

orous action, not merely nicely-turned phrases. This new element was dissatisfied with rigid orthodoxy, but was unwilling to go as far as Reform. This was the beginning of a bitter feud between the advocates of change and James Gimpel Striar. His father had fought as unrelentlessly sixty years ago. Striar was an exponent of the traditional orthodox service and warned against the changes which would impair the essence and purity of the Jewish religion. He struck out against these new proposals when he admonished the membership with the charge: "Reformers create schisms and promote divisions besides impairing the unity of our faith." He and his family left the congregation and worshipped elsewhere rather than see the shibboleths of their faith changed. They did, however, retain their membership in the congregation. And so the battle raged on through the months, every move along the road to Conservatism being contested inch by inch.

The Orthodox group hinted at court action in order to obtain redress, but the victory was apparently too complete. The pioneers, so to speak, had become the patriarchs; it was time for the next generation to carry on the work. The synagogue was no longer static but bent to the beauties and requirements of American Jewish life. That we chose in some respects to depart from the strict ritual of our founders does not mean to imply criticism of them. It rather suggests we intend to compliment them by assuming that, even as they adjusted tradition to their day, so we mean, in the same spirit, to adjust to the changed circumstances of our own.

Having known Rabbi Zucker, it was impossible for the congregation to think of a successor who would not be worthy of the scholarly tradition set by the rabbinate of Beth Israel. The rabbi who would fill the pulpit must, furthermore, be steeped in traditionalism and at the same time be a liberal theologian. Early in 1949, the congregation began its search for a successor to Rabbi Zucker. President Harold R. Epstein, Myer Segal, David Rosen, Joseph Emple, and Henry H. Segal were designated as a committee to screen candidates who would meet the requirements of the new order. The choice fell upon Rabbi Avraham Freedman and his election was ratified by the congrega-

tion. It was arranged that Rabbi Freedman should assume his new duties in September of that year.

The installation of Rabbi Freedman as the religious leader of the congregation in the fall of 1949 was in many respects the mark of the beginning of a new era. Coming to the pulpit of Beth Israel following years of distinguished service as spiritual leader of Durban, South Africa, Rabbi Freedman was symbolic of the post-war age—an age full of promise and achievement.

He was scholarly and gentlemanly, a man whose tolerance and learning well fitted him for the difficult years of transition lying ahead. Born in Russia, Avraham Freedman came to America as a young child and was educated at Yeshivah University. He received his ordination from three of the most distinguished Rabbis in the country—Rabbi M. Soloveichik, RaMaz Margolis, and Dr. Bernard Revel. He occupied the pulpit of the Rideout Street Synagogue in Ottawa, Canada, and later served



JAMES GIMPEL STRIAR

as the Rabbi of the united synagogues in Ottawa. Rabbi Freedman organized the first Vaad Ha-Ir in Canada and was elected Rabbi of the entire Jewish community of the city of Ottawa. In 1937, he was called to South Africa where he served the Durban community with distinction for 12 years. During World War II, Rabbi Freedman served as chaplain to His Majesty's forces.

He was elected to the South African Board of Deputies.

Rabbi Freedman believed that the Synagogue must be restored to its primacy in Jewish life, that it must be the dynamic center of all phases of Jewish communal life. He knew that while he must convince the elders of this necessity, his main work would be with the younger element. To restore our meaningful folkways and give color and drama to our teachings, he inaugurated the Friday Evening Service and the Sunday Morning Minyan Breakfasts—that proved to be a "breakfast institute" of Jewish studies.

The sermons of Rabbi Freedman explored the gamut of intellectualism. Soon he was in demand as a lecturer; he gained renown for his inter-cultural activities. Through the years he has sustained the congregation and helped it regain its perspective toward Judaism, and has brought new hope to the spiritually disinherited. It was due to his influence and zeal that the Sisterhood and Brotherhood were organized. The women's work of the synagogue was originally charitable; it now became apparent that their role would be almost exclusively in the realm of service to the congregation. Rummage sales, fund-raising projects, and a wealth of similar activities followed over the years.

