



NEWS Photo by Toni Hindman

Congregation Beth Israel in Bangor dedicated its Helen and Sidney Epstein Room on Sept. 28 at the synagogue on York Street

Epstein family honored by Beth Israel

By Roxanne Moore Saucker
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The evening of Sept. 28 was a time to dedicate the addition to Congregation Beth Israel, and also to thank Helen and Sidney Epstein for making it possible.

It also was a time to remember the contributions of earlier generations of Epsteins to the life of the Jewish community of Bangor.



The first of the family to come to Bangor was Hyman Epstein, who arrived in the 1890s, said Norman Minsky, president of Beth Israel. A little later came Sidney Epstein's grandfather, Israel, who was "an active participant in the synagogue," said Minsky.

And for 35 of the past 50 years, Minsky said, the president of Beth Israel has been an Epstein.

He called Sidney Epstein "very active," and "a wonderful individual who likes to do things and never let anyone know."

Minsky called the construction of the addition "a most generous and gracious gift" that "will enhance all of the activities of Beth Israel Synagogue and particularly of the Jewish community of Bangor."

Richard Stone, Bangor's mayor and also a member of the congregation, said that the facility would "benefit the community as a whole," and presented the Epsteins with a key to the city.

Representing the family during the dedication were the Epsteins' children, Carol read prayers in English and Hebrew, and Bruce affixed the mezuzas to the doors of the addition, known as the Helen and Sidney Epstein Room.

On behalf of the family, Elaine Epstein extended "our appreciation for seeing you all here." She said that the family hoped the addition would "enhance the Jewish community and the community as a whole."

She read a portion of a prayer from Bosh Hashanah: "May we in our common need gain strength from one another. ..."

Adele Miller offered opening remarks, and a welcome was given by Sharon Theeman, past president of the Beth Israel Sisterhood. Scott Rapaport sang "Mah Tov," which is frequently sung at Jewish weddings.

The dedication was conducted by Rabbi Joseph Schonberger. He explained that the ceremony was being held "in the middle of the holiday of Sukkot, the festival of booths."

The booths, he said, during biblical times had been "temporary shelters," and Sukkot "began as a celebration of liberation." As a holiday of "liberty and thankfulness for God," Sukkot even has "a place in American history," Schonberger said. "The Pilgrims modeled the very first Thanksgiving in this country" on the Jewish festival, he said.

He went on, "Today we have this permanent addition, which will lend endurance and strength

to us. It adds to the central source" of strength, the synagogue, "which is given in our tradition," he said. The new room, he said, would "benefit this congregation, and indeed, the entire community."

The mezuzas, Schonberger explained, contain parchment scrolls with verses from Deuteronomy, and, as such, symbolize "the connection between God and the Jewish identity."

The dedication and reception afterward were attended not just by many members of the Jewish community, but also by clergy and laypeople from Protestant and Catholic churches around Bangor.

A special guest was Sidney Epstein's aunt, Katherine Culver, who remembered the building and dedication of the current synagogue on York Street. She said after the dedication that she recalled the earlier synagogue — which was on Center Street before the Bangor Fire of 1911, and also riding the ferry between Bangor and Brewer.