Senior Community Living: A Talk with Amy Schectman, JCHE

by Jack Curley and Phil Radoff

Whether to age in place or to age in a community: a choice worthy of Hamlet. Listen to the folks at AARP and you’ll opt for aging in place, but according to Amy Schectman, president and CEO of Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE), most seniors will be physically and mentally better off if they live among friends and peers than by going it alone, even with a lot of outside support.

We spent an interesting and informative 90 minutes speaking with Amy and two of her associates at the JCHE offices in Brighton, the largest of four (soon to be five) locations that now house a total of about 1,500 mostly lower-income residents.

JCHE was founded in 1965 by two philanthropists, acting through Combined Jewish Philanthropies, during a time when many Jews were uprooted from their Boston homes. Most moved to the suburbs, but a number of those left behind, primarily elderly women, found themselves with nowhere to go.

Today, while JCHE continues to serve Jewish elders, it also reaches out to the broader community. According to Amy, residents come from 26 countries and speak 26 primary languages. An estimated 70 percent are immigrants. In fact, the great majority of residents living on the Brighton campus are Russian or Chinese speakers. Systemwide, 75 percent of residents are female, with an average age of 81, and an average entry age in the mid-70s. A significant minority of residents enter as couples. Studies have shown that both men and women prefer community living, though Amy acknowledges that married men tend to be less enthusiastic about the idea than widowers.

JCHE must restrict admission to its residences to applicants who can satisfy the strict income limits prescribed by federal grants. In practice, admission to most available units is open to lower-income families and individuals with incomes of no more than $40 thousand per year. Amy pointed out that, while there are a number of alternative options available for upper income elders, there are relative few for those in the middle range of income ($40 - $75,000), a segment that includes the majority of the elderly in the local Jewish community. While this group is currently ineligible for entry into most JCHE facilities, efforts are underway to expand the housing they provide so that it serves a wider range of incomes. Amy also noted that there is more income flexibility in some JCHE units where additional funding resources can be brought to bear. That said, the need for affordable housing remains great. There are currently 1,179 (Continued on p. 2)
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people on the JCHE waiting list, with a typical wait time of at least two years, and more often five-to-seven.

Funding poses an ongoing challenge. Until about six years ago, a generous HUD program provided funds for construction, maintenance, and operation. In the wake of that program’s chronic defunding, a separate federal program providing tax credits that can be sold to investors was used by JCHE to make new housing affordable. However, the recently-enacted federal tax law has made that approach less attractive to investors, with a resulting adverse impact on funding.

Amy points out that many residences for elders also reach out to provide resources for the at-home elder community. For example, non-residents are invited to participate in on-site events such as concerts and multi-cultural celebrations at JCHE (e.g., Seder, the August Moon Festival, and Russian Victory Day). JCHE also is the preparer of kosher meals for those receiving home delivered meals from the state. She is pleased to note that JCHE has recently begun delivery to Moslem elders of Halal meals, which are prepared in the JCHE kitchen using proper Halal guidelines. JCHE is also seeking creative ways to offer more in-house services and programs while remaining within budget guidelines. As one example, JCHE has partnered with local restaurants for on-site, low-cost food deliveries and enlisted volunteers to serve the meals to residents.

While aging in place is sometimes considered to be “the American ideal,” for many the end result can be isolation, chronic loneliness, and an increase in the physical process of aging. Accordingly, JCHE is spearheading a research study to assess the impact of community living on the cost of healthcare. Five thousand households will be involved in the study, with early data expected to be released later this year. The results will be shared with the health industry, which has a great stake in the success of elder community living and is thus a potential source of financial support.

Amy reports that she “fell in love” with BOLLI while participating in last September’s Adventures in Creative Retirement program. Inspired by her talk, Isabel and Dick Hanelin met with JCHE staff to see if their visions of senior housing overlapped. They did, and this was the spark that led to BOLLI’s Housing Options for Learning conference, which took place in June. Elder housing will, of course, continue to be of great interest to us all, and we look forward to hearing more from Amy at future BOLLI events.
What's Up in Waltham? Gore Place

By Na'ama Ansell

It was a mansion, a farm, a golf course, a roadhouse, a speakeasy, an airfield, and an automobile showroom. All of the above were once what is now known to us as Gore Place, the impeccably restored Waltham country estate of Christopher and Rebecca Gore.

Christopher Gore was born in 1758, the eleventh child of a well-to-do Boston merchant family. He graduated from Harvard at 18 and joined the Colonial Army, after which he was briefly tutored in law, passed the bar, and started a successful, lucrative law practice in Boston. He added to his well-being by investing in paper securities that had been given to Continental Army soldiers in lieu of pay. According to John Quincy Adams, this financial coup made Gore the richest lawyer in the country.

In 1785, Christopher married Rebecca Payne, the daughter of the director of the Bank of Massachusetts. Her dowry, added to Gore’s own wealth, enabled the young couple to buy a large tract of land in rural Waltham. In 1793, they built their first mansion and carriage house, importing an English landscape architect to design the grounds.

