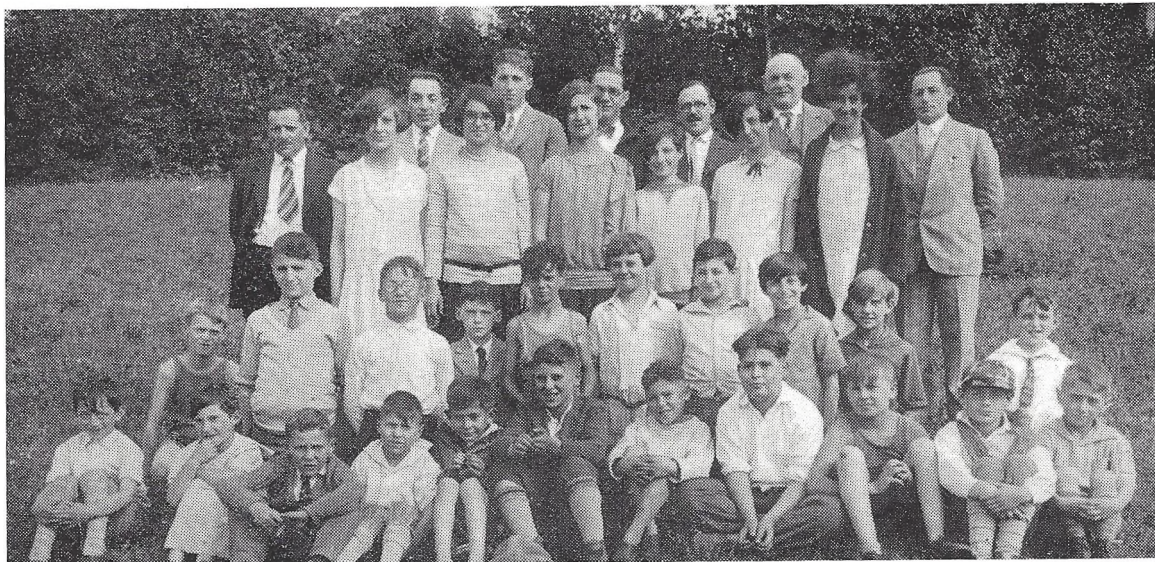


Article I of the Constitution of Congregation Ahawas Achim is important. This provides that "the organization cannot be dissolved so long as three members remain, and that in the event of dissolution, all property of the Congregation shall be placed in the hands of a Congregation located nearest to the City of Bangor, to be held by them in trust and for safe-keeping, until there shall again be a Congregation in Bangor." The property of Ahawas Achim was accordingly entrusted sometime after 1856 to the Congregation Ohabei Shalom in Boston.

The importance of this first Jewish community insofar as the present Jewish community is concerned is nil. No descendants of the original settlers remained nor is it likely that any ever returned to Bangor to live. It is true that the cemetery which they started remains and is still maintained and used to a very limited degree, but for the most part its origins have been forgotten and it is generally assumed that the Jewish community of Bangor was established by the Jews who came to Bangor in the 70's and remained to form the nucleus of the present community. The history of the first Jewish community in Bangor is interesting, however, because it follows so closely the pattern of organization of most Jewish communities in cities all over the world and especially in the United States. It is well to note, too, that though formal Hebrew education began in Bangor forty years ago, the first Jewish children to learn Hebrew in Bangor were taught nearly a century ago.

CLASSES ABOUT 20 YEARS AGO



Front row (left to right): Arthur Bigelson, Buddy Gass, William Cooperstein, Myer Alpert, Melvin Brown, William Saltzman, Sidney Alpert, Edwin Brown, Alex Silver, Harold Cooperstein, and Albert Rubin.
 Second row: Morris Emple, ——— Gold, Max Gass, Sidney Ames, Albert Freedman, Jeanette Leavitt, Sally Rapaport Striar, Anna Bigelson, Robert Morris, and Phil Goos.
 Third row: Mr. Abe Segal, Marcia Allen Grodinski, Mr. Simons (teacher), Mildred Schwartz Stern, Mr. Schwartz (teacher), ——— Rachlin, Mr. Myer Minsky, Frances Gass, Mr. Louis Rapaport, Betty Smith Rolnick, Mr. Joseph Byer, Pauline Smith, and Mr. James Striar.

