

Bangor's Early Role In Zionism

The Zionist movement has been a primary force throughout the years for many Jews. There is no doubt that political Zionism, as envisaged by Dr. Theodor Herzl, had a tremendous effect on Jewish life.

Although there was other Zionist activity in Bangor in the early 1900s, the membership of Beth Israel took the first step to officially organize a group when it formed the "Chovevei Zion" in 1903. Rabbi Seltzer, Joe Raichlin, Morris Rosen, Sam Leavitt, Jonah Wallace, Philip Hillson and Joe Byer were the nucleus of the forerunner of the present Bangor Zionist District.

By 1905 there was a B'nai Zion, and during that year a mass meeting was held at Congregation Beth Israel to support the proposed purchase of Palestine from the Turkish government. The optimistic leaders were reported as believing that "on account of the present financial conditions, the purchase will be easily effected."

In 1912, Myer Minsky, a name that was later to become synonymous with the Bangor Zionist movement, was instrumental in initiating a "Young Judea" club.

During World War I, leaders like the Rev. Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, Zionist orator, spoke in Bangor. Jewish National Fund activities were carried on continually.

In November 1919, Bangor's Jews gathered at the synagogue to hear two speakers from Boston. Dr. M.M. Eichlez and M. Alpert discussed the Zionist movement and the Balfour Declaration.

Under the leadership of Minsky, the Bangor Zionist District, then known as the Sons and Daughters of Zion, played an important role in the life of the young Bangor Jewish community.

Before there was a Jewish Community Center, the Sons and Daughters of Zion was the main social organization for Jews in Bangor. The group rented rooms for activities and also sponsored social functions including dances and sailing trips on the Penobscot River.

Perhaps the most memorable activity of the district was its surprise reception of a train carrying a contingent of the Jewish Legion through Bangor on its way to Halifax and Europe in 1918.

A week before the train's scheduled arrival, Minsky

announced the trip to the Bangor group. What was supposed to be a non-eventful pass through a sleepy Maine town in the pre-dawn hours — between 2 and 4 a.m. — turned into a festive celebration.

Legion members were met by almost 100 cheering people including practically the entire Bangor Jewish community. A band was playing and people were dancing and singing. The Legionnaires enjoyed the sandwiches, pastries, fruit and other refreshments the Jewish residents had prepared for them.

Among the revelers that day was David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), who years later would become the first prime minister of an independent Israel. Revered in his country as the "Father of the Nation," Ben-Gurion never forgot the reception he and his fellow Legionnaires received in Bangor.

"I remember it as if it were yesterday," Ben-Gurion wrote in 1965, responding to a query by Myer Minsky's son, Norman. "Please transmit to your father my deep appreciation for what he had done 47 years ago."

The founders of Beth Israel started life in 1888 with the dream of Zion in their prayer books and 60 years later their heirs rejoiced at the announcement that Israel was reborn.

As Israel continued to flourish during the 40 years after it was declared a Jewish homeland with the aid of the Bangor Zionist District and the community's sponsorship of dunams, the Zionist District continued in full force until the late 1980s, when participation began to dwindle somewhat.

By 1988, the Zionist District, due to a misunderstanding in the Massachusetts leadership, had stopped collecting dues in Bangor. The community still contributed to the Jewish National Fund, and usually collected about \$4,000 during the High Holy Days.

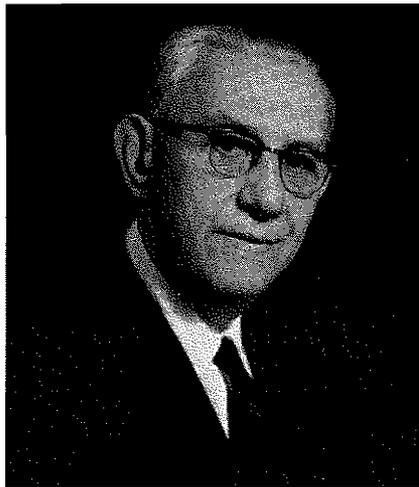
Bond Drives remained popular and continued regularly at the Red Lion restaurant in Bangor.

Zionist District President Sam Rolsky, who took over after Minsky passed away in 1971, said that the future of Zionism was up to the youth of the congregation, and that he expected participation to increase as more of the older members of the community retired and moved to Israel.

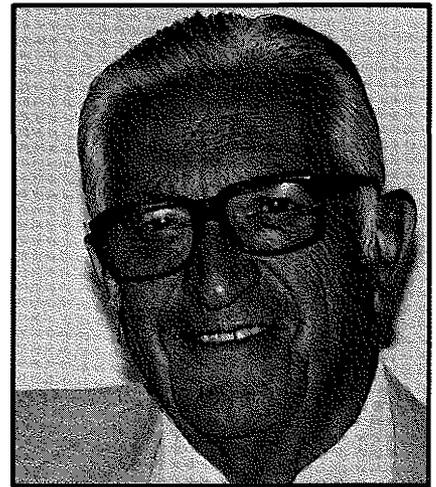
By Henry Segal, John Ripley and Rick Levasseur

Beth Israel Honors These Men

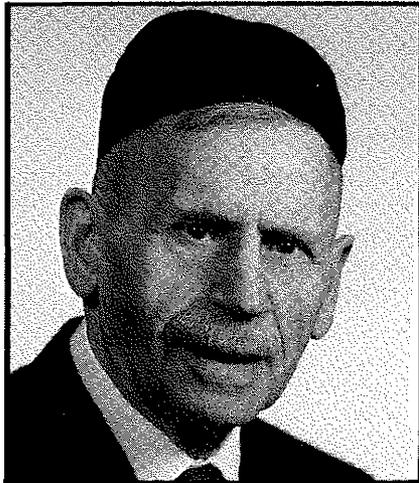
The board of trustees of Congregation Beth Israel has honored six men for their contributions to the synagogue. Although many people have faithfully contributed their time in the past and many continue to serve the needs of the synagogue today, these six men stood out in the minds of the directors of our synagogue. The citations, written by Henry Segal, hang in the vestry of the synagogue in honor of: Abraham O. Emple, Harry Epstein, Rabbi Avraham Freedman, Myer Minsky, Samuel Rolsky and Abraham Stern. To further honor these men, their citations have been reproduced on the following pages.



Myer Minsky



Harry Epstein



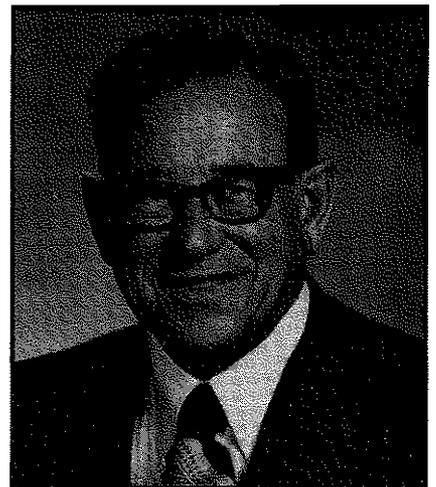
Abraham O. Emple



Rabbi Avraham Freedman



Abraham Stern



Samuel Rolsky