On the political front, Gore was a delegate to the 1789 Massachusetts convention to ratify the Constitution; George Washington appointed him the first U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts; and in 1796 Washington sent Gore to England to represent the United States in maritime claims under the Jay Treaty. His work in England finished, Gore and his wife went on a tour of Europe where Rebecca became enamored of the architecture of European country estates. While the Gores were in Europe their Waltham house burned down. On their return, they began planning their new country home with the grand European estates in mind. Rebecca, a student of architecture herself, enlisted the help of French architect Jacques-Guillaume Legrand in drawing up the plans for the new mansion. It took two years to finish their Federalist style home, the very one that we see today.

Ensconced in their elaborate new home, the Gores entertained lavishly, and Christopher continued his rise in the political world. Between 1809 and 1816, he served as governor of Massachusetts, representative in the Massachusetts Legislature, and finally U.S. senator. It was said that Gore lost his bid for a second term as governor because his lifestyle was too grand for most New Englanders. In 1816, Gore retired from politics.

Gore had an intense interest in agriculture and horticulture. Local farmers helped with the farm work to help keep the estate going. Gore’s innovative use of composting for soil improvement allowed an unprecedented 50% of his land to be under cultivation. The Gore land was an agrarian landscape belying the lavishness of the mansion interior.

Gore died in 1827, followed by his wife in 1835. The estate passed through a succession of owners until 1911 when Charles Metz entered the scene. An industrialist whose Waltham Manufacturing Company produced the Orient racing bicycles, motorcycles, and automobiles, Metz used a portion of the Gore home as a showroom for his cars. He also began to manufacture airplanes and used the estate lawn for air shows.

Metz was gone by 1922, the government having taken over his airplane manufacturing operation for wartime use, and the Gore estate became the home of the Waltham Country Club with a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, and a clubhouse. Seven years later, the club went into bankruptcy as a result of the crash of 1929. In the ensuing six years, the estate became a roadhouse and a speakeasy. (Continued on p. 7)
Welcome Back Brunch

Star attractions at BOLLI are the Back-to-School Brunches at the start of each term. Co-chairs Fran Feldman and Dorene Nemeth report that this year’s brunch on September 21 was no exception. About 125 BOLLI members happily greeted one another after the long summer hiatus and enjoyed the delicious food provided free of charge by the brand-new Brothers Marketplace at 1 Moody Street in Waltham. Stop by the store to sample its wide variety of groceries and prepared foods, and be sure to thank Walter, the manager, for his very generous donation.

Brunch co-chairs Fran Feldman and Dorene Nemeth set up this term’s spread (photo, Harris Traiger). The group as a whole was quick to enjoy (photo, Mel Markowitz).

Bunny Cohen and Charlie Raskin catch up (photo, Joanne Fortunato) while Marcy Fischer and Jan Burress connect with Bonnie Seider. Alan and Laura Rosenspan look forward to their first term at BOLLI (photos, Mel Markowitz).

Good conversation abounds at BOLLI (photo, Harris Traiger), to which members Sherry Glass, Marion Ross, Libby Saks, Amy Avergun, and Fran Tidor can happily attest (photo, Mel Markowitz).
BOLLI Director Avi Bernstein with member Paula Corman (photo, Harris Traiger); Steve Asen and Lloyd David catch up over coffee (photo, Sue Wurster); Diane Young collects publications to help her plan her lunch time and campus activities (photo, Joanne Fortunato).

Eileen Mitchell and Betty Brudnick (above left) share summer tales while Dennis Greene greets Debra and Bruce Ettenberg as well as Ed Goldberg. Frank Segall and Ralph Freidin connect their phones. New members Yoav and Orr Michaely (left) make new acquaintances (photos, Sue Wurster). Below, BOLLI Special Interest Groups (SIGs) welcome those who’d like to join their pursuits. Members head to the Blue Room (bottom left) to meet various groups and explore options (photo, Mel Markowitz). Beth Davis of the Current Events and Sue Adams of the Waltham Matters groups (below) greet interested BOLLI members (photo, Joanne Fortunato). Helen Abrams (seated on table) and Joanne Fortunato (to her right) talk about the Photo Group. Group participant Harris Traiger looks on from the piano (photo, Sue Wurster).
Lately, we’ve been hearing about the “witch hunt” taking place in our nation’s capital. But here in Massachusetts, at this time of year, our country’s original witch hunt comes to mind—the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

Every fall, teeming crowds descend upon “Witch City” for hefty doses of kitschy horror. Shops offer “witch ware,” guides offer “ghost tours,” and street stands offer “butter beer.” The city’s Witch Museum features wax figures and multi-media scenes depicting Salem’s 1692 mayhem. But the one thing it all seems to lack is actual history. For that, those interested in Salem’s 17th century Witch Trials need to get back in the car and head to Danvers.