The change from the oligarchy which had directed the congregation during the earlier years led to a more general participation by the members in synagogue affairs. Keeping the rest of the congregation intact and pacifying both the traditionalists and innovators required a great deal of tact and ministerial engineering. While traditional as his predecessors in fundamentals, Rabbi Freedman felt that the new policy adopted before his arrival would tend to enhance the service and have further meaning for modern Jews. The foundation was laid for the establishment of a congregation along Conservative lines with a minimum of innovations, aim-

ing to attract the young American Jews to the synagogue in order to guide them by precept and example toward the Jewish way of life. Religion at Beth Israel, if it were to mean anything, had to be the expression of a free and educated people. Yet it had, like all Judaism, to be characterized by the love of basic ethical traditions.

Rabbi Freedman's pastorate marked a turning point for the congregation. Beth Israel embarked upon a re-appraisal of values. Progress and tradition moved side by side in the synagogue's calendar. 1950 saw the successful inauguration of the congregational SEDAR on the Passover. How much closer was Rabbi Freedman to the emotional and religious needs of his congregation than was his predecessors. The Rabbi's leadership in the support of Israel and suppressed Jews the world over symbolized the deep sense of urgency—the need to re-educate for Judaism. His activity in the communal Hebrew School reflects credit upon himself and his congregation. He has played the role of shadchan between school and home, enlightening each as to the responsibilities of the other.

Nor was the temporal part of the Congregation neglected. The original constitution and by-laws were replaced by new ones in 1954. The legality of these new measures as presented by Henry H. Segal were scrutinized by Shirley Berger and Abraham Stern and finally enacted at the general meeting.

During the incumbency of Rabbi Freedman who holds the record of longest service to the Congregation, the modernization of the Synagogue building was started. The interior of the building was completely overhauled, the vestry room floor was tiled and an attractive and utilitarian kitchen was installed. The main sanctuary was tastefully redecorated. New electric light fixtures were installed, and an air refreshing unit completed the work on the balcony.

## GROWTH OF BETH ISRAEL

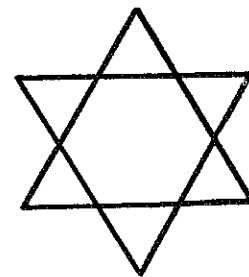
"Teruah" . . . a call to battle, and to build!

The remarkable expansion of Beth Israel in the past decade has encompassed a broad range of interests and sentiments and a diversity of traditions. With the coming of Rabbi Freedman men and women were attracted to the synagogue in growing numbers. They, along with the workings of time, were to modify its features.

Growth has always been one of the basic impulses of the Jewish spirit, and it was not long before the congregation felt the pinch of limitation. Passing years and the rise in religious interest made Beth Israel inadequate in facilities. When the present building was erected, the congregation was convinced that it had been built for the future. The past decade made it apparent that the facilities of the Synagogue, which was nearly a half century old, were insufficient to cope with the increasing needs of the members. More useful space was vital for synagogue activities. The office of the Rabbi had to be surrendered for other uses because of the space shortage. There were inadequate facilities for recreational and social activities. In 1960 the first changes were brought about by remodeling the downstairs vestry. A specially designed movable

wall made the vestry available for secular functions under the auspices of the Synagogue and for community when such is compatible the aims and purposes of the Synagogue. The seating capacity for banquet purposes can now accommodate 160 comfortably. A modern heating system was installed and the walls covered with a rich mahogany paneling. This welcome change added a touch of warmth to the heretofore bleak atmosphere. In 1961 the main sanctuary was carpeted and the walls were treated to a wainscot paneling that completely altered the inner appearance of the synagogue. Subsequently the Ark area was enlarged and the Ark itself refinished in deep tones and adorned with pillars of a golden glint. The "biemah" was removed from the center of the sanctuary and additional benches installed to meet the problem of increased membership as well as allowing greater visibility of the Rabbi's podium and the Ark. The completely new lighting effect along with the colorful stained glass windows lent both an inner comfort and a deep sense of awe.

The year 1963 is of vast significance to Congregation Beth Israel, for it marks not only the 75th year of its founding, but also the Golden Jubilee of our present edifice.



## OUR MEMORIAL STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Possibly the only achievement which will be remembered longer and will furnish more beauty and inspiration, not alone for ourselves, but for future generations as well, was the changing of the old colored glass windows which, so far as is known, had served the Synagogue since its erection and their replacement with the Memorial stained glass windows of exquisite color and design that can only give to those who attend services, an added feeling of dignity and reverence.

