



JCRS ISAAC SOLOMON
**HISTORIC
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1600 Pierce Street
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FOUNDERS

In 1903, a group of dedicated Jewish immigrants in Denver met to devise a solution to care for indigent patients suffering from tuberculosis. Among these men were: Dr. Charles Spivak, a physician and community activist; Benjamin Diamond, a tinner; David Bernhardt, a furrier; Louis Bornstein, a silkweaver; Henry Cohen, a clerk; Jacob Cooper, a tailor; A. Heublum, a painter; David Kaufman, an actor; M. Levinger, a musician; J. Millstein, a photographer; Louis Shapiro, a cigar maker; Benjamin Wittenstein, a furrier; L. Wolf, a tailor; E. Aidelman, a wagonmaker; and Morris Yasness, a cigar maker. Although most of the group was poverty-stricken and plagued by ill-health, at their first meeting they collected \$1.10 to establish a non-sectarian institution for the treatment of patients in any stage of tuberculosis. The Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society was born. At least five of these men were later patients at the facility.

Sources:

Dr. Jeanne L. Abrams, "Chasing the Cure," 1986
Ida Liebert Uchill, *Pioneers, Peddlers and Tsadikim*
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CHARLES DAVID SPIVAK and the JCRS

Red-headed Charles David Spivak, was no ordinary man. An immigrant from Russia, he excelled in many fields and made his mark as a brilliant physician, lexicographer, professor, editor, Hebraist and Yiddishist, Talmudist, Zionist, Socialist, but most deeply as the beloved humanitarian, "Tateh (Papa) Spivak."

Chaim David Spivakofski was born into an Orthodox Jewish home in Krementschug, Russia, on December 25, 1861, to Samuel David and Deborah Adel (Dorfman) His parents gave him a Hebrew and uncommonly thorough secular education, so that for the rest of his life he had a deep understanding of the problems that faced his people and mankind, historically and contemporaneously.

As Cossacks pogroms began to take their toll on the Jewish population, he refused to believe that this terror was the Jewish lot. In his studies he became a Socialist, reading books forbidden by the government, and undertaking the publication of a small revolutionary paper.

Spivak's friend, Abraham Cahan, noted that Spivak fled Russia, not only because of his political activity, in which he had been apprehended, but also because of his strong feelings that as a Jew he had to do something for the Jewish future. He and a friend had planned to join a colony of Russian settlers in Oregon in order to apply their ideas of co-operation and living close to the soil. The colony was never organized and Spivak went to work in a New York factory for six dollars a week. From there he went to Maine where he worked in a wool mill.

His own aspirations and abilities led him into the field of medicine. Through the aid of friends he entered the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia graduating with honors in 1890. During his student days he was active in communal work in Philadelphia and began his writing in the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish newspapers. In the years that followed he took post-graduate work at the University of Berlin, and returned to Philadelphia, where he married Jenny (Eugenia) Charsky, a well-educated young woman, in 1893.

Spivak was well on his way to prominence in his field. He was named chief of the clinic of gastro-intestinal diseases in the Philadelphia Polyclinic. In communal life he had begun to satisfy his longing to improve Jewish life. He was elected president of a group who sought responsibility and recognition for the East European Jews in the short-lived Jewish Alliance of America in Philadelphia, February 15, 1891. The plan came to nothing then but fifteen years later the idea came to life in the American Jewish Committee. Spivak's career in Philadelphia terminated abruptly when his wife's health demanded that they leave the East.

In Denver he was immediately recognized as a leader in his field of medicine, and upon his arrival in 1896 he was invited to become a lecturer on diseases of the gastro-intestinal tract in the local medical college, as well as professor of anatomy and of medicine.



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In his private practice he was an instant success, but he was greatly dissatisfied with the lack of treatment offered the tuberculars in the state. When he was called to address the first mass meeting organized by the "lungers" on West Colfax, he found the field that was waiting for his enthusiasm and ability. [Thus was established the Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society.] This was a mighty task in an entrenched community, and one which required the co-operation of all the Jews, not only of Denver, but of the whole nation -- appealing to the finest ideals of Judaism -- tsdokoh for saving lives. Spivak never let it be forgotten that the JCRS was conceived in lower West Colfax, and that its birth was attended by the Yiddish-speaking Jews of America.

