

2008 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 226

Commending the Jewish families of Berkley, Virginia.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 18, 2008

Agreed to by the Senate, January 24, 2008

WHEREAS, the early Town of Berkley was located directly across the eastern branch of the Elizabeth River from what is now the City of Norfolk in the South Hampton Roads area; and

WHEREAS, in its former period of greatest prosperity, Berkley featured port facilities and a shipyard that produced ships and armaments during wartime, and it was the rail terminus of the original Norfolk Southern Railway, a regional railroad that extended 600 miles to Charlotte, North Carolina; in 1909 the town was annexed by the City of Norfolk, and was then considered a neighborhood of that city; and

WHEREAS, 120 years ago, a tenacious and resourceful Southern Jewish community with roots in Jewish Baltimore moved across the Elizabeth River to settle in Berkley and their little Orthodox *shtetl* grew and prospered, as well as endured tumultuous times, including World War I, a devastating fire that destroyed much of the town, factions within the Jewish community itself, the Great Depression, and World War II; and

WHEREAS, the Jewish community began when Kovna Jewish peddlers Abe Legum and Dovid Glasser from Baltimore and Moses Molin from a nearby town joined forces with Jacob Epstein, a Lithuanian Jew and established Baltimore businessman; the entrepreneurs successfully began to extend their businesses and trade to nearby Berkley; and

WHEREAS, about the same time, David Lowenberg, the successful owner of the Chesapeake Knitting Mills and Elizabeth Knitting Mills, built his largest mill in Berkley; many of his employees resided in the town and they needed supplies, staples, and dry goods; and

WHEREAS, soon Berkley became a thriving town with established businesses selling china, clothes, candy, food, cutlery, grain, and feed for animals; and as the town prospered many more family members and old neighbors moved from Baltimore and from Kovna in central Lithuania; and

WHEREAS, in 1892 David Lowenberg donated a small lot to these Orthodox-practicing Jews and the community came together and built the *shul* Mikro Kodesh, named for the *shul* they had left behind in Baltimore; and

WHEREAS, the Jewish community continued to grow until a new *shul* was needed, which was completed on April 7, 1922, and neighbors celebrated with a big parade down the middle of Liberty Street with the rabbi and marchers carrying the Torahs and the eternal light from the old to the new *shul*; and

WHEREAS, just seven days later a disastrous fire tore through Berkley, wiping out many Jewish businesses and most of East Liberty Street, but the community came together and rebuilt their town, which again prospered until the early 1950s; and

WHEREAS, the older generation began to pass on and many were laid to rest in Berkley Cemetery, and their children moved to cities across Virginia and metropolitan centers along the East Coast; and

WHEREAS, the Jewish families of Berkley, Virginia, and their descendants met in Norfolk and held a Berkley Family Reunion on the weekend of October 19 through October 21, 2007; and

WHEREAS, the Berkley families and their descendants were given an opportunity to explore their heritage by taking a guided bus tour of historical Jewish neighborhoods and to visit the former Mikro Kodesh Synagogue and the Berkley Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, services were held at Ohel Sholom Temple followed by an Oneg Shabbat in honor of the reunion, and a gala event was held to celebrate seeing friends and family, old and new; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commend the Jewish families of Berkley, Virginia, for their many contributions to the Commonwealth and the nation; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Jewish families of Berkley, Virginia, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for their rich culture and traditions and best wishes for many more happy reunions in the future.

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