societies created, in Decter's terms, "extra-familial" networks in the Jewish Quarter, as *chevras* facilitated traditional Jewish burials at Har Hasetim and Har Jehuda, another local cemetery.²⁰ Instead of viewing Har Hasetim as an isolated space, Soto Segura sought to understand who took care of the cemetery and its residents. She began by documenting the administrative activities of the Independent Chevra Kadisho (I.C.K.), the Har Hasetim Association, and other burial societies established in Philadelphia in the 1890s. Their members, on a volunteer basis, started acquiring plots in Har Hasetim in 1894, managing the care of the tombstones and the land, and providing funerary services for Jewish families.²¹ Soto Segura's work drew on the minutes from I.C.K.

¹⁹ Decter, *Interpreting*, 21.

²⁰ Decter explains that "extra-familial factors" had important functions for Jewish immigrants by providing different forms of support "from camaraderie to burial assistance." (*Interpreting*, 70); Andreína Soto Segura, "K'vod Hamet and the Making of a Communal Life: Benevolent and Burial Societies in the Greater Philadelphia Area," (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, spring 2016).

²¹ Stephen F. Finkelman, email to Daniel Gorman Jr. on April 28, 2019.

meetings, correspondence between the *chevras* and beneficiaries of the cemetery (now in the Friends' possession), and newspaper articles about burial sites and beneficial organizations available in the online database *ReadEx: America's Historical Newspapers*. Compiling this information also involved visiting Philadelphia institutions that hold valuable collections related to Har Hasetim, particularly the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Special Collection Research Center at Temple University.²² By tracing some of the *chevras* that interred their members at Har Hasetim, Soto Segura also reflected upon the role of these Jewish organizations in the performance of funerary rituals based on *K'vod Hamet*, the code requiring the purification of the deceased body, its proper burial with the observance of Jewish traditions, and assistance to the deceased's family during the mourning period.²³ In collaboration with classmate Elizabeth Motich, Soto Segura created a database for the Friends with information about the burial societies with proof of interment at Har Hasetim, including their sections, plots, and rows in the cemetery.²⁴

Gorman wrote a microhistory connecting Har Hasetim to Philadelphia's urban and social history. He focused on a Russian immigrant family, the Fensters, who lived on Philadelphia's South Fourth Street. Max and Minnie Fenster buried three children in Har Hasetim between 1898 and 1901. The second child who perished, four-year-old Sarah Fenster, died in the summer of 1900, shortly after the 1900 census was taken. Given the overlap of Sarah's death with the census, Gorman decided to reconstruct what life was like on the Fensters' block circa 1900. He reviewed census enumeration records, found via Ancestry.com, to identify the home ownership status, birth places, careers, and other relevant details of the people on the block. He then connected this information to the Fensters, speculating how the neighborhood's demographics, as well as local institutions, would have affected a young Jewish family. Overall, Gorman's project illuminated the Jewish Quarter's demographics and numerous cultural organizations

²² Minutes of the Independent Chevra Kadisho 1932–1980; Historical Society of Pennsylvania, "Jewish Resources" collection; Temple University, Special Collection Research Center, Jewish Vertical Files, Har Hasetim — Deed Books (1893–1900), Cemeteries; Temple University, Special Collection Research Center, Har Jehuda–I.C.K. Records, Box 1, Folder 1, Accession #2086.

²³ Andreina Soto Segura, "K'vod Hamet and the Making of a Communal Life" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, spring 2016), Microsoft Word file.

²⁴ Elizabeth Motich and Andreina Soto Segura, Database: "Burial Societies with Proof of Interment at Har Hasetim" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, last modified Apr. 21, 2016), Microsoft Excel file.

(not all of which were Jewish) during the period of Ashkenazi migration. Many U.S. national trends, from growing religious and ethnic diversity to contentious labor politics, were visible in only a few hundred feet of South Fourth Street.²⁵ Soto Segura and Gorman hope to publish their papers in academic journals in the near-future.

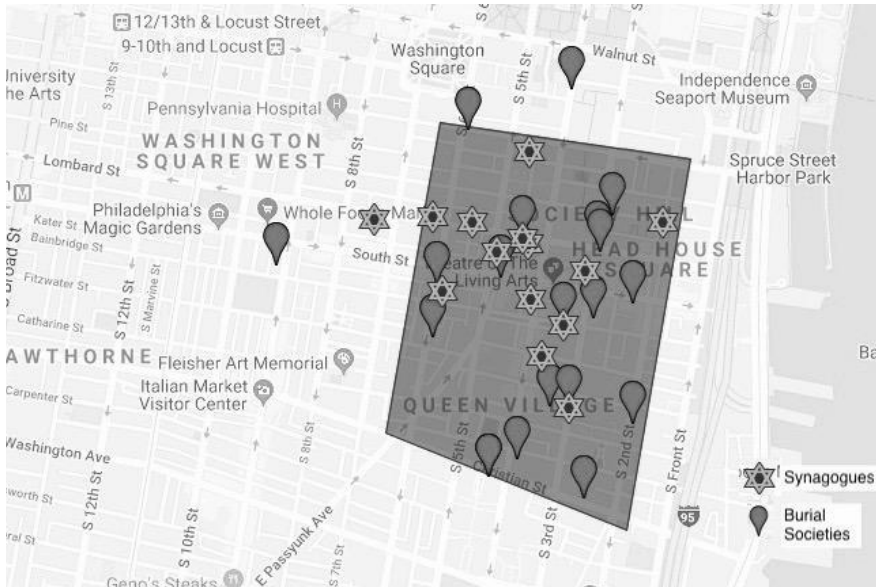


Figure 3. Soto Segura and Gorman's combined maps, showing locations of Synagogues and Burial Societies circa 1900. The box represents the Philadelphia Inquirer's borders for the Jewish Quarter in 1889.²⁶

While writing their papers, Soto Segura and Gorman produced several G.I.S. maps using Google Maps. Soto Segura, who amassed an extensive list of Jewish *chevras* and other benevolent societies, plotted the locations of burial societies' offices. Meanwhile, Gorman mapped the locations of Jewish Quarter synagogues circa 1900. The first image below is based on our combined G.I.S. data, outlining the Jewish Quarter's temples and the *chevras* associated with the Mount of Olives.

