

Abraham Gumpert
President: 1810-11, 1817-18

Rodeph Shalom had a humble beginning in the living room of this one man and some colleagues. There were only about 40 Jewish families in Philadelphia in 1800, as 90% of Jews here were Sephardic. Jews coming to Philadelphia had to declare which synagogue they would join.

Just as Jews of Mikveh Israel purchased land for a cemetery at 8th and Spruce, the Germans bought a plot at Marlborough and Shackamaxon in Kensington.

They adopted several articles governing worship in synagogue, one of which was the fascinating Article 12. It which mandated attendance every Friday evening and Saturday morning, under penalty of a 25-cent fine. Additionally, no one would ever be turned away because of the inability to pay. In 1802, they formally created the Hebrew German Society Rodef Shalom, where records were kept in Yiddish until 1810. In 1817, Gumpert was urged to assume the presidency once again, refused the office, but finally relented for the good of the congregation.

Written by Jerry Silverman