In 1692, Salem consisted of two parts: Salem Town and Salem Farm. It was in Salem Farm, now the city of Danvers, that the original hysteria and hangings erupted. And it is in Danvers where one may step back into history by visiting the home of trial victim Rebecca Nurse.

It’s an easy drive up Route 128, and the directions to 149 Pine Street are simple and clear. But Pine Street, lined on one side with tract houses, seems an unlikely place for a visit to the 1690s. A simple, red plaque on the other side of the street marks the edge of the property. When you turn into the dirt drive to the house/museum, time drops away.

Grassy fields stretch to the left and right along that long path. No parking lot awaits your vehicle—just an open space by a split-rail fence. No ticket booth invites visitors to form a line for admission. No sign draws visitors to a museum gift shop. Instead, you find yourself looking at 27 acres of history: a red salt-box farmhouse, gardens, a shoemaker’s shed, a dairy shed, and a 17th century style (known as First Period) meeting house.

The farmhouse, which the Nurse family began leasing in 1678, is over 350 years old. Rebecca was 71 years old in 1692 when she was accused of witchcraft. At her trial, the frail woman was found not guilty, but that decision was reversed. It is believed that the hanging of this deeply devout, highly respected, ailing woman precipitated the end of that tragic series of events.

Members of the family lived on the property until 1907 when it was acquired and restored by the Rebecca Nurse Memorial Association. In 1926, the property was donated to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. And in 1981, it passed to the Danvers Alarm List Company, a reenactment or living history group that has maintained it in the decades since.

In 1984, PBS sought to film the movie, Three Sovereigns for Sarah, on the property, which involved building a reproduction of the village meeting house on the homestead’s grounds. The Danvers living history group agreed, on the condition that the structure be built as it would have been at the time and that it remain as a permanent fixture.

Today, the building is equipped with electricity and bench seating. And yet, it remains a space in which one can easily sit back and imagine what it must have been like in 1692 when Salem’s fiery Reverend Parris, in whose home the hysteria initially erupted, held forth with his congregation.
The house, gardens, and outbuildings have been lovingly preserved. If you are feeling spry, a short hike to the family graveyard is well worth the effort. The property is ideal for relaxing in quiet reflection.

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead is a local gem not only because of its historical significance but also because of its historical ambiance. With no city sounds and no commercial enterprise, it is easy to put ourselves in the places of those who walked that land so long ago. It is easy, too, to think about witch hunts then and now.

For hours and other information (such as handicap accessibility), go to the Nurse Homestead website at http://www.rebeccanurse.org/visitor-information

Admission:  Adults $7; Seniors (65 and older) $5;  Children 16 and under $4; Children under 6 free.

### Gore Place, continued

By 1935, lenders were ready to raze Gore Place to make way for new housing when a group of historic preservationists raised enough money to save it from demolition. The Gore Society was formed, and the estate has since become a national historic landmark.

A tour of Gore Place today presents a lesson in impressive restoration. The handsome Federalist exterior was fortunately left intact, but the interior was a jumble of different owners’ renovations. Stairways were removed, others were built, walls were knocked out, windows and doors were removed or created. No semblance of the original home interior was left and there were no original plans to consult.

Architectural historians have studied plans of homes of the same time period to try to piece together a floor plan of the Gore home. It’s a painstaking endeavor which goes on today. But the major restoration has been completed, and a tour of the house is awe-inspiring. Large, airy rooms feature wall-to-wall carpeting, flowered wallpaper, an impressive library, and period furniture, all common to the great homes of that era. An unusual feature is central heating--a Gore addition when he and his wife made Gore Place their year-round home.

Gore Place is unique among Waltham estates in that it combines the owner's working farm with a lavish home. Year-round tours of the estate take place Monday through Friday. The first floor of the house is handicap accessible. In October there are Frightful Friday Tours where visitors are shuttled to various parts of the house to hear spooky tales. Moonlight tours, holiday teas, and concerts are periodic events, always popular with visitors to this unique estate.
Upcoming Campus Events
Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

Brandeis Chamber Singers and University Chorus. Sunday, Nov. 11, 2 to 4 P.M. Free and open to the public.

Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra. Sunday, Nov. 18, 3 to 4:30 P.M.
Brandeis Wind Ensemble 7 to 8:30 P.M. Both events are free and open to the public.


THE ROSE ART MUSEUM: Through December 2

Tuesday Smillie: To Build Another World. Building on a history of protest signage, Tuesday Smillie explores transgender-feminist politics and activism, questioning the address of language and the imprint of the past in a multimedia practice that includes watercolor, collage, and textile-based work.

Passage. An exhibition of highlights spanning seven decades of the museum’s permanent collection, curated by Henry and Lois Foster Director and Chief Curator Luis A. Croquer. Includes works by Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Marisol Escobar, Wifredo Lam, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, and Pablo Picasso.

For additional information on Brandeis events, visit http://www.brandeis.edu/events (photos online)