

December 29, 1995

Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz, 87, Founder of Schools

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, a prominent Orthodox religious leader, educator and broadcaster, died on Tuesday at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Elizabeth, N.J. A longtime resident of that city, he was 87.

He suffered a long illness, according to the Jewish Educational Center of Elizabeth, which he founded in 1941.

Rabbi Teitz was a scion of a line of rabbis stretching back centuries. He was born in Latvia and trained in rabbinical seminaries in Lithuania. He arrived in the United States in 1933 for what he thought would be a yearlong lecture tour.

Instead, he stayed to marry Bessie Preil, daughter of Rabbi Elozor Mayer Preil, the rabbi of what was then a small Orthodox community in Elizabeth. He succeeded his father-in-law in the rabbinate upon Rabbi Preil's death in the 1930's.

Since then, the community, founded in 1881, has grown to some 5,000 people affiliated with five synagogues under one united rabbinate. Rabbi Teitz established that rabbinate and the family tradition is upheld by his son, Rabbi Elazar Mayer Teitz, who has been his associate since 1958.

The Jewish Educational Center he founded made Elizabeth the fourth American city, after New York, Boston and Baltimore, to offer a full-range Jewish and secular education. It consists of the elementary Yeshiva, along with Mesivta Academy, a high school for boys, and Bruria High School for girls. Together, they have more than 900 students.

In 1953, Rabbi Teitz founded "The Talmudic Seminar of the Air," broadcast over radio station WEVD-AM (1050) in New York to a peak audience estimated at 200,000 listeners. He used the weekly program to discuss one page of the Talmud at a time and continued to do so for 36 years.

He was elected president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada in 1956 and served for a dozen years in that position.

He was a leading proponent of the humane qualities of kosher slaughter of animal and founder of a kosher kitchen at Princeton University.

In 1964, he made the first of 22 trips to the Soviet Union, where he obtained permission to meet religious needs of Jewish population centers that had previously been denied by Communist officials. He was able to make headway because he avoided publicity and public announcements of his efforts.

When he founded the Jewish Educational Center, the preamble of its bylaws promised that it would become something for Jewish communities throughout the United States to emulate. Its success was recognized by the Government of Israel in 1968, when it singled out Elizabeth as a model Jewish community and presented it with a medal.

In addition to his son, Rabbi Teitz is survived by five daughters, Dr. Hadassah Brooks Morgan and Dr. Rivkah Blau, both of Manhattan, Shulamith Resnick of Elizabeth, Abigail Rabin of Englewood, N.J., and Elisheva Goldstein of Teaneck, N.J.; a brother, Rabbi Elchonon Teitz of Kew Gardens, Queens; a sister, Esther Martin of Nanuet, N.Y., 20 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. His wife died in 1993.