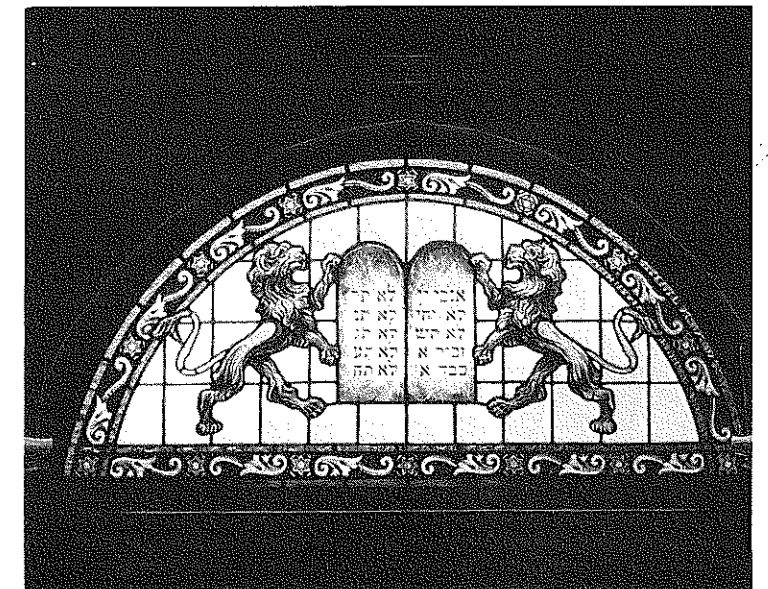
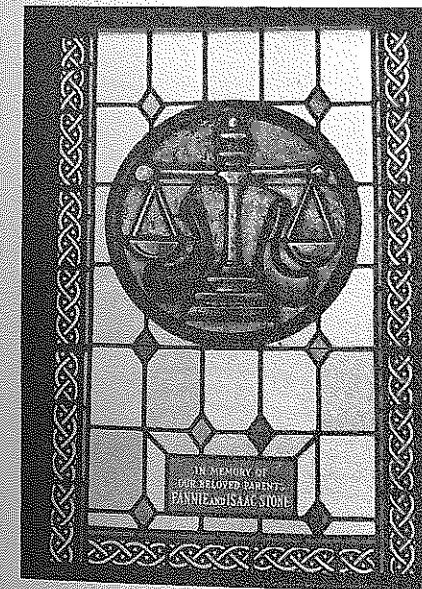
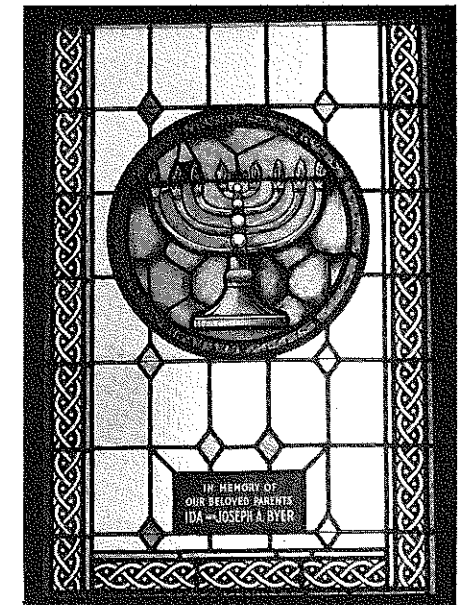
When renovating the main Sanctuary, provision was made for a series of stained glass windows, in harmony with the Romanesque style of architecture. It was the intent of the planner that, in executing these windows, there should be dignity as well as artistic beauty and feeling, in keeping with the sanctity of its surroundings.