This ideal attracted just such professional men as Spivak; Drs. Zederbaum, Hillkowitz, and later Drs. Oscar Shere and I. D. Bronfin were men whose brilliance was matched by their love for suffering humanity.

Spivak became the secretary of the organization, and his painstaking minutes reveal the idealism of its officers. Most of the board meetings were held in his office, where he and his friends, Yehoash and Jacob Marinoff, the writer of Yiddish humor, wrote the bulletins, press releases, and other publicity for the fledgling institution. To them were added Philip Hornbein, the lawyer, Henry Cohen and Mrs. Edgerton, the picturesque couple -- he a labor lawyer and son of the founder of the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society and she his teacher and devoted friend -- and, of course, all of West Colfax.

One of the first suggestions adopted was that no member of the board should hold any pay position in the JCRS. Another was that no one should be paid for soliciting funds, be it salary, commission, or expenses. This was the opinion of Henry Cohen, who believed that "the JCRS must remain unique in this respect as in all others," and that: to pay a commission would lower the high standard the society had set for itself."

The Press and Propaganda committee branched into its own publication, The Sanatorium, of which Spivak was the editor from 1907 until his death. On the staff of the bi-monthly were Yehoash and Marinoff, as well as writers who were patients at the JCRS

Dr. Spivak's legacy to humanity cannot be evaluated. Many people lived to bring into the world their own children because, no matter how full the JCRS was, he always managed to scrape up a cot from some source and to squeeze it into the brimming hospital. The Russian Jew proved that the East European Jews were capable of assuming responsibility, and that experience was not a prerequisite in establishing life-saving institutions. He was happy to overlook petty differences in order to unite the Jews into strong central groups, always democratic in policy and action. Simply presented, he left many guides to those that followed who wanted to keep Judaism alive and healthy in a democratic America. Dr. Charles David Spivak was the first person inducted into the Jefferson County Hall of Fame.

Spivak died in Denver on October 16, 1927. His gravesite is at Golden Hill Cemetery.

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DENVER and the TUBERCULOSIS EPIDEMIC

Tuberculosis (TB, consumption) is an ancient malady. Skeletal evidence has been identified from remains dating to 5000 BCE. The disease was described as far back as the first medical records written down by Asclepiads of Cos. In the Roman Empire and the late Middle Ages in Europe, the "white plague" is detailed. According to records of the JCRS, around the turn of the 20th century approximately 154,000 died yearly due to TB and more than ten times that number suffered from the disease in the United States.

By the 1880s several types of treatment were utilized in Europe and the United States, including the "open air" method, surgical treatments and various medications. By the mid-1880s the sanatorium movement had been established, touting clean air, good food and rest as the best treatment for tuberculosis patients. As the American West was settled, Colorado's dry, sunny climate and high altitude became a drawing card as an ideal location for the healing of TB. The first such Colorado sanatoria included Cragmor in Colorado Springs, and National Jewish Hospital and JCRS in Denver. Other hospitals such as Penrose and Memorial in Colorado Springs, and Swedish, Craig, Lutheran, Porter, and St. Anthony hospitals in Denver began as sanatoria.

Tuberculosis is a contagious disease caused by the air-borne bacteria, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It is spread when a victim with TB in his lungs coughs, sneezes or somehow propels the germs into the air where they are inhaled by another person. TB is not spread in food, clothing, plates, or by persons in the inactive stage of the disease. TB usually affects the lungs, but can also produce an infection found in other parts of the body including the spine, brain and kidneys.

The close quarters of the living conditions and workshops in the East Coast metropolises of the 1800s were breeding grounds for the spread of the disease. The majority of the first 100 documented patients at JCRS were skilled tradesmen from the East Coast.

By the 1940s, several drugs were introduced to treat TB, and the epidemic was considered controlled by the 1950s. Tuberculosis is still an active disease, however, and continues to affect thousands in the United States each year.

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