²⁵ Daniel Gorman Jr., "Sarah Fenster's Neighborhood: Demography, Community, and One Child's Life in 1900 Jewish Philadelphia" (unpublished manuscript, Villanova University, last modified May 21, 2016), Microsoft Word file.

²⁶ "Important Hebrew Move: The Israelites of this City in an Aggressive Humor," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 120, No. 46 (Feb. 22, 1889), 2, *ReadEx: America's Historical Newspapers*.

The second map shows the location of Har Hasetim and Har Jehuda in relation to the city of Philadelphia, where the cemeteries' residents once lived. These images show the vibrant society packed into the Jewish Quarter and speak to the potential of user-friendly, open-source platforms that historians can use to make interactive materials for local history projects.

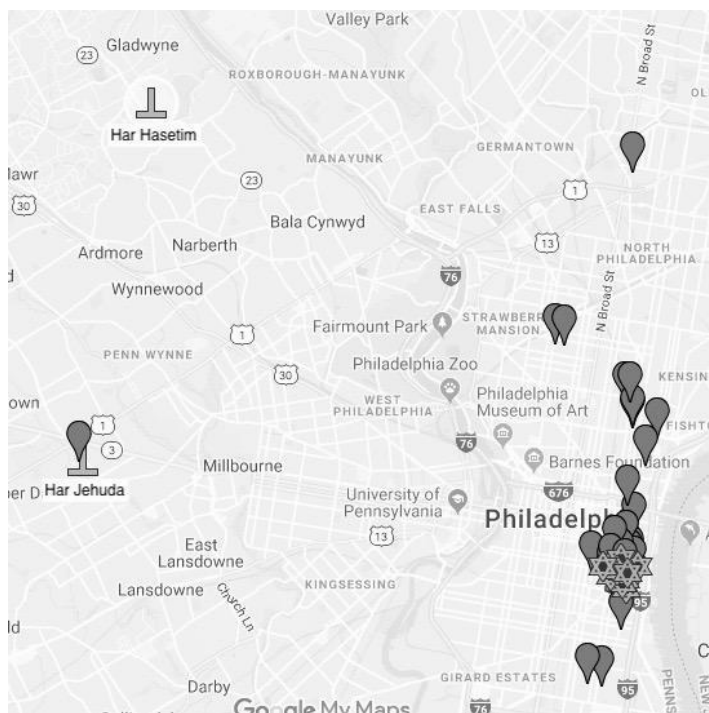


Figure 4. *The location of Har Hasetim and Har Jehuda, in relation to Jewish synagogues and benevolent societies in Philadelphia. During the early twentieth century, the Independent Chevra Kadisho (I.C.K.) managed both cemeteries.*²⁷

While the class did not produce a website for the Har Hasetim project, we discussed how this kind of public history project could easily take a digital form. The lack of time in the semester and the challenge of maintaining a website for the long term, on behalf of the Friends, dissuaded us from making a digital platform for our work. The Friends

²⁷ Minutes of the Independent Chevra Kadisho 1932–1980; “Notes of the Courts.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8 1906, 15; Allen Meyers, *The Jewish Community of South Philadelphia* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 1998), 34; Soto Segura, “K’vod Hamet.”

received an external hard drive containing all of our files, which would help as the Friends worked on their Pennsylvania Historical Landmark proposal for Har Hasetim. However, looking back on the Har Hasetim project, we recognize that despite the time-intensive nature of cemetery visits, genealogical research, and writing capstones, we should have made a full data management plan in consultation with the Villanova University Library. Historians working on community-based histories similar to the Har Hasetim project should consider the best way to preserve their materials and make them accessible, whether in physical or digital form, to future researchers.

On April 28, 2016, the M.A. students who participated in the Public History Practicum held their town hall meeting, “Legacy of Har Hasetim: The Making, Unmaking, and Preservation of Gladwyne’s Unknown Jewish Cemetery.” The symposium was an opportunity to share our collective and individual findings with the Friends, Beth David’s congregation, and faculty and students from Villanova University. The event was received positively by the attendees, especially by individuals who had ties to the Mount of Olives. We discussed the importance of academic communities engaging with their localities through public history, how burial sites could be repaired, and how the microcosm of the cemetery reflected Philadelphia’s larger Jewish history. Ending the course with the symposium emphasized the project’s spirit of collaboration and reciprocity. The Har Hasetim project showed how university classrooms — not only the large-scale museums and Jewish historical societies Decter describes in his book — might partner with synagogues to tell stories about local Jewish history.²⁸ Immigrant Jews once worked together to found Har Hasetim. This time, historians worked with their neighbors to write history among the tombstones.

²⁸ Cf. Decter, *Interpreting*, 217.

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Figures

Figure 1: *Har Hasetim, Gladwyne, Pennsylvania*, 2016.

Photo by Daniel Gorman Jr.

Figure 2: *Benjamin Schurr’s headstone*. Photo by Daniel Gorman Jr.

Figure 3: *Soto Segura and Gorman’s combined maps, showing locations of Synagogues and Burial Societies circa 1900*. Map plotted by the authors.

Figure 4: *The location of Har Hasetim and Har Jehuda, in relation to Jewish synagogues and benevolent societies in Philadelphia*. Map plotted by the authors.

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