

JEWISH EDUCATION AND THE COMMUNITY

By ALEXANDER S. KOHANSKI

Executive Director, Maine Jewish Council

Our Sages in the Talmud remember with great fondness the man, Yehoshua ben Gamala, who founded the elementary Hebrew School in ancient Palestine. "For, if not for him," they say, "Torah would have been forgotten in Israel." The founders of the Bangor Hebrew School will be remembered by the present generation and by generations to come with equal affection.

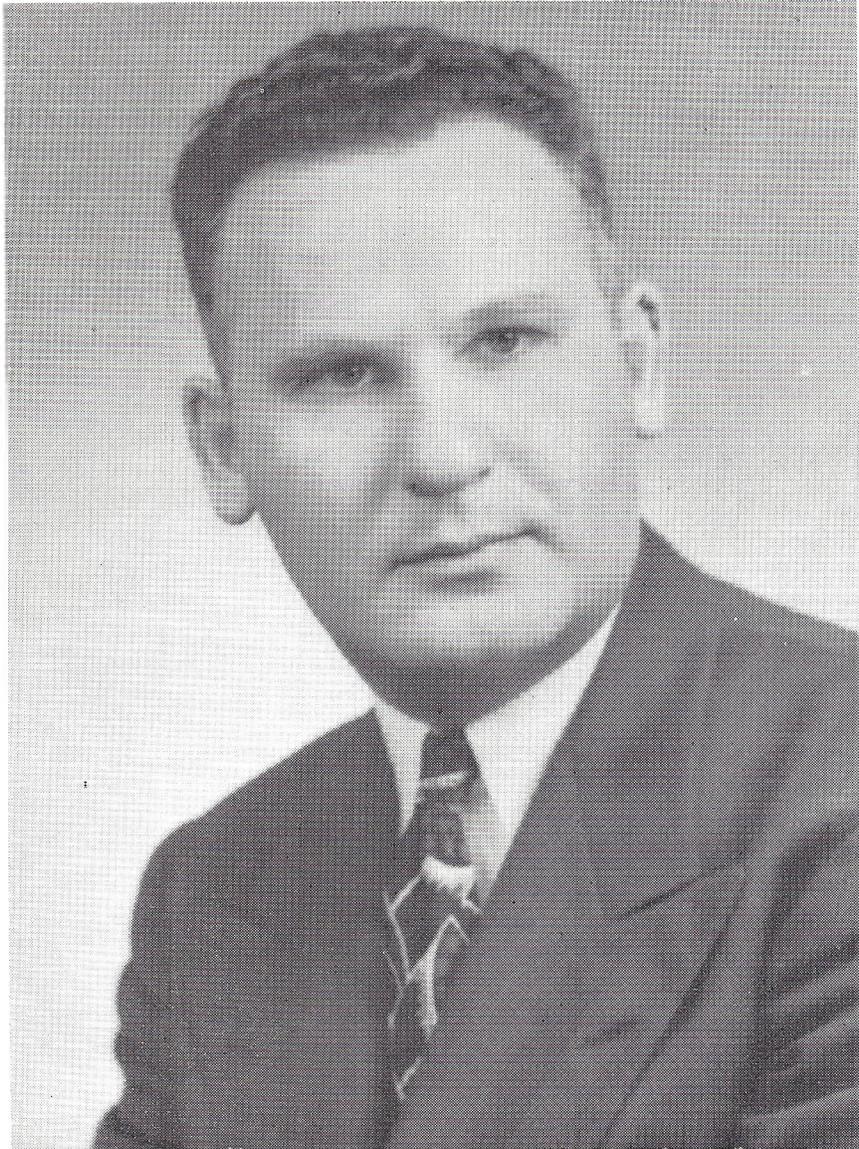
One may visualize the small Jewish community of Bangor some four or five decades ago as a pioneering settlement, struggling on the up-hill in search of economic security. While the head of the family was preoccupied in his daily toil he could hardly pay attention to the Jewish upbringing of his children. Perhaps he spent some stray moments in the evening or on a week-end to instruct his son in the rudiments of "saying ivri". If he was a little affluent he may have engaged a "house rebbe" to prepare his boy for Bar Mitzvah. As in the days of yore, before the time of Yehoshua ben Gamala, the Jewish upbringing of the young generation was in parental hands. With the establishment of the Hebrew School, this function became a community responsibility.

Communal responsibility for Jewish education means primarily that the Jewish upbringing of the young generation must be rooted in the religious, cultural and social life and needs of our people. These are the major factors of Jewish survival; they form the practical basis of Jewish education. The question is often raised as to the practical value of studying Hebrew, Jewish history, literature or other elements of the Hebrew School curriculum. The answer lies in the *aim* of Jewish education, and that is, to relate the child to the Jewish group in its historical and contemporary development, as well as in its hopes and aspirations for the future.

As an individual, unrelated to Jewish group life, one may find no practical value in Jewish studies, except perhaps as an extension of one's liberal education. Thus, one who is interested in languages may also study Hebrew as another language; one who likes history may also become interested in Jewish history, and similarly in Jewish literature. But then one sees no practical use for these subjects in everyday life. On the other hand, Jewish studies assume practical meaning only in the light of group experience, that is, in so far as the individual identifies himself with his group and shares in its communal life.

The community's responsibility is, therefore, to bring to the fore the group demand for Jewish education and to create the general atmosphere in which its importance and practical value may be recognized. But here the responsibility does not end.