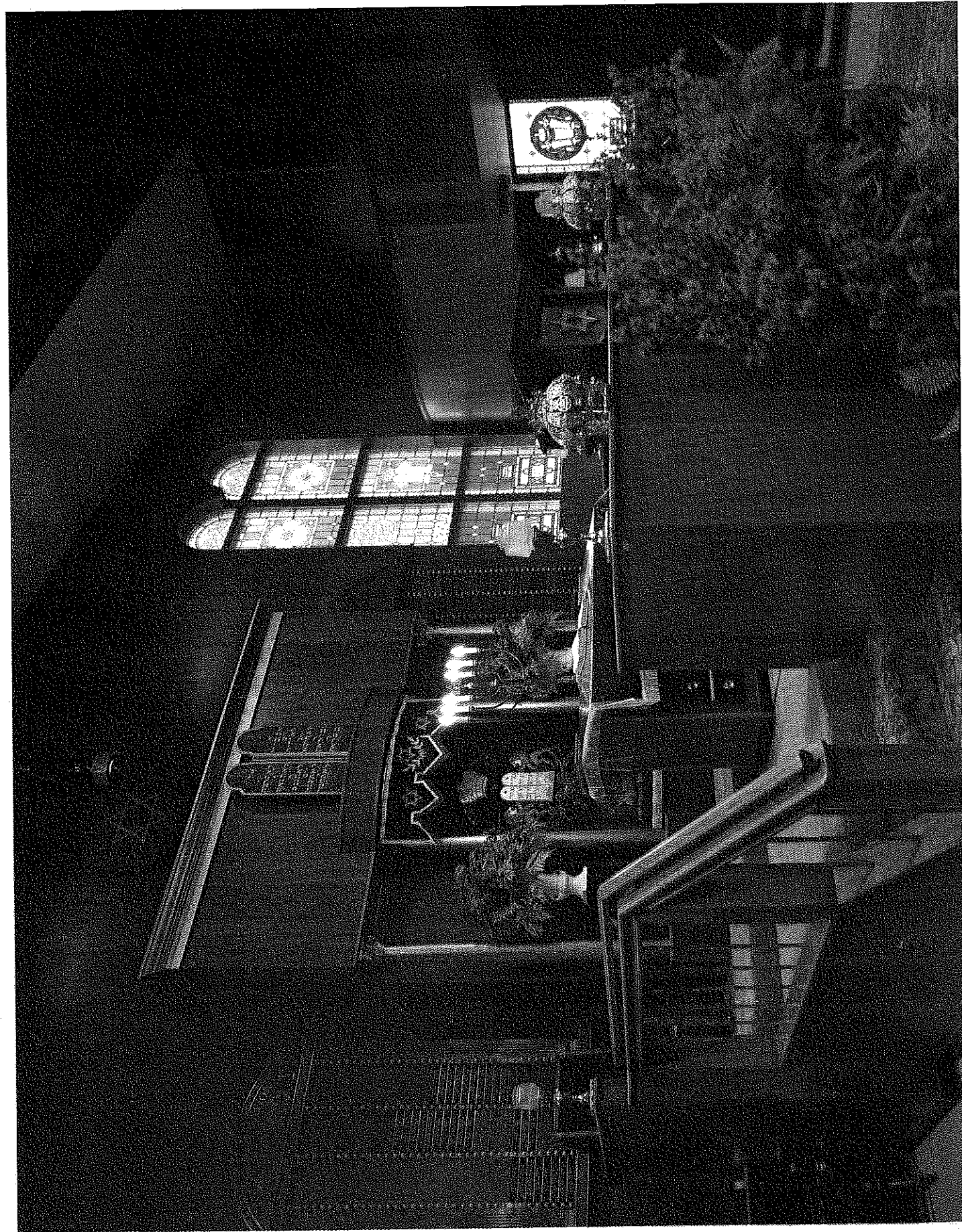
Rabbi Freedman as a committee of one, decided that there should be an overall scheme of design for all windows, so that

a sense of unity and balance would be accomplished.

The motifs of all windows consists of a continuous chronological presentation of the religious and historic development of Israel. The large windows on the Mizrach Wall depicting the Scroll of the Law and the Menorah symbolizes the essence of Truth and the Enlightenment of man. The Stone Tablet portrays the moral code for all of mankind.

*Our lovely stained glass windows remind us to strive for justice, to hasten the day when each man shall live under the vine with none to make him afraid.*





*“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them . . .” Exodus 25:8*

*“Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness”*

*The above cited passage, taken from our daily morning prayers, guided us in beautifying the Holy Ark of classic design, which, with its Ner Tamid, forms the focal point in our Sanctuary. Built fifty years ago, at considerable cost, and remodeled in 1962, its components of solid oak, is a work of religious art in its simplicity enabling us to furnish the keynote to what has resulted in a most graceful “Mizrach Wall.”*