

## The Legacy of David B. and Sophia M. Berger

David B. and Sophia M. Berger were dedicated pioneers in the early years of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. David started his involvement with Ramah in the mid 1950's and subsequently served as an active member of the Camp Ramah in Wisconsin Commission for several decades. Not only did David and Sophia support the camp as donors, they believed in the essential role that Camp Ramah could play in energizing and sustaining the vitality of the Conservative Movement.

**The David B. and Sophia M. Berger Israel Scholar-in Residence Endowment Fund**, established by their children and friends in honor of their 50th wedding anniversary in 1989, is a living legacy to their commitment to Ramah.

David joined the Ramah Commission around the time that his oldest son, Bob, began his camp experience in cabin aleph in 1954. Bob thinks back to why his folks loved Camp Ramah so much: "I know from their very first visit to see me at camp that Dad was completely taken by the amazingly dramatic, ruach-filled Erev Shabbat proceedings, from services outdoors overlooking the lake, to the full-throated and enthusiastic 45 minutes of singing and fun in the Chadar Ochel after Erev Shabbat dinners, to the entire camp doing Israeli dances on the kikar for another 30-45 minutes to the accompaniment of their own singing. Son Ken added, "They were just so excited by the way in which Judaism was lived at camp, with the way in which Hebrew was spoken at camp, and with how much fun the campers seemed to be having... they loved camp because we loved camp so much!"

David and Sophia Berger's Ramah legacy continues to live on through their sons Bob, Ken and Dan, their eight grandchildren and now also a great-grandchild. All of them attended Camp Ramah as campers (the three east coast grandkids at Berkshires), nine of them participated in Israel Seminar (Bob with USY in 1959 before Ramah Seminars began); six worked as counselors, three were Roshei Aidot; and two worked as teachers, Educational Director and/or Scholar-in-Residence. This past summer, great-granddaughter Talya Berger (Ken's oldest grandchild) attended Ramah Canada for the first time.

In the opinion of the Bergers, Ramah's success is predicated on the fun and friendships that are such a big part of the experience. Son Dan remembers most strongly "playing a dancing Cossack in "Fiddler on the Roof" in 1966 while a member of the "best" ever Yud-Gimmel cabin. But most importantly for me, Ramah Wisconsin was the stepping stone to Ramah Israel Seminar which in turn triggered my lifelong love for and activism on behalf of the State of Israel."

This individual family story distills the essence and success of Ramah and the lasting legacy of David B. and Sophia M. Berger at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. As Rabbi Ken says, "Ramah is an expression of Conservative Judaism at its best and it has had a tremendous impact on our family as well as on thousands of campers and staff members."



David and Sophia Berger at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin in 1954