From 1856, the last date of any extant record of the first German Jewish settlers in Bangor, until the end of the Civil War, there is no evidence of any permanent settlement of Jews in the city. In the two decades following the close of the war, approximately five Jewish families who originated from eastern Germany made their permanent homes in Bangor. There were other families in some of the towns close by, such as Charleston, Haynesville, Ellsworth, and Newport. Their community in the days preceding the mass migration of eastern European Jews to the United States and proportionally to Bangor, we shall refer to as the second Jewish community in Bangor, though there is actually no definite terminal date of this community since it was merely absorbed and superceded by the larger community of eastern European immigrants.



Beth Israel Synagogue
Home of the Hebrew School from 1913-1920

In 1874 these people under the leadership of Mr. Julius Waterman resumed some of the community activities of the Congregation Ahawas Achim. The Torah and the records of the earlier congregation were returned from Boston and from 1874 to 1901 Ahawas Achim functioned again as the religious organization of Bangor's Jewish community, but services were held only during the Holy Days each fall. The cemetery established by the earlier group was also taken over by the second group. No attempt was ever made, however, to organize a He-

brew School. Generally speaking this second community lacked the religious vitality of the first group. They were less zealous about maintaining their Jewish religious traditions and observances. It is quite likely that whereas the earlier settlers were extremely orthodox in background, these later German Jews were people who had long been accustomed to little but token observance of religious ceremony. Many of that second group became farther and farther removed from their Jewish background and eventually some of them lost their Jewish identity completely. The fact that no provisions had been made for the education of young people in Jewish religious background was primarily a reflection of the thinking of the adult group, and was only secondarily a cause for their lack of survival as Jews.

During the later years especially of the period 1874 to 1901, which we have loosely designated as the period of the second Jewish community, the third and present community was establishing its roots. The Jews from eastern Europe made up the largest and most per-



Bangor Hebrew School
1920-1938

manent settlement in Bangor and their immigration which began about 1880 reached a peak between 1890 and 1910.

The background of the eastern European Jew is familiar to all of us. The political situation in Europe, the persecution, the lack of economic and political status of Jews, and the lack of any promise of future security, were factors which contributed heavily to their migration. The adjustment demanded of this later migration of Jews was much more difficult to

make than the adjustment required of their German predecessors since they came from a society which was literally centuries behind western Europe and America. Not only was social intercourse with Gentiles impossible, but it was also denied the new immigrant by the Jews of German extraction who preceded him to America and for the same reasons. The German Jews had been accustomed to modern social and economic life and once language difficulties were overcome they found adjustment to life in America comparatively easy. The Jew who came from eastern Europe, on the other hand, had not only language difficulty to master, but also a tremendous psychological adjustment to make to a society which allowed him the privileges of first class citizenship, the opportunity of achieving economic security within the limits of his ability, and equality of educational opportunity. While the German Jews had nothing in common with their eastern European co-religionists socially, it is true that in many ways they offered sympathetically and graciously valuable assistance to the newer immigrants in their struggles to learn a living.

In the practice of their religion, the newer immigrants required more than the Congregation Ahawas Achim had to offer. Their background of living as Jews completely with no opportunity to participate in the national life of the countries in which they lived had caused them to maintain for the most part strictly orthodox lives and had never provided any incentive for changing the ancient methods of teaching their children. As the number of children in the group increased the problems they met in bridging the gap between their secular education and their religious teaching became more of a community problem. When there were few young people each family assumed the responsibility for its children's education in learning Hebrew and studying the Torah. Elder members of the community were frequently available as teachers. The existing community had no facilities for Hebrew education, as we have pointed out, and the newer members of the community of necessity had to provide their own. By the end of the nineteenth century there were enough Jews to support a synagogue which was erected on Center St. The synagogue did not immediately support a professional rabbi; therefore, the more educated men of the community acted as lay preachers and officiated when services were needed. The children continued to be taught Hebrew by private teachers until 1906 when the Beth Israel Synagogue employed a professional rabbi who also taught Hebrew.

