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VIRGINIA'S FIRST SYNAGOGUE TO BE HONORED WITH HISTORIC HIGHWAY MARKER

RICHMOND, VA: On Friday, March 21st, a Historical Highway Marker will be dedicated for Richmond's Kahal Kadosh (K.K.) Beth Shalome synagogue, the first Jewish house of worship in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the sixth in the United States. The dedication ceremony, sponsored by The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, The Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives, Congregation Beth Ahabah and the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond will be held on the northeast corner of 14th and Franklin Streets at 1:00pm.

The congregation, which was founded in 1789, was one of six colonial congregations that sent a congratulatory message to George Washington on the eve of his inauguration. On September 15, 1822, the congregation dedicated a modest brick structure at 115 Mayo Street as their first synagogue building. K.K. Beth Shalome merged with Congregation Beth Ahabah, established in 1841, in 1898, and in 1904, dedicated a new synagogue building on Franklin Street. The Mayo Street building was demolished in 1932.

Participants in the dedication ceremony include Earl Ferguson, president of Congregation Beth Ahabah, Richard A. Arenstein, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond, Rabbi Martin P. Beifield, Jr., Rabbi Gary Creditor, the head of the Richmond Rabbinical Counsel, a spokesperson for the Department of Historic Resources Historic Highway Marker Program, Dr. Stephen Elliott, Executive Director of the Counsel for America's First Freedom and Jerry Klinger, president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. Richmond Mayor Rudolph C. McCollum and Congressman Bobby Scott have also been invited to participate.

Volunteers at The Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives are planning the dedication ceremony at the request of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, which sponsored the Historic Marker. "Jews have participated in American life since the beginning," said Klinger. "But what I'm finding is that our children don't really know anything at all about our American heritage. In Virginia, in particular, Jews were part of the Jamestown settlement, they fought in the Revolution and they were among the pioneers who settled the West. Most of our children only see the Jewish experience in America as beginning with the great immigration of the 1880's. What they don't understand is that the colonists and settlers planted the seeds for the tolerance and acceptance that the immigrants of the 1880's found in America... that the American experience is that of multiple groups working together." The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, based in Rockville, Maryland, is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to identifying and recognizing sites of American Jewish Historical interest.

“Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome was the first permanent Jewish house of worship in the Commonwealth of Virginia,” continued Klinger. “Unfortunately, the building, which was located between Cary and Dock Streets on 14th Street, no longer exists. Fortunately, the Jewish community still thrives in Richmond, and Congregation Beth Ahabah, while not the only direct link to K.K. Beth Shalome, significantly symbolizes the first Jewish efforts to establish a permanent physical presence in the State of Virginia.”

“We’re honored to have the opportunity to assist the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation with the dedication ceremony,” said Herbert Heltzer, of the Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives. “It is our mission to collect and chronicle the history of the Richmond Jewish experience, and K.K. Beth Shalome is a very important part of that history. In fact, the Beth Shalome families still have a presence in Richmond - many are members of Beth Ahabah while others are members of different congregations, and some are no longer practicing Jews but all are still involved in the City.”

In addition to unveiling the plaque, which has been forged by the Historic Highway Marker Program of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives also plans to recognize the descendants of the K.K. Beth Shalome families during the ceremony. William B. Thalhimer, 3rd and Christina Newton, the director of the Museum & Archives would like to extend a special invitation to all of the descendants of Samuel Alexander, Myer Angle, Dr. James Beale, Jacob Block, Henry Calisher, Aaron N. Cardoza, Rev. Abraham Cohen, Asher Cohen, Edward Cohen, Israel Cohen, Jacob I. Cohen, Joshua Cohen, Myer M. Cohen, Joseph Darmstadt, Mordecai Derkheim, Rev. Julius Eckman, Marcus Elcan, Jacob Ezekiel, Lyon Hart, Aaron Henry, Abraham Hutzler, Henry Hyman, Louis Hyman, Isaac Hyneman, David Isaacs, Isaiah Isaacs, Rev. George Jacobs, Solomon Jacobs, Lazarus Joseph, Baruch Judah, Gershom Judah, Isaac H. Judah, Manuel Judah, Asher Katz, Jacob Katz, Isaac Leeser, Abraham Levy, Isaac Levy, Jacob Levy, Isaac Lyon, Jacob Lyon, Rev. Ellis Lyons, Augustus Mailert, Asher Marx, Charles Marx, Frederick Marx, Joseph Marx, Samuel Marx, Meyer Meyers, Joseph Millhiser, Isaac Mordecai, Jacob Mordecai, Mordecai M. Mordecai, Samuel Mordecai, Solomon Mordecai, Abraham Myers, Aaron Myers, Benjamin Myers, Emanuel Myers, Gustavus A. Myers, Henry Myers, Joseph Myers, Levy Myers, Mordecai Myers, Moses Myers, Samuel Myers, Samuel Hays Myers, Solomon Pallen, Lewis Pyle, Wolf Pyle, Zalma Rehine, Israel Sandek, Isaac Schriver, Emanuel Semon, Ezekiel Solomon, Benjamin Solomons, Ezekiel Solomons, Henry Solomons, Isaac Solomons, Moses Straus, William Thalhimer, John Tobias, S.A. Winstock, and Benjamin Wolfe. The Museum & Archives has made every effort to develop a complete list of founding families, and regrets any inadvertent omissions.

“I am fascinated by the fact that I can trace my family’s history from the time my great-great grandfather, William Thalhimer became active in the community, first as a member of K.K. Beth Shalome and then as a founding member of Beth Ahabah. I’ve been working on our family geneology for quite a while and have found that many of the descendants of Beth Shalome families are related by marriage. In fact, it sometimes seems like I’m related to half of Jewish Richmond.” If you are a descendant of one of the Beth Shalome families or, if you are and your ancestor is not listed here, please contact the Museum & Archives.

The dedication ceremony for the Historic Highway Marker honoring Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome will take place at the northeast corner of East Franklin and 14th Streets on Friday, March 21st at 1:00pm. There is no admission and the public is invited to attend. For more information about the ceremony or K.K. Beth Shalome, please contact Christina Newton at 804.353.2662.