

Historical Cemeteries

The below information is from **“Our Legacy, 275 Years of Congregation Mickve Israel and Jewish Life in Savannah 1733-2008”** 1733 – 1765 Burial Grounds:

Shortly after the Jews arrived in 1733, General James Oglethorpe set aside a plot of land for their use as a burial ground just south of the city’s limits at South Broad Street, now known as Oglethorpe Avenue. Today, a handsome granite monument memorializes those that are buried in that area. 1765 – 1861 Levi Sheftall Cemetery: In 1765, Levi Sheftall reserved at 25 x 40-foot walled plot at what was Spruce and Cohen streets for the exclusive use of his family: the Sheftalls, the de Lyons, and the De La Mottas. Levi’s father, early settler Benjamin Sheftall (1702 – 1762) was the first to be buried there. In 1773, the cemetery was placed in trust as a family burial ground. The cemetery is now owned by Mickve Israel. 1769 - 1881 approximately, Mordecai Sheftall Cemetery: According to lore, on the occasion of the death of a Jewish visitor to Savannah, Levi Sheftall declined to allow this visitor to be buried within the Sheftall family plot. Levi’s half-brother, Mordecai, immediately appropriated 1.5 acres of the 5 acres granted to him by King George III in 1762 (adjacent to the Levi Sheftall Cemetery) to be put in trust, deeding the land to ten trustees for the use and purpose of a place of burial “for all persons whatever professing the Jewish religion” and for erecting a synagogue or building for the worship or Judaism. Between 1769 and 1881, there were at least eighty-four burials in this cemetery including Mordecai Sheftall himself, his wife Frances Hart Sheftall, Sheftall “Cocked Hat” Sheftall, and various other members of the de Lyon and De La Motta families. Also buried in this cemetery are Abigail Minis, one of the original 1733 settlers, and her son Philip, the first Caucasian male child to be conceived and born in Georgia.

By the late 1800s, the trustees had acquired the property adjacent to the cemetery. In 1902, they received authorization to sell that surplus land and use the proceeds to build a one story building on Monterey Square, adjacent to Mickve Israel’s sanctuary. This building was called the Mordecai Sheftall Memorial Hall, the first of three such halls named for Mordecai on this site over the years.

The cemetery, through its present trustees, is still maintained by Mordecai Sheftall’s 1762 trust.