In 1907 the first attempt was made to organize a Hebrew School on a community basis and available for all the youngsters in the town. For the first time the Talmud Torah was an autonomous institution separate from the synagogue. Little is known of the details of the circumstances leading up to the founding of the school, but it is likely that by 1907 the number of young people had grown considerably and private instruction was no longer economically feasible or expedient. Permission was granted the Jewish community by the city authorities to use the York St. School (now the Ward I polling place) after the afternoon session for Hebrew school classes. A man named Koretz was the principal of the school and Louis Richardson assisted him. The following persons comprised the school board: Joseph Byer, president; Philip Hillson, treasurer; Morris Golden, secretary; Israel Ratchkovsky, Simon Kominsky, and Robert Cooper. Robert Cooper is the only survivor of those who were instrumental in organizing the school and who still lives in Bangor. Approximately eighteen students were enrolled in 1907. Two of the students were girls. Many of the students are now familiar figures in the Jewish community, others are familiar names. Some of the boys were Jack Berson, the Koritsky boys, Sam Richardson, a Garfinkle boy, Sam Marcus, Louis Wallace, Max Snyder, the Hillson boys, Hy Galpert, Ike Cohen, Phil Kaminsky, Joe Glazier, Phil Altman, and Dave Robinson.

The salary of the principal of the Talmud Torah was \$18 a week; his assistant received \$12. These salaries were the chief expenses of the school since the city generously loaned the building at no cost to the community. It is evident, however, from Mr. Cooper's reminiscences that the community had rough times financially. Every Sunday he, together with Mr. Hillson and Mr. Ratchkovsky, made a door-to-door canvas collecting money to meet expenses. At first glance such a hand to mouth existence would seem to indicate poor planning and organization, but it is more likely that the most important reason for such financing was the inability of the interested Jews in those days to pay out any sizable amount of money at one time. A practical advantage in collecting money in this fashion was that it undoubtedly maintained more active interest in the progress of the school on the part of all contributors and it afforded the Board an opportunity to keep in close contact with the thinking of the community.

The following year the school moved to a private house on Carr St. The front part of the house was used for the school and the teacher lived in the rear. This arrangement lasted until 1913 when the Beth Israel Synagogue was completed and Hebrew classes were held in the vestry of the synagogue.

The Cheder was the phase of Jewish life in those early years which most nearly approximated life in Europe. Since the school was set up by men who spent their youths in Europe and whose knowledge of teaching was limited to their own experience it is not in the least surprising that their first Cheder in their new environment should be patterned pretty closely after the European model. The teaching methods were those of the old country as were the teachers. The Hebrew School was the institution which clashed most violently with the American institutions with which the young second generation came in contact. To make the adjustment between their public school training and their religious education presented a very real problem. It is not uncommon to hear the men and women who were the first students in the Cheder recall their shame and embarrassment at having to go to the Talmud Torah after public school was over because they found it awkward to explain to their Gentile classmates the program and purpose of the Cheder. They learned for the most part without understanding and, therefore, the apparent schism between their European heritage and American education and standard of values became a culture conflict and served to accentuate the distinction between the Jewish youth and their Gentile neighbors. Had they been taught the purpose and value of such education in relation to their education as young Americans they might have had more respect for their teachers and been more cooperative students, to say nothing of being happier people. Behavior problems and lack of discipline were the bugaboos of the first teachers. Truancy was common and disappearances from the classrooms via the windows when the teacher's back was turned indicated the attitude of the students toward a method of teaching that was anything but dynamic. The ancient laws of the rabbis, the Talmud and the ritual that were stressed in the school not only represented typical medieval learning, but tended also to stress the rigidity and orthodoxy of the life of a pious Jew. The young students found frequent necessity to revolt against this rigidity because they could not bridge the gap between the life and thinking represented by the Hebrew School and public school and America. Crossing the ocean and settling in the United States represented a matter of a few years in the lives of the immigrant parents of these children, but centuries of progress in many ways separated the eastern European village of the late nineteenth century and Bangor, Maine, in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The visit of Jacob Schiff to Bangor in 1913 stimulated interest in the community to modernize the Cheder. Mr. Schiff emphasized to the leaders of the community that a modern Hebrew School was essential, and his suggestion led to raising enough money that year to employ a more progressive teacher.

