



On October 15, 2021, [The Archaeological Conservancy](#) and the [New England Hebrew Farmers of the Emanuel Society](#) (NEHFES) gathered in Hartford to celebrate the donation of the synagogue parcel of the NEHFES's synagogue and creamery site in Chesterfield, CT. At the helm was President and Executive Director of the NEHFES, Nancy Savin. For decades, Nancy has been the site's tireless advocate; whether it was uniting the descendant members of the first families or applying for grants to document and preserve the site, Nancy was the driving force behind it all.

NEHFES was a farming community of Russian-Jewish immigrants who settled in Chesterfield, built CT's first rural synagogue in 1892, and wrote a governing constitution in 1894. Nancy's great-great grandfather, Hirsch Kaplan, arrived in 1890 and served as the community's first leader. Initially, the community subsisted on sewing piecework for clothing, hats, handbags, and wallets. This early work helped raise funds to purchase the land and construct their religious and agricultural buildings. By the early twentieth century, the families had a booming business boarding

summer visitors. By the 1930s, the once-thriving community started to wane as the second generation moved out of Chesterfield to work and raise their families. Nevertheless, Nancy has fond memories of visiting her grandmother (pictured above at age 6), going to the local one-room synagogue, and swimming in the local swimming hole.

Nancy credits the fantastic collaboration with the SHPO for the long-term preservation of the synagogue and creamery site. Current and previous SHPO staff including Dave Poirier, Dan Forrest, and Mary Donohue helped Nancy along the way. Nancy also acknowledges the support and cooperation of preservation professions outside the SHPO office including Preservation CT, Historical Perspectives, Inc., PAST, Cirrus Engineering, and UCONN archaeological field school. From the SHPO's perspective, Nancy's efforts have been inspiring. Mary Dunne, Deputy State Historic Preservation Office says, "Nancy Savin's unflagging dedication to protecting the site of the former New England Hebrew Farmers of the Emanuel Society synagogue in Chesterfield, and keeping the history of its community alive, is an inspiration. It's been an honor to help her in her preservation efforts!"

Today, the site retains the ruins of the synagogue, which was destroyed by fire in 1975 and the creamery parcel. Under Nancy's leadership, the site was designated a State Archaeological Preserve in 2007 and nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 2012. Nancy also obtained a matching grant from the SHPO to rehabilitate the Synagogue foundation and arranged for the excavation of the historic *mikveh*, or ritual bath, through UCONN's archaeological field school.

With the support of over 40 NEFHES descendent members from the U.S. and Canada, Nancy's work honors memory, human history, and a story about an immigrant community that through great effort and enterprise created far better lives for their families and future generations –the real American Dream!

Finally, it is important to note that NEHFES is not Nancy's only work in historic preservation. In 1983, she initiated a survey of historic theaters in Connecticut and in 1991, she proposed an inventory of Connecticut's historic synagogues. The SHPO staff thanks Nancy for her dedication to the identification, documentation, and preservation of CT's historic resources. Her enthusiasm is infectious and SHPO staff sings her praises. "Since joining SHPO, there is no one that I have enjoyed getting to know more than Nancy," says Cathy Labadia, Staff Archaeologist. "I don't know where the NEHFES site would be without her stewardship. She did not do it alone, but her perseverance and caring led the way to the long-term preservation of the Synagogue and Creamery site."