In our own State of Maine, the Maine Jewish Council has launched a program of education with the same end in view, namely, to develop standards and to advance the principles and needs of Jewish education in all the communities in this state, in line with national endeavors. This program, like that of the Bureaus in large cities, is a cooperative enterprise. All our communities are to participate in it with a sense of common responsibility for the Jewish upbringing of our children in the small towns as well as in the larger cities in our state. If we accept the tenet, which has been forcefully brought to our attention by the exigencies of our time, that Jewish education is essentially a process of relating the individual to his group life, then our communities must not isolate their Hebrew Schools and other educational institutions within their own limited confines. In this respect, the responsibility of the community for Jewish education also involves the obligation on its part to join forces with other communities for the achievement of the common goal.



Dr. Alexander Kohanski

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Hebrew School Orchestra
1946-1947

Front Row: Arnold Viner, Jackie Meltzer, Stephen Podolsky, Michael Rolnick, Merrill Allen,
Barry Spitalnick, Milton Silver, Billy Miller
Back Row: Harvey Leavitt, Sheldon Hartstone, Murray Leavitt

IN MEMORIAM

Joseph S. Cooper
1884-1945



Selfless, devoted servant to the Hebrew School and Community. With love and affection, he fostered the ideals of the Hebrew School through the years.

PROLOGUE

This is the story of the Bangor Hebrew School — of the men who shaped its character — of the influences which patterned its destiny — of the spirit which has brought it through crises in the past and which must be trusted to preserve it in the future.

This, too, is a tale of Bangor Jewry — of its slow, painful, but continuous progress culturally, spiritually and civically — for the deeds of the Talmud Torah and its pioneers have left their impress upon the whole community and have determined, in a broad sense, the manner in which the Jews of Bangor shall live for years to come.

In the aggregate, this chronicle is a true review of the Hebrew School's hopes, struggles and accomplishments. It is not meant to be a distinguished historical contribution nor a detailed chronological summary of the forty years it covers. Instead, by selecting the more significant and human episodes in our growth, we hope to present a colorful pageant of the modest epic which is our history.

The personalities that have been interwoven are those of the men and women who, by general agreement, have been most responsible for the development of the Talmud Torah and whose deeds have become a part of the tradition that is our Hebrew School. There are others too and though their names are not mentioned, the satisfaction of having participated in our growth must be its own reward.

The Bangor Hebrew School is no one man or woman, but a fusion of all its supporters, past and present. And on this, the observance of our fortieth anniversary, the history that follows is dedicated to the Youth of our community, with the hope that it will give a few moments of pleasant reading and a warm glow of pride in the institution that has to do so much towards building for all of us a better, richer and happier life.

Henry H. Segal, President



Medal Winners of Their Respective Classes

1946-47

Front row (left to right): Ruth Sclair, Nancy Ashmond, Nuriith Fish, Joanne Kopelow, Beverly Segal, Sybil Miller.

Back row: Stephen Podolsky, Mr. Brown, Melvin Gotlieb, Mrs. Fish, Howard Silver, Harvey Leavitt, Jerry Cooper, Murray Leavitt, Sanford Gass, Sandy Podolsky, Mr. Fish.

The
FIRST 40 YEARS
of the
BANGOR HEBREW SCHOOL



A History of It's Growth
from 1907 to 1947



By
MRS. LAWRENCE CUTLER

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Historical Background

Three basic institutions form the foundations of an established Jewish religious community wherever in the world that community may be. These institutions are the synagogue, the burying ground, and the Hebrew School.¹ A study of the growth of those institutions in a community would give a fairly good picture of the development of the community as a whole, or conversely, a study of the community would necessarily be largely concerned with the development of those institutions.

This evening the Jewish community of Bangor is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the founding of its Hebrew School. For forty years there has been a sufficiently cohesive group of Jews in Bangor not only to maintain such a school, but also to change the methods and physical surroundings of the school in keeping with the developments in modern educational methods as well as in relation to the community's growth and needs. It is paradoxical, perhaps, that while the Hebrew School was the last of the three institutions to be organized, it is, of those three, the institution most likely to ensure religious survival in succeeding generations.

In order to understand why the Hebrew School was the last institution established and in order better to understand its origins and development, let us briefly look into the origins and development of the settlement of Jews of which it is a part.

The first real settlement of Jews in Bangor was formally established on July 20, 1849, nearly one hundred years ago. Jews had come to America to live as early as 1654 and the first Jewish person known to have come to Maine settled here shortly after the Revolution. There may well have been isolated instances of Jews living in or around Bangor before 1849, but there were never enough to comprise a Jewish settlement. The only source of information extant today concerning the small and short-lived community of a century ago is contained in the minutes of the Congregation Ahawas Achim which was organized on July 20, 1849. The date, July 20, 1849, marks the first meeting of the group which called itself the Congregation Ahawas Achim — Congregation of Brotherly Love — and which was duly chartered by the City of Bangor. The first two meetings of the congregation were concerned with making plans for the first two essentials of communal living — the synagogue and the cemetery. The cemetery which was purchased forthwith was located on Webster Avenue, then outside the city limits. At a subsequent meeting plans were made to employ a spiritual leader, evidently one of their members well versed in religious education and trained by an orthodox teacher and rabbi. He was to act as teacher, Shochet,² Mohel,³ and prayer leader. Thus it is evident that though the community was small, provision was made to educate the young in the language and religious teachings of their people.

After November 2, 1856, there are no minutes of these first Jews. In this connection

¹The Hebrew words *Talmud Torah* and *Cheder* are sometimes used interchangeably with Hebrew School.

²Shochet: a man licensed to kill fowl and cattle according to Jewish law.

³Mohel: a man licensed and trained to perform circumcisions.