The 1918 Flu Pandemic Experienced by the Rhodes Jewish Community of Los Angeles

By Aron Hasson, April 5, 2020

In 1917 the Sephardic Jewish immigrants from the island of Rhodes established a synagogue organization in downtown Los Angeles called the “Peace and Progress Society” (“Sosiedad Pas i Progreso”)¹. The following year these young immigrants faced the “1918 flu pandemic” and they pooled their modest earnings to help those among them in need which exemplified their humanitarian efforts.

The following financial report dated September 20, 1919 is written in Judeo-Spanish (“Ladino”)² and includes three entries indicating how their funds were spent towards charitable endeavors.

(Transliterated from the Judeo-Spanish handwriting and then translated into English in blue):


$129.71 ... Aiudos a miembros enfermos i aiudos de karidad = Assistance for sick members and charity assistance. $200.00 ... Por personas empleadas para kuldar i asistir kontinuimente los miembros enfermos mientras la epidemia = For people employed to care for and continually help the sick members during the epidemic. $245.00 ... Funerales i karosas de akompaniamiento = Funerals and accompanying carriages.

During the organization’s previous year, the charitable nature of the organization is also manifested. From their $575 of total expenditures: $100 was sent to the people suffering in Rhodes; $90 was sent to the people suffering in Salonica; $60 was “given in the name of the suffering ones of the war”; and $71 was given to “aid for the sick members and charity assistance”.

Let this experience inspire us today to stay strong and hopeful to overcome the current Covid-19 pandemic.

For more information of the Jewish community of Los Angeles: www.rhodesjewishmuseum.org/Los Angeles

¹ The organization name later changed to Sephardic Hebrew Center and later merged with the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel.

² This handwriting was used in the Iberian Peninsula before the Inquisitions and was brought to the island of Rhodes by the Sephardic Jews and was subsequently used in Los Angeles by the Rhodesis.