This Hebrew School situation was further improved in 1920 when the school moved to the Hebrew Institute Hall on State St. The close physical association with the synagogue was ended and the new school more closely resembled that of a secular institution. Even more important was the hiring in 1927 of two of the first graduates of the newly established Hebrew Teachers College in Boston. Although in many respects the subject matter remained the same, there was improvement in the method of presentation. The teachers could speak English and they emphasized the history of the Jewish people as well as their religion and customs.

In 1938 the Liss Memorial Building was given to the Jewish community of Bangor to be used as a community center and Hebrew School. Teaching methods have changed radically since the early days, and the curriculum has been made much more attractive. Today the values of American Jewish life are emphasized. The students, besides learning to read Hebrew and to understand the content of what they read, are by their study of Jewish history and tradition helped to interpret and understand many seeming paradoxes which confront them as American Jews.

For the past ten years the Hebrew School has conducted a Sunday School primarily for the purpose of teaching Jewish history to the youngsters of the community who are not enrolled in the Hebrew School. Last year fifty-four children attended Hebrew School and an additional forty-three were enrolled in Sunday School.

Ideally children begin Talmud Torah at the age of seven and follow through the six-year program. Besides giving each child a reading knowledge of Hebrew, the program includes the reading and discussion of the Pentateuch and the early prophets, and carries the study of Jewish history up to modern times. Jewish customs, traditions and religious observances are also an important part of the curriculum. Not only do the children learn the significance and routine of important religious services, they have the opportunity actually to carry out and participate in the services. Sabbath services are held every Saturday morning at the school. The members of this Junior Congregation are Hebrew School students and it is they who conduct the services. An average of forty students participate weekly. The School staff in cooperation with the Community Center sponsors two dramatic clubs, one for grade school students and one for junior and senior high school students. The Young Judea Club is also an extra-curricular activity of the school as is the Bar Mitzvah Club.

Beginning this year two curriculum changes are being inaugurated. The Sunday School will be taught by the staff members with no lay assistants, and basic Hebrew will be taught along with Jewish history. The second change in curriculum will be the Junior Hebrew High School, an additional year of study for boys and girls who have passed thirteen years of age. This extra year will round out their education in Hebrew and will lead to a diploma.

The staff of the Hebrew School now consists of three persons, the principal and two assistants. Under their able guidance the curriculum is constantly being improved and expanded in accordance with advances in educational thinking and the needs and interests of

the community. The excellent attendance and enthusiastic participation of the young people in the program of the Hebrew School which is, it must be remembered, voluntary on the part of student and parents, attests to the fact that the curriculum is today truly dynamic and that it goes far towards satisfying the spiritual needs of Jewish youth today. It is gratifying to note that the registration for 1947-1948 is the largest in the history of the institution. There are 66 children in the daily classes. The beginners' class has a registration of 19 children, an all-time high. With the Sunday School and the regular classes there will be well over 100 children.



TO BE CONTINUED

This is not the end of the story. More will be written by others who will know the future importance of the Bangor Talmud Torah. This is but the end of a chapter. In an age that has made world history, the Bangor Hebrew School closes its fortieth year on the threshold of an era that is beyond ordinary comprehension. The war has left deep scars. The healing of these scars is the challenge facing us.

In this critical period, we complete our first 40-year cycle with pride in our past and hope in our future. As a religious institution, we enjoy ever-increasing numerical strength. The idea that was conceived forty years ago by a group of far-sighted individuals has blossomed into a thriving institution of more than 100 children. The star of the Bangor Hebrew School burns brightly in the firmament of religious institutions. It has risen above the vicissitudes of internal strife, economic depression and world war to emerge into 1947 in full vigor.



Hebrew School Choir

1946-47

Front row (left to right): Barry Spitalnick, Bobby Miller, Jackie Meltzer, Sheldon Hartstone, Stephen Podolsky, Michael Rolnick.
 Back row: Sybil Miller, Evelyn Sclair, Charlotte Rolnick, Murray Leavitt, Ruth Pels, Mr. Fish, Harvey Leavitt, Nancy Silver, Billy Miller, Linda Gotlieb.

This program has been made possible through
the kindness and generosity of friends.

AS THE TREE IS BENT,
SO THE TREE SHALL GROW.

--- PROVERBS
