

Bath Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Number 38 March - April 1996

From the President's Desk...

The significant date to remember is Wednesday, April 17 when we have our Annual Meeting at the Patten Free Library. We will gather at 7:30 PM in the Auditorium for our brief business meeting and the election of officers and trustees and then we will have our special program. This year we are pleased to have Gene Reynolds and Oscar Marsh discuss the Hyde Windlass Company and draw on their many fond recollections of times with that Bath institution. It sounds like a grand evening and I hope many of you will be able to attend.

All of you should have received your request for donations to the Patten Free Library expansion and renovation project. It is a worthwhile endeavor and I trust you will all be able to support it with contributions which will enable the Bath Historical Society to enjoy larger and better facilities in the coming years.

*Chuck Richelieu,
President*

A History of the Jewish Community in Bath



The interior of the Beth Israel Synagogue, located on Washington Street in Bath.
Photo by Donald Povich.

By Donald M. Povich

Every history of Judaism in Maine begins with the first Jewish settler in Maine. His name was Susaman Abrahams and he came to Waldoboro on June 2, 1785, just nine years after the Revolutionary War. He lived at times in Waldoboro, Warren and Thomaston. He was a rag buyer, a tanner and a peddler. The latter occupation could have brought him to Bath as it was the habit of pedlars to travel, and Bath was only twenty-five miles away.

If Susaman Abrahams was in Bath is a matter of conjecture. What is known is that the first true Jewish presence came about some hundred years later, in 1880, when a Mr. Goldstein had a clothing store in the Church Block on Front St. In 1883 S.A. Issacson had a clothing store at the same location. Neither Goldstein nor Issacson were true Bath residents. Issacson did board at the Sagadahoc House in Bath, but he probably came from Lewiston. One year later a business known as the Boston Bargain Clothing

Continued on page 2

The Bath Historical Society, Est. 1989

This newsletter is published every other month by the Bath Historical Society

OFFICERS: *President - Charles F. Richelieu; Vice President - Nathan R.*

Lipfert; Secretary - Frances Y. Kakos; Treasurer - Malcolm Varney

TRUSTEES: *Betsy Fear, Frances Y. Kakos, Kerry Nelson, 1996;*

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR: *R. L. Meyers*

REFERENCE LIBRARIAN: *Denise R. Larson*

**BATH HISTORICAL
SOCIETY,**

33 Summer Street,
Bath, Maine 04530

Jewish Community

continued from page one

Company or B.B.C.C. opened in Bath and was managed by Bert Filene whose family of German Jewish background were the founders of Filene's Department Stores.

The first Jewish family which was truly a permanent resident of Bath was that of Louis Mikelsky who arrived in Bath in 1886. The Mikelsky family, which consisted of parents and nine children, was in fact on its way from

Rockland to Boston by train when one of the children became ill in Bath. Largely due to the kindness of a local druggist who helped the sick child, the family halted their journey and remained in Bath.

In the decade of the 1880's and into the decade of the twentieth century more Jewish families began to arrive. Mostly these families were immigrants from eastern Europe and many of them started out as pedlars. After the Civil War, with the great expansion to the West, many of the young Yankee pedlars moved westward and their places in locales like Maine were filled by these new European arrivals. These new Jewish families, many of whom were large, with eight or nine children, formed the nucleus of the founders of what is now Beth Israel (House of Israel) Synagogue.

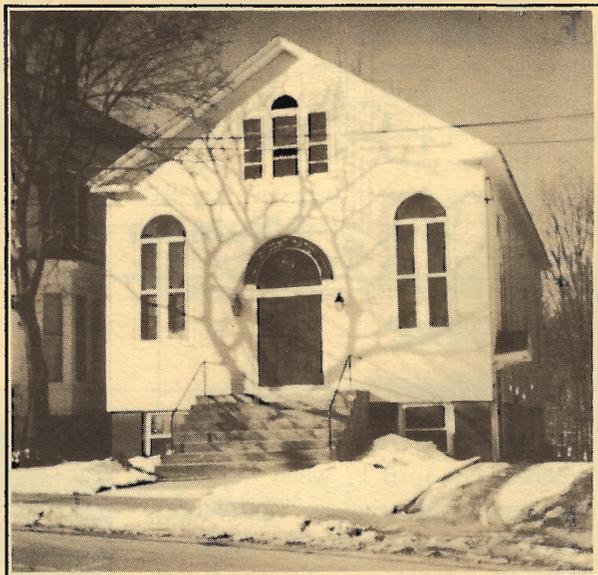
Owen in his *History of Bath* describes these people this way, "Like the Pilgrims of an earlier day, they brought their religion with them and did not wait for numbers to begin organizing." Thirty-nine names appear on the founding charter of Beth Israel including Greenblatt, Gediman, Povich, Brown, Petlock, Miller, Cohen, Kutz and Solovich.

Beth Israel was founded in 1919 and meetings and services were held in various halls around the city. In 1922, the shell of the building which now stands at 862 Washington Street was completed. Over the years in small phases, the interior was finally finished. On Jan. 29, 1922, a ceremony was held officially opening the new building. A parade started at the Music Hall on the corner of Washington and Center Streets and

proceeded up Washington Street to the Synagogue. The parade was led by Soloman Greenblatt, then President of the congregation, followed by members carrying the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), followed by the men of the congregation carrying lighted candles. Having thus opened the doors, the Synagogue remains active to this day.

