

Living in Brooklyn

Moslem Tartars Worship Here

By MARGARET MARA

A congregation of Moslem Tartars worships in a mosque in Williamsburg that is believed to be the first mosque founded in the Greater City. More than 20 years ago the Moslems purchased the building at 109 Powers St. Originally a recreation center and social club headquarters, the two-and-a-half-story brick building has a peaked roof and a wide entrance on the second-floor level approached by two steep flights of steps. A high iron fence with locked gates separates the property from the street of modest frame houses.

Gold lettered on black, a sign decorated with crescent and star reads: "American Moslem Mosque. There is no God but one God. Mohammad is the Messenger of God."

Adjoining the mosque is the manse, where live the religious leader, Samuel Raffel, and his family.

When I called at the manse last Wednesday, Mr. Raffel was not at home. He was at work, Mrs. Raffel informed me. He is a furrier, a common trade among the Tartars affiliated with the mosque.

Religious services and instruction classes are held in the mosque on Friday evenings for adults and children. Entire families assemble on this occasion and the total congregation numbers about 300.

Discard Shoes

A mosque is a simple place of worship. The room where the members of the congregation pray has no furnishings with the exception of wall-to-wall carpeting. Shoes are left outside the door when the Moslems enter the prayer room.

From Mrs. Raffel I learned that the congregation of Moslems consists of Russian Tartars and their American-born children.

When the mosque was founded, a dozen men made a door-to-door canvass of the Williamsburg Tartars for funds to establish the religious center.

Although he is the religious leader, Mr. Raffel does not have a Moslem title. Among Moslems, however, he is recognized as the only person among local Moslems who can properly interpret the dates on the lunar calendar, by which Moslems live.

Fifteen years ago a second Moslem mosque was started on State St. (More about the State St. mosque on Wednesday.)



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