The first Rabbi of Beth Israel Congregation was Charles Arik. He was followed by a succession of Rabbis until the late nineteen forties when the synagogue was no longer able to bear the expense of professional service. At that time it became a lay-leader organization, a tribute to the desire and dedication of its members. Despite the end of World War One and the great depression the synagogue remained viable with the addition of new families to the area.

No history of the Beth Israel Congregation, however brief, is complete without the mention of Abraham Kramer. Mr. Kramer came to Bath in 1942 to operate a grocery store. Shortly after he arrived, he became the president of Bath Israel and remained so until his death in the mid 1980's. Over the years he was as close to a rabbi as a lay person can be. He conducted all the major services, led all the minor holiday services, was a representative to the community at large and conducted all the funerals. During his tenure there were all too many funerals as the older members began to pass away. In addition to age taking its toll on the congregation, numbers of younger members moved away. Many were by this time professionals and found greener pastures elsewhere. With the death of Mr. Kramer, and the premature death of several of the younger members



**The exterior of the Beth Israel Synagogue.
Photo by Denise Larson.**

who remained, the synagogue struck a low point. Its very existence was threatened.

Upon the death of Mr. Kramer, Vice President Isadore Singer stepped in and with a noble effort kept the synagogue together for the next several years. Services mostly to High Holidays and memorials. Parents were sending their children out of town to Hebrew School. As fate would have it, on one such trip there was not enough room in the car pool for several extra children. At the suggestion of Suzanne Smith, Marilyn Weinberg began to teach a small group of children about their faith and heritage. This small group began to grow as more and more young professional people of the Jewish faith moved into the area. Now children were coming from as far away as Freeport and Brunswick to the west and Damariscotta to the east. These children were followed by their parents and the synagogue once again took on a new life.

A new set of by-laws was drawn and a new board of directors was formed.

Continued on page 4

Sagadahoc History Room Hours

Wed. - Sat. Noon - 4pm

Patten Free Library Hours

Mon., Fri., Sat. 10am - 5pm; Tues. - Thurs. 10am - 8pm

Jewish Community

continued from page 2

Donald M. Povich became the first of the new presidents and Beth Israel was reborn. Growth has been steady through the late eighties and early nineties. The membership has reached fifty families and the Hebrew School has nearly fifty students. Beth Israel has become a regional synagogue. Today Marilyn Weinberg is the president, the first woman elected to that office.

Although there have been a few scattered incidents of anti-semitism over the years, the Jewish experience in Bath has been a happy one. In 1921 when Soloman Greenblatt wanted to buy a building in downtown Bath, the owners refused to sell it to him because he was Jewish. Fred Stevens, local Christian, bought the building and sold it to his Jewish friend Mr. Greenblatt four days later. When several shares of the Bath Trust Company, a local bank owned largely by Christian elite investors became available for purchase, Rupert Baxter, a non-Jewish banker called his Jewish friend Morris S. Povich and offered him the very scarce stock. When Mr. Povich said he didn't have the money, the banker said, "You buy the stock, I'll lend you the money." When that struggling group of early immigrants was trying to build their synagogue, which cost \$5000, the non-Jewish community contributed \$2400.

In turn as time has passed, the Jewish people of the Bath area have given of their time, talent and money to support every civic and community activity. They have become movers and doers and their heritage has become a part of Bath's heritage.

Queries continued from page 3

ROGERS

Need parents of Sarah Rogers of Seabrook, MA (now NH). She married John E. Lowell who was b. 2 Nov. 1757 in Amesbury, MA and d. 16 Nov. 1846 in Gardiner, ME. They married before 1797 and lived in Phippsburg where most of their children were born. Their son, John Eaton Lowell, was b. 21 Sept. 1804 in Seal Harbor.

F.Y. Kakos, 55 Mechanic St., Bath, ME 04530.

INGHAM/LARRABEE

Need parents, dates, etc. on David Ingham and Mary Larrabee who were m. 11 March, 1782 in Brunswick, ME. F.Y. Kakos, 55 Mechanic St., Bath, ME 04530.

All are welcome to seek or respond to queries. Address queries to Bath Historical Society, 33 Summer Street, Bath, ME 04530.

Bath Historical Society
Treasurer's Report

February 29, 1996

CHECKING ACCOUNT

Balance Forward \$3,471.99

Receipts:

Memberships \$670.00

Research 20.00

Donation (History Room) 10.00

Program (Patten Family) 14.00

TOTAL \$714.00

Expenditures:

Bath Printing (Newsletter) \$90.48

Balance Forward \$4,095.51

SAVINGS

Balance Forward \$6,588.97

Savings Account Interest \$13.09

Balance Forward \$6,602.06

Distribution: \$60,000.00 in CD's
\$6,602.06 in Savings

Respectfully submitted,
M.R. Varney,
Treasurer

*Don't forget to
renew your
membership in the*



*Bath Historical
Society.*